TOURISM AND TERRORISM: A HOTEL INDUSTRY PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the consequences of terrorism for tourism with particular reference to the hotel industry and the case of Singapore. Terrorist activity is shown to have adverse impacts for destinations where it occurs and hotels to be attractive targets for attacks. The risks are recognised and management is attempting to secure properties against damage. Such a task can be daunting and is illustrated by a discussion of circumstances in Singapore based on information collected from hotel security managers and other experts there. There is a need for constant vigilance. Tools to combat terrorism directed at hotels are both technological and human and internal and external communications, cooperation and collaboration have an important part to play in effective resistance.

Keywords: crisis management, terrorism, hotel security, Singapore

INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry worldwide has been significantly affected by the threat of terrorism and instances of terrorist attacks in the modern era. Hotels, which serve a core function as suppliers of tourist accommodation and other amenities, are attractive targets and management has been forced to review and revise security measures accordingly. This paper is concerned with issues of terrorism and tourism with specific reference to hotels in Singapore and aims to afford insights into risks and responses within a wider context.

After an explanation of the methodology, an account of recent trends in terrorism and the consequences for tourism are presented. Terrorist actions represent a potential crisis for the industry and the vulnerability of hotels is summarised in a separate section. Some background information about Singapore is then provided in order to set the scene for the discussion which follows the results of a series of interviews with hotel security managers and other experts there.

The findings reveal a belief that Singapore hotels are well equipped technologically to deal with what is regarded as a real possibility of a terrorist

strike, but that there is no room for complacency. There are some concerns about human resources and a feeling that a more security conscious culture should be cultivated. Improved recruitment and further training to enhance security awareness and skills amongst employees are needed. While technology is essential, its effectiveness is determined by the people who use it and security is the responsibility of all staff. Communication, cooperation and collaboration within the industry and with external stakeholders, and especially government agencies are also crucial to success in coping with terrorism.

METHODOLOGY

The original intention was to interview at least ten security managers from a selection of Singapore's superior standard hotels affiliated to international chains in order to gain information about hotel and corporate attitudes towards terrorism and action on security. Unfortunately, perhaps owing to the sensitivity of the topic, only four hotels agreed to participate. Even then, there was a reluctance to disclose facts about hotel security measures and a preference for talking more generally from a strategic and management stance.

Given the disappointing response, it was decided to extend the interviews to a professional from the national security industry institute and an academic with expertise in facility management and design. Questions posed related to the likelihood of a terrorist attack on Singapore hotels and experience of such situations; security policy, implementation and monitoring; relations with external agencies; and principal challenges. Interviews were conducted in person and lasted about one hour. Despite the limitations of the material, it was judged that sufficient and suitable data had been collected for the purpose of an exploratory study.

TERRORISM, TOURISM AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT

Terrorism is something of a disputed concept which is open to differing interpretations regarding motives and causes. Nevertheless, it can be broadly defined as 'premeditated, politically motivated violence against non-combatant targets by sub-national groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience' (US Department of State, 2004). Objectives of terrorists range from gaining attention through provoking an official reaction to the ousting and replacement of incumbent regimes (Crenshaw, 1981). Commentators suggest a rise in deaths and injuries due to terrorism in recent decades with intensification in the scale of attacks, although the number has not necessarily increased (Thackrah, 2004). Terrorists have become more ambitious and less confined by geographical boundaries, exploiting the latest technologies to their advantage (Foreign and

Commonwealth Office, 2004; Sonmez & Grafe, 1998). While violent aggression appears to be the preferred method, there is scope for other types of terrorism such as hacking into computers, food poisoning and release of toxic chemicals.

