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Terrorist Tactics: Street Vendors - The Perfect Surveillance Platform

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Physical surveillance can be the most visible step in the terrorist attack planning process. The purpose of systematic observation (i.e., surveillance and casing) is to analyze a potential target to discover security measures, patterns, and vulnerabilities. Physical surveillance can be accomplished by means of static or mobile observation. Static surveillance is potentially difficult to identify or counter because the surveillant can utilize the environment around the target to blend in without attracting attention. In essence, the surveillant becomes invisible. One of the most effective low-tech ways to conduct "eyes-on" monitoring of the target is to use street vendor cover. Unlike other ruses and disguises, street vendors are ubiquitous in many places, and, hence, largely ignored. This cover often enables the terrorist(s) to conduct prolonged static and potentially mobile surveillance in the open without arousing attention. This issue of Terrorist Tactics will examine how terrorists in one Latin American country used "street vendors" to surveil a government facility, and ways to mitigate this threat.

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