



A COORDINATED RESPONSE: LAW ENFORCEMENT RESPONSE TO THE SAN BERNARDINO ATTACK

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On December 2, 2015, Rizwan Farook and Tashfeen Malik launched a devastating attack on the Inland Regional Center (IRC) in San Bernardino, California. Resulting in the death of 14 innocents and the injury of 24 others, the San Bernardino shooting in 2015 was the deadliest terrorist attack on the United States since September 11, 2001. It was also the worst mass shooting since Sandy Hook in 2012.

Americans — and Californians especially — were shocked. The shooting was another warning that the United States is not impervious to terrorist attacks. San Bernardino also reminded the American people that the first line of defense against domestic terrorism is not soldiers armed for war, but rather local police, medical, and fire services. The men and women of the 17 agencies that responded to the attack acted with utmost courage. Many lessons can be learned from their actions in order to prepare for and respond to future attacks. The Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) of the United States Justice Department and the Police Foundation conducted an in-depth analysis of the training and response of local authorities to the San Bernardino attack. They published the results of this study in *Bringing Calm to Chaos, A critical incident review of the San Bernardino public safety response to the December 2, 2015, terrorist shooting incident at the Inland Regional Center*. The analysis in this article relies heavily on that report as well as reporting by *The New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times*.

The response to the shooting can be broken into four distinct stages: the initial response to the attack, medical treatment and evacuation of the victims, pursuit and elimination of the gunmen, and conducting the investigation. Each part of the response presented different operational challenges, most of which were handled well by those on the scene and some of which revealed flaws in protocol and/or coordination.

The attack began when Rizwan Farook and his wife Tashfeen Malik entered the IRC at 10:59 a.m., December 2, 2015. The IRC is a non-profit organization that provides support services to thousands of people with developmental disabilities in southern California. County departments frequently use it for training programs because of the availability of a large conference room and the IRC's proximity to the county office building. Farook was an employee of the San Bernardino County Environmental Health Department and was there with approximately 80 of his colleagues for a day of training. Farook left the session at approximately 10:30am and returned some 30 minutes later with his wife. They entered the center wearing tactical clothing and armed with semi-automatic AR-15 assault rifles. Over the course of only two or three minutes the assailants together fired over one hundred .223 caliber rounds. Nearly all the casualties of the attack were hit within this brief period of time. The gunmen fled the scene three minutes after the shooting began.

Two police units were ordered to the IRC less than a minute after the first shot was fired. Lieutenant Mike Madden of the San Bernardino Police Department (SBPD) was the first officer on the scene, followed by three additional officers who were in the area. None of the first four officers specialized in tactical operations, but they had all received basic active shooter training. The team of four officers—unaware that the shooters had left the IRC—carefully entered the IRC at 11:06 a.m. Shortly after the first police team entered the building, and within 10 minutes of the first shot being fired, 13 SWAT members of SBPD and an additional team of police officers joined Lieutenant Madden’s team in clearing the building.

After-action reports of the attack reveal that the first officers on the scene demonstrated exemplary coordination with one another, despite specializing in very different roles. They closely followed active shooter protocol when clearing the building, focusing solely on locating and eliminating the threat before aiding victims. They were not distracted by technical matters of rank and jurisdiction, and they immediately fell into the proper building-clearing formation.

Coordination between main agency commanders also began shortly after the attack. San Bernardino Police Department Chief Jarrod Burguan, San Bernardino County Sheriff John McMahan, and Assistant Director David Bowdich of the FBI’s Los Angeles field office were in regular communication shortly after the attack began. Command of the situation transferred from the initial officers engaged in tactical operations to agency leaders as they arrived on the scene. Commanders quickly established the San Bernardino Unified Command Center (UCC), creating a more structured chain of command. The command center was composed of various representatives from each participating agency. Together they made decisions regarding tactics, managing the media, and conducting the investigation. The cooperation of operational leaders was a major strength in the San Bernardino operation.