Another trend has been an expansion in the role of terrorism perpetrated in the name of religion, illustrated by Al-Qaeda and its actions (Sedgewick, 2004). The movement is dedicated to pursuing its version of global jihad (commonly and misleadingly translated as holy war), the establishment of an Islamic theocracy and obliteration of contrary world views. Al-Qaeda has been described as a component of a fourth wave of terrorism which is distinguished by religious extremism and suicide bombings (Ludes, 2004). Animosity has been focused on the USA, fuelled by the 2003 war in Iraq and its aftermath, but encompasses America's supporters in the conflict and the West and its allies in general. Numerous groups have linked themselves to Al-Qaeda in a loose network which includes Jemaah Islamiah (JI). JI is associated with South East Asia and carried out the bombings of two Bali nightclubs in 2002 when 191 died and over 300 were injured (Henderson 2003). Terrorists usually seek maximum publicity for their acts and the amount of media exposure received is partly an outcome of the volume of fatalities. They therefore often concentrate on spaces and buildings where crowds gather, especially those which are unsecured and deemed to be soft (Siaw & Loosemore, 2006), and public transport services and termini. Global news coverage is likely to be greater if foreign nationals are hurt or killed and tourists and tourist facilities thus make tempting targets (Dimanche, 2004). Tourists are also representatives of their country of origin so violence against them can be a means of expressing opposition to foreign governments and their policies. The economic importance of tourism also makes it relevant to terrorists as a sudden decline in revenues and employment can have destabilising repercussions for destination economies, societies and politics which could hasten realisation of terrorist goals. As a result, terrorism and tourism can be said to have a close relationship with hijackings, bombings, shootings and kidnappings all directed at tourists (Pizam & Fleischer, 2002; Sonmez, 1998).

Tourists and the tourism industry have also exhibited resilience and some researchers assert that tourists may not be unduly worried about terrorism (Larsen, Brun and Øgaard, 2009). However, opinions and recovery from a terrorist-related tourism crisis depend upon the way affairs are managed and subsequent developments. Repeated cases and an official failure to act decisively will seriously depress demand in the long term. In other circumstances, society may indeed be more tolerant of the threat of terrorism because of familiarity and adaptation as well as the desire to demonstrate defiance. Common sense additionally tells us that the chance of an individual tourist being caught up in terrorism is extremely remote and risks should be put into perspective, although this can be difficult in view of the intense media attention to any such stories which heightens feelings of danger with a lingering effect (Henderson, 2007).

Despite a degree of popular resistance, terrorism constitutes a possible crisis of great magnitude for the tourism industry. It has the potential to unsettle a

country's government, precipitate widespread fear, disrupt daily operations and engender negative emotions and unfavourable destination images. There are also practical problems of insurance and many underwriters exclude terrorism from their corporate and personal cover. Planning to avoid such situations, or at least minimise damage should they occur, thus becomes imperative and the topic of tourism crisis management is generating its own literature about the dynamics of crises and how they can best be handled (Faulkner, 2001; Paraskevas & Arendall, 2008; Ritchie, 2004). Full exploration of these themes is beyond the remit of this paper, but it is clear that the capacity of terrorism to provoke a tourism crisis cannot be dismissed. Hotels are very exposed to the threat in a manner which is outlined below.

HOTELS AS TERRORIST TARGETS

Terrorist incidents at destinations can have very harmful impacts on the hotel sector as a whole if there are dramatic falls in arrivals (Stafford, Yu and Arnoo, 2002) and the financial and less tangible costs to individual properties are acute when they are the scene of the outrage. Hotels have a history of being targeted, some in popular holiday centres and others in troubled states where guests are mainly citizens and foreigners travelling for business or official purposes. Locations of such strikes are worldwide in a pattern which reflects evolving domestic and international political conditions. Notable examples in the past few years are a car bomb at the Marriott Hotel in the Indonesian capital of Jakarta in 2003 which left 13 dead and 100 wounded and suicide bombings which killed at least 67 and injured almost 150 in the Radisson SAS, Days Inn and Grand Hyatt hotels in Amman, Jordan, in 2005.

The susceptibility of hotels was made apparent most recently in the Indian city of Mumbai through an assault by terrorists belonging to a Pakistani-based organisation which commenced in the late evening of 26 November 2008. The Oberoi-Trident and Taj Mahal Palace, luxury hotels much visited by foreign businessmen as well as more affluent Indian nationals and celebrities, were both occupied. Shooting began immediately and there were grenade explosions with fires reported in the Taj. There were running battles between the terrorists and army on the second day and much confusion about what was happening. Some guests managed to escape while others, several of whom were later murdered, were taken hostage or tried to hide within the hotel. Commandoes finally took control of the Oberoi on the morning of 28 November and the Taj siege was declared over early on 29 November (BBC News, 2008). A total of 52 staff and guests died at the Oberoi and 32 at the Taj, including the wife and two sons of the latter's General Manager.

