



# Sanctified Thought: OODA and the Anatomy of A Suicide Bombing

SCOTT BRAWNER, CONCILIUM PRESIDENT

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By Scott Brawner

On Saturday January 2, 2016, patrons of the Village Restaurant in Mogadishu were enjoying their food and conversations when a suicide bomber detonated an explosive vest, killing himself and three patrons, and injuring many others. Sadly, this type of attack has become all too common in many parts of the world.

Reconstructing the scene from [eyewitness testimony](#) just prior to the crime, we can create a picture that clearly points toward impending mayhem—and the survival of many quick-thinking people. Why? Because the body count would have undoubtedly been higher, had some restaurant patrons not acted quickly to escape prior to detonation. These people survived because they practiced some basic (and essential) security principles that saved their lives. These are the same security principles that Concilium teaches in their security courses. Some of those principles include:

**OODA (Observe, Orient, Decide, Act).** I have written on this decision-making process before and how it can save your life. This process was used by the near victims of this attack as they observed the situation at hand, oriented themselves to the threat, made a decision to protect themselves, and acted by fleeing the scene with literal seconds to spare before being blown up. Walking through these OODA indicators in order will help reveal the anatomy of this bombing. In particular, we will reconstruct the case through the testimony of one Mohamed Hassan, a 60-year-old former university professor of who narrowly escaped death in the bombing.

1. **Observe/Orient.** Observations of sights, sounds, smells, and actions are implicitly filtered and processed by our orientations. Orientations filter our observations in order to make sense of what we are experiencing. Some of our major filters include emotional views based on our previous experiences, our upbringing, our faith, our training, and even our fears. All of these filters help discern our observations. This discernment, in turn, allows us to make a good decision such as activating a self-defense plan. In this case, Hassan’s discernment of orientation was developed through:

- a. **Profiling and Stereotypes.** So often in Western nations, the terms stereotyping, and profiling have negative connotations. However, these very processes are quietly taught and used by not only Western military and intelligence services, but by everyday people on the street who see someone whose appearance or activities just don’t fit the situation (see JDLR, below). In this case, Professor Hassan reported that the bomber was a “tall, dark-skinned young man.” The ethnicity of the soon to be bomber initially drew the professor’s attention to a potential concern, which quickly became a legitimate threat. Another way to put it (perhaps with a softer tone...) is to get to know what is normative in your ministry area and look for the anomalies. That’s stereotyping.

**WCE Takeaways:** There are key principles of hostile observation awareness (HOA) WCEs should use when scanning for potential threats. These include:

- Watching for new/different ethnicities in a place where they are rarely observed.
- Watching for different tribal differences including dress, tattoos, scarification, etc.

- b. Demeanor Indicators/Concerns.** Once the profiling of the potential threat was complete (this took 10-30 seconds), the demeanor of the individual raised immediate concerns. This included indicators that the perpetrator “appeared nervous” as he sat down by himself and “He kept his back straight and chin up as he took the seat...” indicating the perpetrator was not at ease as he was sitting in the restaurant.

**WCE Takeaways:** The professor’s observations were filtered by his orientations as the bomber’s demeanor clearly did not fit the situation. At this point, many patrons seemed to be placing their keen attention on this person of interest. That said, WCEs so often do not want to be seen, or come off, as judgmental by looking directly at a person and quickly evaluating a situation. Moreover, Westerners often will, for the sake of not seeming reactionary, place themselves in a place of imminent danger because they are more concerned about overreacting and causing a scene (we all do that...). In this case, the very indicators that had some patrons headed for the door--and safety-- were deadly mistakes for those who underreacted or were oblivious.

- c. Just Doesn’t Look Right (JDLR).** Apart from demeanor, there are actions that potential threat actors will take that can be filtered as threatening or benign. In this case, the bomber had several. Again, according to the professor:

- “...He kept checking his mobile phone’s screen and had an earphone in his ear.”  
Just a little bit odd for someone coming in for a drink...
- “He started shoving his hand under his shirt only to uncover his [explosive] vest to nearby people.”
- “He was struggling to fine-tune a wire under his blouse which poked out of his shirt’s buttons.”