Establishing strong inter-agency connections is essential to respond effectively to an active shooter situation. Ideally, these relationships develop before a crisis so that agencies are able to cooperate more smoothly

when an attack occurs. The San Bernardino responding agencies had the advantage of strong relationships built on joint training exercises, their response to the Christopher Dorner incident in 2013, and the lessons learned from the analysis conducted and published by the Police Foundation in *Police Under Attack: Southern California Law Enforcement Response to the Attacks by Christopher Dorner*. A variety of agencies told the Police Foundation team that the self-examination and critical incident review analysis following the Dorner attack were critical to the success of the response on December 2, 2015. The San Bernardino Police Department, San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Department, Inland Valley Regional SWAT teams, and other law enforcement agencies had all participated in inter-agency active shooter training. The Police Foundation report quotes an officer saying, “I just jumped into the formation with the SWAT guys, it was seamless.” Another officer commented, “Regional and realistic training was invaluable. Training came into play tenfold. We didn’t have to think about how we should do it – we just did it.”

San Bernardino first responders were on the scene in less than four minutes. The San Bernardino Police Department SWAT team was on the scene within 11 minutes.

There are also different regional organizations across the country that aim to develop cohesion between emergency services of all kinds. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has a program known as the National Incident Management System (NIMS), which focuses on helping various emergency agencies with “planning; procedures and protocols; training and exercises; personnel qualifications, licensure, and certification; equipment certification; and evaluation and revision.” By standardizing as many variables as possible in an emergency situation, NIMS intends to streamline the management of multiple response teams. FEMA is a federal agency, but through NIMS it can improve the effectiveness of local, state, and non-governmental emergency organizations. NIMS encourages emergency responders to “leverage existing preparedness efforts and

TIMELINE: SAN BERNARDINO SHOOTINGS, 12/05/15

Time (PST)	Event
10:58 a.m.	First report of five rounds heard in the 1300 block of S. Waterman Ave.
10:59 a.m.	Report of three suspects armed with assault rifles wearing all black clothing.
11:00 a.m.	Two patrol units dispatched.
11:04 a.m.	First unit arrives on scene (Lieutenant Mike Madden).
11:06 a.m.	Lieutenant, detective, motor, and patrol officer form a contact team and make entry.
11:09 a.m.	San Bernardino Police Department (SBPD) special weapons and tactics (SWAT) team arrives with twelve operators and a tactical medic (six more arrive later).
11:15 a.m.	Triage area established at S. Park Center and Waterman Ave.
11:17 a.m.	First floor secured. Patient evacuation to triage area.
11:26 a.m.	Roof cleared.
11:30 a.m.	Directed Probation to set up containment area for those exiting Bldg. #1.
11:31 a.m.	Secondary sweep of building.
11:33 a.m.	Possible device found on 2nd floor office (roller luggage bag out of place).
11:46 a.m.	SBCSD Explosive Ordinance Disposal (EOD) on scene.
11:51 a.m.	EOD determined device was suspicious.
11:56 a.m.	SBCSD Special Enforcement Division (SED) cleared Bldg. #1.
12:24 p.m.	Inland Valley Regional SWAT (IVS) team to 2nd floor of Bldg. #1 to clear and evacuate.
12:38 p.m.	Unified tactical command post established with SBPD, SBCSD, and Inland Valley SWAT team. The FBI joined later but was on standby to assist if needed at other locations.
1:42 p.m.	Robot deployed to X-ray suspicious package.
2:22 p.m.	X-ray complete, device deemed safe.
2:35 p.m.	SBCSD completes search and evacuation of Bldgs. #1 & #2.
3:02 p.m.	Redlands Police Department in 100mph pursuit of unrelated stolen car that terminates 1/2 mile from command post.
3:02:17 p.m.	SBPD narcotic unit flagged down Redlands Police Department sergeant.
3:08:19 p.m.	SBPD narcotics and Redlands Police Department following suspect vehicle eastbound between San Bernardino Avenue and Richardson.
3:08:43 p.m.	Shots fired while officers attempt to stop suspect vehicle.
3:09 p.m.	Suspect in custody from the Redlands Police Department stolen vehicle pursuit (Orange Show Rd. and Arrowhead).
3:09:22 p.m.	Suspects stop and gun battle ensues (1795 E. San Bernardino Ave.).
3:12 p.m.	Bearcat (armored vehicle) requested.
3:12:57 p.m.	***Officer Down*** Narcotics officer shot in left thigh with .223 round @ corner of Shedden and San Bernardino.
3:14:53 p.m.	Shooting stops.
3:19 p.m.	SED units searching for potential third suspect seen running from the area of the SUV.
3:19 p.m.	Bearcat on scene.
5:08 p.m.	Explosive devices located on 1st floor primary building.
7:36 p.m.	Device removed for destruction.
7:54 p.m.	Device #1 detonated / rendered safe.
8:33 p.m.	Device #2 detonated / rendered safe.
8:37 p.m.	Device #3 detonated / rendered safe.
9:29 p.m.	Building clear and released to investigators.