The hotels closed until 21 December when less damaged sections re-opened with a multi-faith prayer ceremony at the Oberoi and reception at the modern Tower Wing of the Taj. Hotel representatives hailed the occasion as a

testament of the staff and city's courage and strength. Security was very tight with armed police on patrol, but questions were being asked about the lack of preparedness and lax security prior to the attack. There were accusations that warnings had been ignored by city authorities and hotel management (The Times Online, 2008). Business was also badly hit, with Mumbai hotel prices dropping by 41% in the last quarter of 2008 (Indian Hotelier, 2009), and return to normality or near-normality will be a long term process. Repairs are expected to take at least a year at a cost of INR5 billion in the case of the Taj where the Heritage Wing, a historic building over one hundred years old, had been the terrorists' stronghold.

Reasons for targeting hotels are that they offer a high degree of access, usually 24 hours a day. Larger hotels have many public spaces and entrances and exits and foreigners may gather there (Horner & Swarbrooke, 2004). Meetings and conferences, sometimes prestigious, are hosted and there are restaurants which might be frequented by prominent businessmen and government officials. Properties which are part of international chains, often American owned, are a symbol of that country and its government. Security is unlikely to have been a guiding principle in the architecture of most hotels and certain features such as grand lobbies and spacious entrances are vulnerable to individual suicide and car bombings. Striking architectural designs are not always the most secure and hotels in towering skyscrapers pose formidable challenges as do resorts with sprawling grounds. Guests may be lulled into a false sense of safety once inside the hotel and overlook suspicious behaviour and objects. Certain city hotels may also be disadvantaged by unsafe environs and proximity to other notable targets such as embassies, and shopping malls.

Security is an awkward topic for many tourism businesses, including hotels, with a feeling that publicising measures could negate their effectiveness. There are also reservations about inciting unfounded fears and losing custom as a result. However, awareness of risks and the importance of security amongst practitioners and society at large have risen since September 2001. The civil aviation industry, for example, has been compelled to take unprecedented steps at considerable inconvenience to passengers in a bid to thwart terrorism in the air. There is an appreciation in other tourism sectors that tourists are cognisant of hazards and want assurance that safeguards have been installed (Tarlow, 2007). In an indication of the changing climate, hotels have borrowed ideas from airlines and airports such as checking of vehicles, inspection of luggage and screening of people by metal detectors. Questions of security are now spoken about more openly and there are signs of a greater willingness to engage in dialogue and share good practice (Hotels, 2003).

The USA appears to be taking the lead with debate in public and private domains. The Overseas Security Advisory Council of the Department of State's Bureau of Diplomatic Security reported in 2006 how American companies operating overseas were devising checklists to rate hotels on the basis of their security (OSAC, 2006). Real estate investors were also called on by a US Senate

hearing to reflect on lessons to be learnt from Mumbai (Harwood, 2009). Experts concurred that building managers should focus on liaison with officials to obtain up to date intelligence about terrorism and act upon it without delay. Police and other relevant parties should be given building plans so they can intervene quickly in an emergency. Site hardening is crucial together with training specifically for terrorism, flexible procedures and crisis management planning. Another observer of experiences in Mumbai commented on the significance of surveillance and unpredictable security routines as the terrorists had apparently visited the hotels to familiarise themselves with layouts and arrangements (Spadanuta, 2009).

However, many techniques such as protective barriers, surveillance, identification of employees and alarm systems are essentially reactive. It also should not be forgotten that terrorists too are becoming more sophisticated in their methods and harnessing of technologies. Given these factors, it has been argued that one of the most potent security stratagems is to incorporate prevention into building design. However, this is not an option for hotels which have already been constructed and adds to the development costs of new properties. Terrorism is a 'low probability-high impact risk', making expensive investment of this kind hard to justify in most instances (Siaw & Loosemore, 2006, p. 161).

