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THESIS

**IT IS NOT JUST A PRESS CONFERENCE:
THE CONSEQUENCES OF CRISIS COMMUNICATION
WHILE THE WORLD WATCHES**

by

Kelly B. Huston

March 2014

Thesis Advisor:	Lauren Wollman
Second Reader:	Vincent T. Covello

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13. ABSTRACT (maximum 200 words)

An important part of the homeland security enterprise is the ability of public officials and leaders to communicate effectively with the public. When a crisis strikes, the public's ability to understand and act upon messages provided by officials is often significantly impinged by anxiety, fear, worry and distrust. In these uncertain and traumatic times, the public looks for a trusted voice and steady leadership. The ability to be trusted and lead during a crisis is determined, largely, by how well an official communicates with those affected.

This thesis examines the public information methods used by officials in two high-profile criminal cases that unfolded before live television news cameras over the course of several days in 2013—the Boston Marathon bombings and the nine-day manhunt for former Los Angeles Police Department Officer Christopher Dorner in the greater southern California area.

Best practices in risk and crisis communication are identified through a review of the literature and are used as the basis for analyzing each case study. The findings lead to four key crisis communication recommendations for public officials: recognizing the importance of empathy and compassion in trust building, focusing specifically on crisis communication best practices for leadership, emphasizing the importance of building pre-event partnerships, and differentiating the tactics from the strategic.

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IT IS NOT JUST A PRESS CONFERENCE: THE CONSEQUENCES OF CRISIS COMMUNICATION WHILE THE WORLD WATCHES

Kelly B. Huston
Deputy Director, California Governor's
Office of Emergency Services, Sacramento, California
B.A., California State University, Stanislaus, 1994

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March 2014**

Author: Kelly B. Huston

Approved by: Lauren Wollman
Thesis Advisor

Vincent T. Covello
Second Reader

Mohammed Hafez
Chair, Department of National Security Affairs

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ABSTRACT

An important part of the homeland security enterprise is the ability of public officials and leaders to communicate effectively with the public. When a crisis strikes, the public's ability to understand and act upon messages provided by officials is often significantly impinged by anxiety, fear, worry and distrust. In these uncertain and traumatic times, the public looks for a trusted voice and steady leadership. The ability to be trusted and lead during a crisis is determined, largely, by how well an official communicates with those affected.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CDC	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
CERC	crisis emergency risk communication
COPS	Office of Community Oriented Policing Services
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
DOJ	Department of Justice
EMS	emergency medical service
ESA	California Emergency Services Act
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
HSGP	homeland security grant programs
ICS	incident command system
ISR	intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance
JIC	joint information center
JIS	joint information system
JRIC	joint regional intelligence center
JTTF	joint terrorism task force
LAPD	Los Angeles Police Department
MACC	mutual-aid coordination center
MEMA	Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
MMAA	California disaster and civil defense master mutual aid agreement
MMR	measles, mumps and rubella
NIMS	National Incident Management System
OA	operational area
PIO	public information officer
PTSD	posttraumatic stress disorder
RCPT	regional catastrophic planning team

SBCSD	San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department
SEMS	Standardized Emergency Management System
SHSP	state homeland security program
SUV	sport utility vehicle
UASI	urban area security initiative

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

> The tragedy that we are undergoing right now is something that we've had nightmares about. My heart goes out to all the innocent victims of this horrible and vicious act of terrorism. And our focus now has to be to save as many lives as possible.
>
> – Rudolph W. Giuliani, Mayor of New York City
> September 11, 2001

In uncertain, traumatic and fearful times, the public looks for a trusted voice and steady leadership. The ability to be trusted and lead during a crisis is determined, largely, by how well an official communicates with those affected. Specifically, gaining people's trust is particularly important to motivate people to take critical actions in an alarming, confusing, rapidly changing, or high concern/consequence event. This trust can be difficult for leaders, first responders and public spokespersons to achieve because often their untrained instinct in a crisis situation is to provide matter-of-fact details about the crisis, and miss other key elements that emerge from executing a comprehensive crisis communication strategy.