**WCE Takeaways:** The behavior cues here are overwhelming. In any situation, as WCEs serve the Lord, they should always be looking for actions or situations that just don’t look right. In my experience debriefing victims of violent encounters most of them can, in hindsight, identify the actions of the assailant that could be characterized as JDLR. Their response to observing JDLR prior to an incident:

- “I didn’t want to overreact”
- “I didn’t want to offend someone.”
- “I could not believe what I was seeing.”

Sadly, all of these responses to JDLR and demeanor indicators lead to the victimization of WCEs. Don’t let that happen to you.

2. **Decide and Act!** The final phase of the OODA loop leads to action. Depending on the situation (like this one) an OODA loop must be completed in seconds to escape injury or death. To quote Professor Hassan on the decisions and actions of those paying attention in the bar:

“...the more he checked his vest the more he had drawn people’s attention – and the more people saw the more the restaurant gets emptied of people.”

The decisions and actions of those who survived were guided by how their observations were filtered by their orientations. Those decisions --even split second-- decided who lived and who died. Mr. Hassan would have perished had he lagged in his decision making. However, his discernment of the situation led him to literally run for the door with bomber detonating his explosive vest behind him, blowing him down, but surviving the blast. Thus, as decisions lead to actions, options are generated including:

- a. **Run, Hide, Fight.** [The Run Hide Fight Video](#), released by the Houston Police in 2012, has good application for WCEs. These are great principles that can save your life. To quickly break these principles down:
- i. **Run.** In the case of this bombing, run (read: ESCAPE) was the best decision. Hiding from, or fighting with, this suicide bomber was impractical. Those who ran had quickly discerned the INTENT of the threat (through observation and orientation) and responded appropriately by escaping (acting on that decision to flee).
  - ii. **Hide.** Recognizing the situation and being unable to escape, getting down and seeking cover as quickly as possible was the only choice. We hear often about those who have hidden from active shooters in buildings. I also know of young orphans who (several times) ran into the jungle to escape the likes of the LRA and others by concealing themselves in the foliage. Same principle, different circumstances; similar outcomes—survival.
  - iii. **Fight.** In my experience, this is the least talked about of the three principles for many reasons. In this particular case, fight was not an option as there was not enough time. However, if we look to a similar threat with a well-armed gunman on a high-speed European train, we see a similar OODA process in play with three unarmed but committed Americans (a US airman, an Army National Guardsman, and their college student friend), the quick actions of these three young men stopped an armed terrorist and saved the lives of perhaps 100 people. In their OODA process, one of the young men reported: “I saw a guy entering the train with an AK and a handgun, and I just looked over at Spencer and said, 'Let's go. Go,' and he jumped up, and I followed behind him by about three seconds.” *Three seconds*. CBS News interviewed one of the three Americans and asked him why he chose to move forward rather than hide. His response: “What else is there to do? Either you sit down, and you die, or you get up and you die...” There is

so much more to write on this principle but I must save them for a different time. However, WCEs need to better understand the issue of fighting back is a viable option. Therefore, they must and reconcile this concept (fighting for survival of self and others) in their personal theology of risk.

In closing, please let me be clear: As believers called according to God's purposes in the nations, WCEs often place themselves in locations that are more 'dangerous' than the average Western tourist will ever visit. This might be expected as there is a direct correlation between areas or locations that are considered "unsafe" and those that are "unreached" or "unengaged."

What does this mean? Well, a people group is unreached when the number of Evangelical Christians is less than 2% of its population. A people group is also considered to be unengaged when there is no church planting strategy present. Overlay a global map of the locations of unreached and unengaged people with a map of ongoing global insecurity, and you will quickly see the correlation. Consequently, more WCEs are serving Christ in dangerous locations because they are committed to reach the unreached and unengaged (I will say more on this in a separate article at another time as there is much more to unpack here with the future of duty of care and other issues associated with reaching the unreached...).

Bottom line, WCEs reaching the lost are more often placing themselves in harm's way. This creates a real and tangible need for both security worldview that is biblically based and security training that is gospel centered and designed to build effectiveness and resilience in both individuals and organizations as they take the Gospel to the nations.

I know this is long, but I sincerely hope that this analysis is helpful to you and those you serve. May God bless you as you serve and equip your personnel for ministry in the nations!

**In Christ,  
Scott Brawner**