Research into hotel security has been limited to date, but work completed suggests that hotels commonly strive to create an environment which is both welcoming and secure against assorted manifestations of criminality (Gill, Moon, Seaman and Turbin, 2002). This is not an easy task and there are conflicts between the offering and denying of hospitality which must be reconciled. Security may upset customers if it is deemed to be over-intrusive and an invasion of privacy so should be discreet, although an obvious presence can be a deterrent. Providing adequate security is also made more difficult by the tendency for some hotels to have a diversity of amenities alongside accommodation. Policy and practice are thus influenced by a range of variables and major influences are location, design, the General Manager's attitude and the Security Manager's background (Groeneboom & Jones, 2003). Trying to protect a hotel against terrorism clearly presents dilemmas for management and circumstances in Singapore are explored after the presentation of some information about the country pertinent to the discussion.

SINGAPORE IN CONTEXT

The Republic of Singapore is a modern and cosmopolitan city state and a major Asian commercial centre and trading port. It is home to offices of the world's major financial companies and popular with both leisure and business travellers. In excess of 10 million visitors and almost S$14billion in spending were recorded in 2007 (STB, 2008) prior to the onset of the global recession which has since

dampened demand. Tourism has benefited from the international air connectivity afforded by the award winning Changi Airport and the country's location allows it to function as a regional transport hub. The stock of conventional tourism attractions is restricted, but authorities have invested heavily in various man-made projects and there are high standard BTMICE facilities. Most of the leading hotel chains are represented and two integrated resorts incorporating casinos, one oriented towards the BTMICE market and the other to holidaymakers, will augment the supply of hotel rooms when fully operational.

The country is well known for its order, efficiency and economic progress and achievements are credited to the People's Action Party (PAP) and its founder. The PAP has been in office since the first post-independence elections in 1968 and governs in a way which has produced a high degree of prosperity and stability (EIU, 2009). Its approach includes inculcating a unifying sense of national identity intended to avert discord amongst the different ethnic communities which make up a population of over four million. Those of Chinese origin comprised 75% of the total in 2007 and Malays and Indians represented 13.7% and 8.7% respectively (Statistics Singapore, 2009). The constitution provides for freedom of worship and political parties based on race are banned, but there has been censure of the marginalisation of the non-Chinese (Rahim, 1998) and racial tensions persist beneath a surface of harmonious multiculturalism.

The above considerations indicate that Singapore is likely to be viewed as a highly desirable or 'trophy' target by terrorists. At the same time, the characteristics of the government and the reach of state institutions into many aspects of life make it hard for them to succeed and there have been few cases of terrorism in the past. In one of the rare examples, four hijackers of a Singapore Airlines plane were killed during a rescue operation at Changi in 1991. More recently, a JI cell was uncovered in 2001 and 38 suspects were arrested. According to officials, they had been preparing to attack a series of venues (Kader, 2007), several of which were connected to American interests. Elements of Singapore's foreign policy render it an apt choice for anti-Western sabotage and analysts concur that it is not immune from terrorism with particular fears about a resurgence of JI (EIU, 2009; Kader, 2007).

In any assessment of risk, it must be remembered that Singapore is part of the wider region and is inevitably affected by regional weaknesses, however efficient its own system of government. Parts of South East Asia are prone to political instability and insecurity. Terrorists allied to JI and Al-Qaeda are active in Indonesia and the Philippines and there have been clashes between Muslims and non-Muslims along the Thai-Malaysian border. Endeavours to combat terrorism require political commitment and resources which some countries do not possess. Even in Singapore, there can be mistakes and a prominent JI member escaped from a detention centre there in early 2008 and was not recaptured until 2009. Such are the facts and forces which must be taken into account by all those involved in the republic's hotel industry when formulating policies on security, the subject of the remainder of the paper.