This thesis examined two high profile crises that unfolded before live television cameras in 2013, The Boston Marathon bombings and the Christopher Dorner manhunt and murders. These represent two similar man-made disasters in which the individuals responsible continue to injure and kill over the course of several days. The public statements made by officials in the heat of the crisis had the potential to influence the killers and reduce or increase the death toll. Therefore, the researcher used these events as an opportunity to look closely at the methods of communication used and analyze their effectiveness. Specifically, the researcher sought answers to the question: What can we learn from the deconstruction of crisis communication by public officials in unfolding, high consequence events?

Specifically, this paper focused on six main principles from the literature that formed the foundation for relevant best practices in crisis communication during unfolding and ongoing incidents similar to those examined in this paper: 1) building and

maintaining trust, 2) delivery of timely messages and information, 3) conducting effective news conferences, 4) guiding and encouraging appropriate attitudes, decisions, actions and behaviors, 5) coordinate, collaborate and act in partnership with other credible sources, and 6) advanced planning and practice.

In the first case study, the tragic events and unprecedented manhunt for Christopher Dorner created extraordinary challenges for law enforcement in the Southern California region. The discovery of his online manifesto provided fuel for a dramatic, uncontrolled storyline by members of the news media, and created a level of fear that permeated deeply within the law enforcement community. When the Los Angeles police chief described the evolving situation as "…extremely worrisome and scary, especially to the police officers involved…" early in the manhunt, it signaled the seriousness of the unfolding threat to the community; a rapidly evolving threat that resulted in quick action by law enforcement throughout the region. However, officials experienced difficulty in coordination among the multiple agencies and did not employ existing protocols, such as the mutual aid system, often used for fire related activities. The use of empathy in primary public messaging, a significant component necessary for building trust, was not prevalent in the beginning and the multitude of agencies involved were not consistent in coordinated messaging. However, information dissemination was provided in a timely manner, and when the mayor of Los Angeles announced a $1 million reward, a deliberate display of unity among jurisdictions provided a significant show of coordination and effort on behalf of more than just law enforcement.

In the second case study, public safety officials in Boston faced the challenge of responding to a plausible worst-case scenario of terrorism at a highly public, large-scale event. The premeditated attack on innocent people at the Boston Marathon finish line, and deadly manhunt that followed, caused a prolonged heightened level of fear and uncertainty in the greater Boston area—arguably on a similar, but distinctly different, level as the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. The pressure on law enforcement to identify those responsible and apprehend them as quickly as possible was tremendous. The researched showed that pre-existing relationships and exercises appeared to contribute to a well-coordinated response and public display of unified leadership.

Information was provided in a timely manner; however, an early instance of speculation by officials turned out to be inaccurate. The Boston Police Department provided timely information when it resorted to using Twitter when its news blog crashed, which became a watershed moment that evidenced an effective use of social media in high profile incidents. Boston officials use of empathy in primary public messaging, a significant component necessary for building trust, was also not prevalent in the beginning.

The research and case studies in this thesis provided valuable real-world insight into the complexities and challenges of communicating during a high profile crisis and led the researcher to provide some specific recommendations for public officials and organizations likely to face similar events in the future. Those faced with the challenges and demands of high profile, high consequence events are certain to be judged more by their success at communicating effectively before, during, and after the crisis than by how well they handle the tactical response.

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If you are like me, the title of a thesis is enough to keep you from reading it. However, if the author provides a provocative headline, then you might give it a second look. The next stop for me is here—the acknowledgements. Why? The required language of thesis writing strips away the color of emotionally expressive prose and any hints about the person behind the keystrokes. If I am going to take the time to plow through a thesis, I would like to know something about the author first. As we heard repeatedly in our coursework, what is his or her "world view?" Sure, you will not get a full picture of his life, but it is enough for me? Perhaps I am subconsciously trying to figure out if we share a similar worldview that might keep me reading and trust what follows. Maybe the author thought it was better to pay homage to his boss and a bureaucratic organization before his spouse and family. That says something too. I know this sounds petty, but people do this every day when they see public officials on the news for the first time. They develop a quick first impression and decide whether to trust what is being said. If they decide they do not like the speaker, the veracity of what is said is irrelevant. Time to put down the paper and look for someone else's thesis. For the love of Moodle, there are tens of thousands of others from which to choose. So below are the tidbits that will color your impression of me—for better or for worse.