Source: Braziel, et.al., *Bringing Calm to Chaos, A critical incident review of the San Bernardino public safety response to the December 2, 2015 terrorist shooting incident at the Inland Regional Center*, COPS, Police Foundation.

collaborative relationships to the greatest extent possible” and includes organizational specifications for an “Incident Command System, Multiagency Coordination Systems, and Public Information.” With NIMS operational commanders can spend less time creating a chain of command, since all involved organizations already know to whom to report in a crisis.

The overall response to the San Bernardino attack was very organized. Problems began to arise, however, when a large number of officers began to “self-deploy” to the IRC. Many officers arrived still dressed in civilian clothes and driving personal cars, which led to additional confusion in an already difficult situation. Self-deploying officers can give onsite commanders a large advantage in securing the scene. If they arrive, however, in a chaotic fashion and fail to report in to the chain of command, they can distract officers who already have assigned duties. The phenomena of self-reporting officers is not a new one and self-reporting officers do provide essential manpower in a time of crisis. For example, some of the first responding officers were with the San Bernardino County Probation Department—even though they did not have explicit orders to respond. The probation office is only 2.9 miles from the IRC, making it closer than the SBPD headquarters. Hearing of the incident over the police scanner, probation officers self-deployed to the scene to investigate. The proximity of the probation officers allowed them to reach the scene before most other law enforcement. The probation officers saw multiple wounded victims when they arrived at the IRC, and they were the first officers to start the triage process by passing out medical supplies. They set up and managed the transportation and triage of victims. They initially acted independently, but once an operational command was established, the large team of probation officers reported to the commanders and became instrumental in securing perimeters around the IRC and triage areas.

Chief Burguan of the SBPD later explained that the initial officers to respond to the shooting were ill-equipped. SBPD has a limited number of service rifles, and thus most of the first police to enter the building were only armed with handguns. There is debate over the extent to which police officers should be armed, but some of the initial officers also lacked basic protective equipment like ballistic helmets. Part of the equipment

issue is that in an active shooter situation every second counts, and often officers respond before having a chance to prepare properly.

After police arrived on the scene, a grueling three-hour process of sweeping and re-sweeping the IRC room by room for potential threats ensued. Officers had to work with discipline, as it was still unclear whether the shooters were still in the building. This task was complicated by the crime scene consisting of many rooms spread among multiple floors on the IRC’s three buildings, and the fact that there was no standardized system for marking which rooms had already been cleared. Though law enforcement was able to work through this confusion, it slowed the overall process of clearing the IRC. The Police Foundation report noted that in the future emergency services should ensure that law enforcement personnel have the tools to breach rooms quickly and a uniform system to indicate which rooms have already been searched. As the IRC was locked down, local medical services did their best to manage all the wounded victims. Twenty minutes after the attack began paramedics established the first triage area and began to perform first aid on the wounded. All of the 22 wounded civilian victims—and later the two wounded police officers—arrived at a hospital within 57 minutes, and all of them survived.

While the EMTs were able to rescue all the wounded, responders admitted that there is nevertheless room for improvement regarding medical efficiency. Many of the first officers to respond to the IRC did not have substantial first aid training. In addition, many of the officers were not equipped with adequate medical kits to begin treating the victims’ extensive wounds. Advanced police first aid kits and training may not be sufficient to stabilize victims completely, but these improvements would buy medical responders more time to get the patients to higher-level medical care.

The wounded were obviously the most pressing concern, but there was also the matter of securing nearly 400 witnesses. Police on site escorted the witnesses from the IRC to a nearby golf course where they waited for a few hours before being moved to a local church. No one can tell when or where a mass shooting will occur which makes it difficult to find a centralized location

big enough to house such a large number of witnesses. Law enforcement can benefit by establishing a network of community leaders with access to large facilities that could be used in emergency situations.