THE THREAT OF TERRORISM AND SECURITY REGIMES

All the parties consulted admitted that the threat of terrorism in Singapore was real, but none of the individuals or the hotels in which they were employed had direct experience of an incident. The country's cultural composition, economic infrastructure, stage of tourism development and political ties with the West were cited as reasons for its vulnerability. It was mentioned that, although ethnic diversity meant vibrancy and despite the government's insistence on racial tolerance, there was still some mistrust which terrorist groups could exploit. The nation's role as a financial hub, dependence on trade and foreign investment and popularity as a tourist destination also made it interesting to terrorists and hotels were agreed to be soft spots.

Security regimes were shaped by the location of a hotel and its surroundings, directives from head office and autonomous hotel management decisions. Nevertheless, security managers identified similar tools that were vital to their work such as closed-circuit televisions (CCTVs). For hotels with extensive open compounds or many corners, CCTVs acted as the eyes of security officers and were repositories of evidence in the event of anything untoward. Fire drills were mandatory and believed to help familiarise staff with escape routes and maintain order during an actual emergency. Timings were documented to monitor performance and facilitate the speediest of evacuations.

In terms of human resources, the recruitment of security staff was a key area for attention. Officers were seen to have numerous duties and heavy responsibilities. They had to be certified in carrying out medical procedures such as first-aid, cardiopulmonary resuscitation and automated external defibrillator rescue. Recruits also had to be cleared by the Security Industry Regulatory Department, an arm of the Singapore Police Force, to confirm that they had no criminal record. Training in security measures and their execution was not only necessary for security officers, but all employees. Managers tried to cultivate understanding of the thinking behind policies and security was reviewed during morning briefings and management meetings.

Security had been revised and generally tightened after 11 September 2001. New measures included the installation of additional surveillance cameras, increased checks at public and staff entrances and verification of guests before the re-issuing of room key cards. Key card access to guestroom floors had not been an industry norm in Singapore, but was gradually being adopted. Extra workshops on security had also been organised post-2001. The overall aim was to develop a culture in which employees saw themselves as partners of security officers in detection and enforcement. Interviewees spoke of the need for all staff to be alert and eager to report any suspicions. A team of pro-active individuals was itself a critical weapon against terrorism at the hotel and complemented technological instruments.

COMMUNICATION AND COOPERATION

Security managers favoured a two-pronged approach in which clear and concise communication about security was coupled with efficient implementation. Internally, initial transmission of information occurred during employee orientation sessions and was followed by updates about changes to current practice and trends across the industry. Crisis manuals describing security measures and emergency evacuation arrangements were also distributed. Staff members were encouraged to comment on and suggest improvements to existing policies as well as be aware of the terrorist situation within the country and region. Across the industry in Singapore, there was a security network of about 30 managers that convened monthly to share information.

A significant stakeholder was the government and its agencies and all hotels belonged to a Safety and Security Watch Group, a formal initiative whereby security managers met with police bi-monthly to receive news about security. The government had worked with the Singapore Hotel Association and police to launch a national standard for hotel security in 2005. The publication was entitled the Technical Reference for Security Management Systems for Hotels and contained guidelines on the installation and maintenance of equipment, provision of materials and information outlining procedures, employing and training personnel, and establishing plans and procedures (SPRING, 2005). Hotels had also to conform to laws and regulations; for example, fire drills had to be held regularly in accordance with stipulations of the Singapore Civil Defence Force. A Security Industry Institute existed to help train and improve the calibre of security staff and, in collaboration with the Ministry of Manpower, offered courses and certification for officers, supervisors and managers (WDA, 2009).

All the managers applauded the endeavours of the government to enhance security through intelligence gathering and exchange and border and immigration controls. It seemed to them that authorities were very appreciative of terrorist threats and conscientiously disseminated warnings to the public and business community urging them to be on guard. There was a feeling that the regular meetings with the police and civil defence forces as well as the Internal Security Department were very useful. Although the threat of terrorism was present and demanded vigilance, the general consensus was that an appropriate national security framework was in place and had eased concerns of a possible attack.