Despite the countless hours of coursework, the challenge of balancing my day job with this academic job, and the write-till-you-drop thesis development, I never forgot my top priorities in life, my awesome spouse Joe Wood, maintaining decent mental health and paying it forward to those who are not as fortunate. A bitter reminder of the importance of priorities came with the unexpected death of a beloved classmate and colleague a few months before the end of this program. Her passing reminded us all that life is short and even the most important and demanding jobs require life balance and perspective.

Academically speaking, credit goes to several people including Dr. Lauren Wollman, Dr. Christopher Bellavita, and Dr. Vincent Covello. They each played a key role in my research, decision making, and ultimate success in completing this thesis. From the perspective of the school, finishing the program with passing grades and a completed thesis was what was required. So I will call this “mission accomplished”—and not in the George W. Bush way. This thesis did not take me 10 years and $4 trillion.

Finally, I thank you. Tax dollars paid my salary and provided great support for this program. Ultimately, it is because of taxpayers that I was able to be here in the first place. It is now my responsibility to take what I have learned, and the new relationships I have built, and continue doing as much good in the world as possible before the last chapter in my life is written.

I. INTRODUCTION

In uncertain, traumatic and fearful times, the public looks for a trusted voice and steady leadership. The ability to be trusted and lead during a crisis is determined, largely, by how well an official communicates with those affected. One of the best examples of an effective crisis communicator amidst a catastrophic event was former New York Major Rudy Giuliani during the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. His authentic, empathic, and reassuring presence before the news media following the attacks transcended politics, introducing the nation to someone it could trust. Shortly after the first tower collapsed, killing hundreds more than were lost in the original jetliner collisions, the mayor appeared before television cameras at a press conference alongside then New York Governor George Pataki. "Today is obviously one of the most difficult days in the history of the city," said Mayor Giuliani. "The tragedy that we are undergoing right now is something that we've had nightmares about. My heart goes out to all the innocent victims of this horrible and vicious act of terrorism. And our focus now has to be to save as many lives as possible."[1]

In contrast to then-President George W. Bush who was swept away by Secret Service and inaccessible in the first few hours, Mayor Giuliani was leading not only worried New Yorkers, but also the rest of the country. Long before this catastrophe, Giuliani had mastered the skills of an effective crisis communicator that gave him the ability to put them to use when the nation needed them the most. In his book *Leadership*, Giuliani describes the preparation he and his administration had conducted for the inevitable crisis that unfolded on September 11. "As shocking as the crash was, we had actually planning for such a catastrophe. My administration had built a state-of-the-art command center, from which we handled the emergencies that inevitably befall a city like New York."[2] He and his executives would routinely practice the methods of crisis

[1] CNN.com, "New York's Governor and Mayor of New York City Address Concerns of the Damage," September 11, 2001, http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0109/11/bn.42.html

[2] Rudolph W. Giuliani and Ken Kurson, *Leadership* (New York: Hyperion, 2002), 119.

communication in non-crisis times, such as at executive staff meetings and exercises, to ensure they were ready to provide public information in the most effective way.

A *New York Times* story in 2007 explained, "A leader must weave a narrative of shared loss while acknowledging consuming anger. All this Mr. Giuliani accomplished, mourning the dead, comforting the grieving and cheering the living even as the police and the National Guard moved in."[3] The result of using effective risk and crisis communication during a crisis is an informed public that is more likely to make rational decisions, take actions to remain safe and contribute to the overall well being of others. In contrast, ill-informed members of the public unable to find a trusted source of official information are more likely to make irrational, selfish decisions that lead to unnecessary fear, anxiety and worse outcomes.

A. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Gaining people's trust is particularly important to motivate people to take life-safety actions in an alarming, confusing, rapidly changing, or high concern/consequence event. This trust can be difficult for first responders and public spokespersons to achieve because often their untrained instinct in a crisis situation is to provide matter-of-fact details about the crisis, and miss other key elements that emerge from executing a comprehensive crisis communication strategy. It is known from research that people under stress or fear are affected by their *negativity bias*—in that, they are more powerfully influenced by negative information than by consoling, reassuring positive information.[4] In addition, those experiencing a crisis will rely on their *affective heuristic*, wherein they use their emotions, often disproportionately, to make decisions.[5] One decision critically important to them is determining whom to trust.