A large number of personnel were tasked with clearing the IRC, but there were also many law enforcement officers who were trying to track down the shooters. A county employee in the conference room told an SBPD officer his suspicion that Farook was the perpetrator. Coordinated and rapid work by SBPD and SBCSD crime analysts determined that several individuals of that name lived in neighboring communities and officers then made their way to all known addresses. Authorities then released to the public a description of the black SUV identified by witnesses as leaving the IRC. Several people called in with reports, including one of a black SUV with Utah license plates. One caller memorized the license plate number and called with that information. An analyst at SBPD headquarters ran the plate number and found that the car was registered to a rental company. An

employee at the rental car agency provided information that led to the identification of Rizwan Farook.

SBPD then sent an unmarked car to Farook’s house in Redlands, but found no activity there. Meanwhile a few SBPD narcotics officers also headed to Farook’s house. They saw the SUV leaving the home just as they arrived and followed the SUV in their unmarked cars. The narcotics officers were able to alert a Redlands patrol sergeant who followed the SUV on Interstate 10. The Redlands officer tried to stop the SUV after it got off the freeway at Tippecanoe Avenue in San Bernardino. An SBCSD deputy joined behind the Redlands police cruiser. The SUV continued a short distance on San Bernardino Avenue before the occupants began shooting at the pursuing officers through the back window. There were, at that point, officers from the Redlands Police Department and San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Department on the scene. All three departments broadcast on their respective radio channels that the suspects in the SUV were shooting at them. As a large gunfight broke



Graphics by Melissa Muller '18, based on Braziel, et.al., *Bringing Calm to Chaos, A critical incident review of the San Bernardino public safety response to the December 2, 2015 terrorist shooting incident at the Inland Regional Center*, COPS, Police Foundation.

out in the street, 175 law enforcement officers from various local, county, state, and federal agencies made their way to the scene. Ultimately, 24 officers fired at least 440 shots at the SUV. The suspects fired at least 81 rounds at the officers. The firefight resulted in the death of both gunmen and non-lethal injuries to two officers.

The climactic gun battle again showed the positive and negative sides of self-deployment. The narcotics officers who pursued the gunmen did not necessarily self-report, but they did act independently by switching from police radios to cell phones to prevent the perpetrators from listening in through radio scanners. This meant the Unified Command Center was not fully aware of the narcotics team's status. In this case the initiative of the narcotics officers allowed law enforcement to track and neutralize the terrorists. There were other officers, however, who rapidly left their assigned positions at the IRC to assist in engaging the gunmen. Many of these officers failed to report to the command center, resulting in some confusion and leaving certain response roles at the IRC unmanned. Additionally, some of the officers who self-deployed arrived after both shooters had been killed. Self-reporting can be a useful part of emergency response, but only if the officers respect the chain of command upon arriving on site.

With the death of the two attackers the immediate threat of additional casualties subsided. Law enforcement agencies then began conducting a criminal investigation. Since there were federal, county, and local law agencies at the three crime scenes – the IRC, the attackers' home, and the site of the gun battle -- they had to coordinate the collection of evidence. Overall the Unified Command Center did well at assigning distinct roles to each agency. The law enforcement leadership team of Chief Burguan (SBPD), Sheriff McMahan (SBCSD), and Assistant Director Bowdich (FBI) decided it would be best if the FBI processed the IRC to collect evidence, as it appeared that the attack was likely to be related to terrorism. The SBCSD tactically cleared the building before releasing it to the FBI. The SBPD, however, remained as the on-scene commander at the IRC until the attack was officially classified as an act of terrorism on the following day. The FBI also led the investigation of the home in Redlands and the SBCSD led the investigation at the site of the final gun battle. On a macro level the operational

commanders were successful at dividing tasks among the agencies. Agencies also were effective in using one another's crime analysts and forensic specialists where they would be most useful.

There were, however, also a few instances of miscommunication among federal and local law enforcement. For example, after the shootout in the street, police officers began a traditional mass shooting investigation. Federal agents on the scene were more focused on determining whether the shooting was a terrorist attack, and some agents collected evidence from the scene without adequately explaining their intentions to local law enforcement. The tension between FBI agents and SBCSD officers revealed that not all personnel were aware of other agencies' authority. The best way for emergency agencies to avoid unnecessary confusion is by ensuring that all responders have a strong knowledge of every organization's role in a crisis situation.