PRINCIPAL CHALLENGES

Interviewees identified a number of key challenges confronting those in charge of security against terrorism in Singapore hotels which pertained to money and people, technology and balancing security with other guest needs. Firstly, security

managers observed a predilection of hotel management to see their departments primarily as non-revenue generating units which had adverse consequences for funding. Security was at a disadvantage compared to divisions which made a more obvious contribution to the hotel's competitive position and profitability. However, the counter-argument communicated to senior management was that security protected property, staff and guests and could either bolster or undermine market confidence should there be a terrorist attack with corresponding implications for revenue.

The second dilemma was finding the right people for the job of security officer, given its long hours and relatively low pay. Retirees and the less educated usually formed the bulk of officers and they did not always display great physical fitness or the best mindset which was hard to instil. In addition, there were problems in inspiring the proper attitude amongst all staff. It was impossible for officers to be omnipresent so employees should also exercise a security function, using their initiative to tell officers about unusual happenings and volunteer feedback on security systems. Propagating such values and behaviour depended upon correct security education and training as well as the recruitment of suitable people. However, non-security employees appeared to be less engaged with security than managers might have wished; for example, they were not active participants in discussion forums despite knowing of their availability.

It was widely agreed that technology was an invaluable asset which could be used to detect dubious characters or harmful substances and deter terrorists. It was therefore important for hotels to be equipped with the latest technology and have the personnel to utilise it to optimal effect. However, technology was expensive and always changing. New technologies might not be compatible with those already in existence and instalment could be a disruptive and costly operation, especially in older properties. Hotel security also could not rely on technology alone, even state-of-the-art, but depended on the aptitude of those manning it.

Finally, the reconciliation of guest satisfaction and security imperatives was a predicament. It was acknowledged that hotels were first and foremost businesses where customers paid to have a comfortable and convenient experience with an appropriate level of service. This extended to security and guests wanted to be reassured that they were in a comparatively safe environment, but expected tactics to be unobtrusive. However, security could not be compromised for the sake of comfort and convenience and safety had to be maximised which meant constantly trying to strike a satisfactory balance between the two obligations. The duty of care also embraced casual sightseers at famous hotels which were visitor attractions and customers of other outlets in the complex. Managing access and internal movements within the hotel compound without marring the enjoyment of legitimate non-residents was an added burden for security enforcers.

CONCLUSION

Terrorism seems set to continue as the 21st century progresses and the hotel industry will remain vulnerable. The quantity and quality of security that a hotel is able to provide is closely linked to the amount of funds allocated and while there will always be a tension between cost savings and expenditure, security should be given a financial priority which reflects its importance. Investment in the recruitment of specialist staff, education and training of all staff and technology in particular will determine how well hotels respond to the terrorist threat. In cases of new hotel construction and especially in higher risk locations, security should be given due consideration by planners and architects in their designs.

Attacks such as that in Mumbai will be remembered for some time and may be emulated by other terrorist groups, perhaps leading to tourists putting a greater emphasis on personal safety when choosing accommodation in the future. In some circumstances, this need could take precedence and, given mounting public awareness of terrorism, security could become a component of quality grading schemes. Including security measures as a criterion might help allay fears and demonstrate the hotel and company's commitment to guest safety in a positive and non-alarmist fashion. However, guarding against complacency is crucial and hotel managers should keep abreast of incidents worldwide, learn from the shortcomings of others and take appropriate steps to reduce the chances of a similar occurrence in their property. The fight against terrorism is also not only a matter for individual hotels and has to be dealt with collectively by the whole industry, governments, residents and tourists.

This paper has addressed several important questions about terrorism and hotels and illuminated the nature of hazards the former entails for the latter and policies adopted in response, but further research is necessary. Detailed cases of hotels and hotel companies with different experiences of terrorism would be instructive and comparative studies could be conducted across countries and regions of the world regarding hotel security provision and market receptivity. More knowledge about perceptions and expectations of security amongst hotel customers and its effects on buying behaviour would be especially useful for management decision making. Confidentiality is, however, a serious obstacle for researchers in the field and they must be prepared to negotiate unwillingness within the hospitality industry to reveal information about security regimes or the causes and consequences of their breaching by terrorists.

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