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[3] Michael Powell, "In 9/11 Chaos, Guiliani Forged a Lasting Image," *New York Times*, September 21, 2007, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/21/us/politics/21giuliani.html.

[4] James N. Breckenridge and Philip G. Zimbardo, "The Strategy of Terrorism and the Psychology of Mass-mediated Fear," Naval Postgraduate School, accessed December 20, 2013, https://www.chds.us/courses/mod/resource/view.php?id=73341; Paul Rozin and Edward B. Royzman, "Negativity Bias, Negativity Dominance, and Contagion," *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 5 (2001): 296–320.

[5] Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman, "Judgment Under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases," *Science* 185, no. 4157 (1974): 1124–1131.

For example, a study was conducted that focused on people who lived around Mount St. Helens in Washington State in 1980 when it experienced the most catastrophic volcanic eruption in U.S. history. Researchers concluded that a significant relationship existed between the belief and trust in the source of a warning (e.g., public officials) and taking action.[6] Experts described the amount of foreknowledge and warning for this volcanic eruption as greater than any previous geologic hazard in history. Numerous warnings surely reduced the death toll; however, many people remained skeptical of officials and unconvinced of the danger. As a result, 60 individuals lost their lives, many of whom could have heeded repeated warnings and escaped the danger if they trusted the officials issuing the warnings.

1. Public Concerns Mostly Driven By Perceptions

A common misperception by public officials facing a crisis situation is the need to appear knowledgeable during public statements by providing lots of facts and figures (e.g., number of casualties, homes burned, fire trucks firefighters at the scene, shelters open, police officers investigating, time of incident, etc.), as they believe that will reduce stress and anxiety. However, according to research described below, public concerns typically are based 95 percent on perceptions and only 5 percent on facts. People's behavior usually is predicated on perceptions—often misperceptions—that differ substantially from reality (facts),[7] which is a critical distinction highlighting the difference between what people *need to hear* when they are stressed and what public officials *actually say*, or do not say, when a crisis strikes.[8]

Consequently, a dangerous disconnect can occur between how public officials actually communicate in a crisis, and their awareness and understanding of the unique skills and techniques needed to prompt consequential, life saving actions by those affected. Therefore, officials who "wing it," rather than using proven techniques of risk

[6] Ronald W. Perry and Marjorie Greene, *Citizen Response to Volcanic Eruptions: The Case of Mt. St. Helens* (New York, NY: Irvington Publishers, 1983).

[7] Center for Risk Communication, "Determination of Trust," December 10, 2013, http://centerforriskcommunication.org/environmental-risk-communications/.

[8] Vincent Covello and Peter M. Sandman, "Risk Communication: Evolution and Revolution," *Solutions to an Environment in Peril* (2001): 164–178.

and crisis communication, are often less effective; some even risk making the situation worse. Conversely, numerous case studies have shown that officials who practice learned risk and crisis communication techniques are more likely to build trust and become an effective response and mitigation tool for those managing a disaster.[9]

2. History As a Guide

It is not necessary to look far back in history to appreciate the perils of poor public communication in a crisis. In July 2012, a 641-page report authored by an independent 10-member panel, issued a stinging rebuke of the Japanese government, bureaucratic regulators, and Tokyo Electric Power Company, which had been widely criticized for sluggish action and the release of inaccurate information in the hours and days following the disaster at the Fukushima nuclear power plant in 2011. "Only 20 percent of the residents of the town hosting the plant knew about the accident when evacuation from the 3km zone was ordered at 21:23 on the evening of March 11."[10] Two months after the disaster, a nationwide poll showed 81 percent of respondents to the survey said they did not trust government information about the crisis. Seventy-eight percent said then Japanese Prime Minister Naoto Kan lacked leadership in handling the disaster.[11]

When an explosion killed 11 men and injured 17 others on a drilling platform in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010, leading to the worst environmental disaster in U.S. history, the man in charge at the time was widely criticized for not only lacking empathy, but also repeatedly failing to express it. His most famous statement was made as thousands of gallons of crude oil continued to gush into the ocean unabated. "I'm sorry. We're sorry for the massive disruption it's caused their lives," said BP CEO Tony Hayward while touring the coast wearing a neatly pressed Oxford shirt. "There's no one who wants this

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[9] Robert R. Ulmer, Timothy L. Sellnow, and Matthew W. Seeger, eds., *Effective Crisis Communication: Moving from Crisis to Opportunity* (Sage Publications, 2010).