As detailed in the Police Foundation report, "Overwhelmingly, responders interviewed attributed much of the success of the response to the December terrorist attacks to the relationships they had built regionally through training and other endeavors."

The attack on San Bernardino put the many responding agencies to the test. If the operation had not been executed cleanly, then there could have been far more casualties. There were points during the attack that could have strained the response leadership to the point where confusion overwhelmed emergency personnel. First responders, however, had already forged many inter-agency personal connections that allowed them to better navigate the hectic situation.

The responders displayed exemplary coordination during the attack, and demonstrated the effectiveness of preparation and training. ♦

RESPONDING AGENCIES

STATE AND LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT ORGANIZATIONS	
San Bernardino Police Department	SBPD officers were first on scene. In conjunction with the SBCSD and the FBI, they maintained primary incident command. SBPD officers were initially responsible for the investigation of the shooting incident and also responded to the gun battle with the suspects.
San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department	The SBCSD assisted the SBPD and the FBI with incident command. It also responded to and maintained responsibility for the scene of the gun battle that ultimately killed the suspects.
California Highway Patrol	The CHP assisted at both the IRC and shootout scene with emergency response, scene management, and traffic control.
Colton Police Department	The Colton Police Department is part of the Inland Valley Regional SWAT team that responded to both the initial terrorist attack at the IRC and the final shootout with the suspects.
Fontana Police Department	The Fontana Police Department arrived shortly after the first four officers entered the IRC. The second team to enter the IRC included three Fontana detectives, one of whom was a SWAT team member. The Fontana Police Department is also a member of the Inland Valley Regional SWAT team.
Inland Valley Regional SWAT	The IVS is a collaboration of the cities of Rialto, Colton, and Fontana. The IVS responded to both the initial shooting at the IRC and the final shootout with the suspects.
Redlands Police Department	The Redlands Police Department responded to assist with stopping the suspect and securing the suspects' home.
Rialto Police Department	The Rialto Police Department is part of the Inland Valley Regional SWAT team.

FIRE AND EMERGENCY RESPONSE AGENCIES	
Inland Counties Emergency Medical Agency	The ICEMA is the local emergency medical services (EMS) agency for Inyo, Mono, and San Bernardino counties.
Ontario Fire Department Explosive Ordinance Disposal	Ontario Fire Department Explosive Ordinance Disposal responded to assist with potential explosive devices.
San Bernardino City Fire Department/ San Bernardino County Fire	The city's fire department was the primary medical first responder to the shooting at the IRC. The department established the medical triage and treatment area and handled logistics for medical transport of victims. The county's fire department also provided substantial support during the incident.

RESPONDING AGENCIES

OTHER LOCAL RESPONDING AGENCIES

San Bernardino City Unified School District	The SBCUSD responded with police officers as well as Office of Emergency personnel to assist with scene management and medical triage and security. It initiated a lockdown of all 80 San Bernardino schools and other buildings in an effort to secure all locations, personnel, and students in their care.
San Bernardino County District Attorney’s Office	The San Bernardino County District Attorney’s Office sent representatives from its Bureau of Victim Services to provide a comprehensive list of services to victims and witnesses at both the Rock Church and the Rudy Hernandez Community Center.
San Bernardino County Probation Department	Representatives of the San Bernardino County Probation Department were some of the first on scene and were responsible for setting up and managing the transportation and triage of victims. They also managed Hernandez Center operations as part of the investigation and witness interviews.

FEDERAL PARTNERS

Federal Bureau of Investigation	The FBI responded immediately to the scene and provided mutual aid and support at the incident command and tactical support through executive management personnel, SWAT agents, special agent bomb technicians, and investigators. In addition, FBI personnel conducted the evidence recovery efforts at the IRC and subject residencies. The FBI became the lead investigative agency once the shooting at the IRC was determined to have been a terrorist event.
Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives	The ATF was responsible for assisting in investigating the source of the firearms seized from the suspects as well as recovered explosive devices.
Department of Homeland Security (DHS)/ Homeland Security Investigations (HSI)	DHS/HSI was on scene as part of the federal response to the terrorist shootings.

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