

PROACTIVE VIP PROTECTION

BY AMOTZ BRANDES

An ounce of prevention is better than 'security by the pound' when it comes to optimal protection measures.

Using a bodyguard carries a certain caché. Movies have been made about brawny bodyguards, romanticising the serious subject of personal protection. Having a bodyguard whose presence is obvious and ominous immediately puts a protectee into the spotlight. But when you think about it, drawing attention to a potential target is not always an appropriate security strategy.

Celebrities walking the red carpet or shopping on Russell Street or Orchard Road might understandably want to put some distance between themselves and over enthusiastic fans or paparazzi.

There are instances where using a bodyguard is necessary and appropriate. Some celebrities will not hire a bodyguard who weighs less than 300 pounds. These 'human refrigerators' function essentially as mobile barriers. When a situation takes a turn for the worse, sometimes being able to bring muscle to the

fight is important. But truly effective security has to be holistic and customised for the individual client, as no two protectees are identical.

Do The Homework

VIP protection involves securing not just a body in a moment and at a location, but an entire operational existence. The mission at its most basic is to avoid having to actively protect your client in the first place.

High net-worth individuals need to consider security for a full range of possible threats in every context: while travelling on business and pleasure, while at home with their family, at work or enroute to an event.

Effective security for these VIPs requires careful research and detailed advance work. Part of the equation is to consider mitigating insider threats, such as how to properly vet staff and



vendors, conduct surveillance, implement countermeasures and have ready contingencies for every situation. This kind of VIP protection is proactive, creative and flexible. It is threat-oriented and its mission is to avoid danger in the first place, again, mitigating the need to run or fight.

A quick review of protection failures reveals a few noteworthy points. In the case of most kidnapping and assassination attempts, things move so fast that even the best trained guards may not be quick enough in their response.

A well-planned, violent attack on a VIP can be over before a security team can move. The shooting of US President Ronald Reagan in 1981 was mitigated but not prevented. The mortal stabbing in 1960 of a Japanese politician, Inejiro Asanuma, happened in a flash. The 1989 murder of then Deutsche Bank CEO, Alfred Herrhausen, succeeded despite his large protection team. The kidnapping (1978) of Italian President Aldo Moro is another example of where security missed the mark.

The security missteps that resulted in Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's assassination in 1995 have been painstakingly studied, with lessons learned judiciously applied. The most common reasons for such security failures often stemmed from insufficient screenings, gaps in intelligence, using an unchanged routine, and broken protection rings.

Know Everything


I spoke to one of the best VIP protection agents I know, an ex-Israeli Defence Forces commando who has decades of experience assuring the safety and well-being of a long list of international A-listers. I asked him what are the most important factors for a successful executive protection.

Without hesitation he replied "scheduling and advance work." An excellent VIP protection agent knows everything about his client: their needs, weaknesses, public relations issues, medical profile, blood type and allergies. This same agent must also know everything about every locale such as where is the nearest hospital, bathroom, exit, what is the geographic layout, and much more. It is a complex job that involves scoping out every location to minimise the unknowns, while at the same time being able to adjust and improvise when required. The more unknowns there are, the softer the target becomes and the more dangerous the situation. A good bodyguard gets into situations that a great bodyguard would have avoided in the first place.

Blend In

My friend (who understandably will not be named) went on to explain that the best executive protection agent is an extension of the client and needs to dress and behave appropriately for every minute of the day, blending in to each environment as a nondescript player. It is part of the overall mission of making the client less of a target.

Coordination vis-à-vis the support and admin teams is another critical factor to a client's safety. The client's inner circle needs to be vetted regularly because unfortunately, threats do not stop at the outer door. Insider threats can be a real problem but it can be assuaged with the right threat-oriented approach and vetting.

At the end of the day, while the job is more tedious than it is glamorous, it is also very satisfying when done well. Hollywood celebrities often buy "security by the pound". Perhaps buying an ounce of prevention is the better value. 



About The Writer

Amotz Brandes is Managing Partner of Chameleon Associations, an International security consulting, corporate due diligence and investigation company. A veteran of the Israeli Defence Forces' Special Reconnaissance Unit, Amotz started his career as a Security Agent for El Al Israeli Airlines in Los Angeles, USA. Amotz has a B.A Degree in International Development Studies from UCLA, and is Chair of the Homeland Security Committee of the Southern California Israel Chamber of Commerce.