[10] National Diet Library, The Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission, "Japan Diet Fukushima Report," July 2012, http://naiic.go.jp/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/NAIIC_report_lo_res.pdf.

[11] Associated Press, "Poll: Most Japanese Distrust Gov't on Nuke Crisis," May 30, 2011, http://www.boston.com/news/world/asia/articles/2011/05/30/poll_most_japanese_distrust_govt_on_nuke_crisis/.

over more than I do. I'd like my life back."[12] Although Hayward may have been trying to assure the public he would do everything possible to stop the oil from leaking into the ocean, his choice of words portrayed himself as a victim rather than a trustworthy leader of the emergency response.

At some of the top business schools across the country, Hayward's catastrophic mistakes have become the focus of case studies and classroom discussion.[13] In addition to lessons on executive leadership, Hayward provides several explicit examples of why letting people know you care matters. His statement sent a message of insensitivity, selfishness, and detachment to the public and those affected by the spill. "The words made many families feel that Hayward and BP simply didn't care. Hayward just needed to use a little more empathy in public," said Peter Topping, associate professor of organization and management at Emory University.

3. Effects—Acute Stress Disorders

Generally speaking, it is known that those exposed to a traumatic event show increased rates of acute stress disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), major depression, panic disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, and substance use disorder. Victims of intentional terrorist acts often cope with loss using a harm/loss appraisal, thus experiencing a high level of stress, fear, and likely anger in that moment.[14] Consequently, the length and severity of stress and outlook on the future can be direct affected by the presence or absence of psychological support.[15] Public officials can demonstrate that support, in part, through effective risk and crisis communication.

An interesting study was conducted two weeks after the Boston Marathon bombings on April 15, 2013. Researchers surveyed residents in Boston, New York, and

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[12] The Huffington Post, "BP CEO Tony Hayward (VIDEO): 'I'd Like My Life Back,'" June 1, 2010, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/06/01/bp-ceo-tony-hayward-video_n_595906.html.

[13] Stephanie Chen, "Crisis Management 101: What Can BP CEO Hayward's Mistakes Teach Us?" *CNN.com*, July 27, 2010, http://www.cnn.com/2010/LIVING/07/27/bp.tony.hayward.mistakes/index.html.

[14] Bruce Michael Bongar, *Psychology of Terrorism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 175–93.

[15] National Research Council, *Preparing for the Psychological Consequences of Terrorism: A Public Health Strategy* (Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2003).

the remainder of the United States to determine the media's role in broadcasting acute stress following the bombings. They examined whether repeated media exposure to the Boston Marathon bombings was associated with acute stress and compared the impact of direct exposure (being at or near the bombings) vs. media exposure (bombing-related television, radio, print, online, and social media coverage) on acute stress. Interestingly, their findings support the conclusion that six or more daily hours of exposure to media coverage of the Boston Marathon bombings in the week afterward was linked to more acute stress than having been at or near the marathon. Acute stress symptoms increased with each additional hour of bombing-related media exposure via television, social media, videos, print, or radio.[16]

High-profile incidents that receive national media exposure also tend to attract and involve more than the typical career public safety leaders (e.g., police and fire chiefs, sheriffs, emergency managers). Elected officials are sought after by the media as leaders and representatives of the people affected. As was witnessed in previous disasters, they often overshadow the front-line public safety officials despite the latter's greater relevance in the crisis. Some may argue that elected officials, specifically, should focus on "politics" and stay out of the way of emergency managers, but the reality is that elected officials often feel compelled to take a highly visible "leadership" role in a disaster even if there is not a specifically defined one in an operational structure. Often, this compulsion appears to be motivated by other factors, such as ego, enhancing electability, and gaining public stature or advocating for unrelated political objectives that must be factored into the risk and crisis communication strategy used if officials want to maximize the effectiveness of their public dialogue.

4. Perceived High-Profile Consequences

When faced with a crisis that gains significant public exposure or calls for the public to take action, standard methods are typically used to release information to the public, such as press releases, press conferences, one-on-one interviews, and public

[16] UCIrvine News, "Prolonged Viewing of Boston Marathon Bombings Media Coverage Tied to Acute Stress," 2014, http://news.uci.edu/press-releases/prolonged-viewing-of-boston-marathon-bombings-media-coverage-tied-to-acute-stress/.

forums. The focus typically centers on a written document called a "press release," or "news release," or a scheduled appearance before members of the news media called a "news conference." Some officials see these as high-risk events within a critical incident, where a misstatement or inability to address a journalist's tough question adequately could negatively impact that official's career. For this reason, critical information is often not timely. A hyper-focus on risk managing the potential negative consequences of what they say trumps the urgency and opportunity to provide public information. Alternatively, others view appearances before the media and public as their opportunity to achieve the proverbial 15 minutes of fame.

Conversely, elected officials are more are likely to have experience in working with the media and public as a part of their routine election process. Since they are independent of any controlling agency, such as a police or fire department, they rarely have formal policies specific to how to communicate during emergencies. They are also more likely to have experience in public relations as opposed to specific training in risk and crisis communication.

5. Inconsistent Emphasis on Public Information Function

Public safety agencies are more likely to have policies on how to provide public information during a crisis. These policies typically focus on the procedures to create and distribute information products, such as news releases and official statements. Their intent is to ensure the agency complies with laws, such as the Freedom of Information Act or, in the case of California, the California Public Records Act.

However, having a crisis communication policy that ensures compliance with laws and regulations is not the same thing as having a strategic crisis communication plan. In a survey of members of the Major Cities Chiefs Association in March 2011, 55 percent of those who responded said their agency did not have a strategic communications plan even though they used many methods to communicate with the public.[17] Many law enforcement agencies have designated public information officers

[17] Darrel W. Stephens and Julia Hill, *Strategic Communication Practices: A Toolkit for Police Executives*, U.S. Department of Justice, 2012, 57.

(PIO) trained in media relations and public information laws. However, smaller agencies that lack adequate staff are more likely to designate someone as a PIO who is not full-time and may not possess any formal training. In some cases, the culture of the agency may be to take a posture of "deny, justify, and stonewall" instead of providing critical information during a crisis.[18]

The convergence of public safety officials and elected leaders during a crisis often leads to inconsistencies because of differing levels of training and experience, and assumptions about how to handle a crisis. Leaders may decide not to follow existing procedures because the event is extraordinary. The heightened public attention may also create the perception that they need to take extraordinary actions that are outside existing policies and procedures.

Therefore, research and previous case studies suggest it is critically important that officials employ consistent and proven risk and crisis communication methods and techniques in high profile, high consequence events. The application of which increases the chances of reducing the public's innate distrust of those managing disasters, and increases their likelihood that life saving messages will be persuasive and convincing.

B. RESEARCH QUESTION

Emergency management officials and leaders often commission in depth case studies on critical incidents and disasters to identify how well they responded and the areas upon which they can improve. Numerous "after action" analyses are available concerning large-scale disasters, such as Hurricanes Sandy, Katrina, the Northridge earthquake in 1994 and other catastrophic events throughout the world. These reports are typically used as a basis for changing or improving government practices to better serve those who depend on them the most in a crisis. The same is true for "man-made" disasters, such as the Oklahoma City Bombing, terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, and other mass killings throughout the United States.

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[18] Chuck Wexler, Mary Ann Wycoff, and Craig Fischer, *Good to Great" Policing: Application of Business Management Principles in the Public Sector* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2007), 48.

The Boston Marathon bombings and the Christopher Dorner manhunt and murders in 2013 represent two similar man-made disasters in which the individuals responsible continue to injure and kill over the course of several days. The public statements made by officials in the heat of the crisis have the potential to influence the killers and reduce or increase the death toll. Therefore, it is important to use these events as an opportunity to look closely at the methods of communication and uncover lessons learned.

Primary Research Question: What Can We Learn from the Deconstruction of Crisis Communication by Public Officials in Unfolding, High Consequence Events?

Answers to the subset of questions that follow helped in examining the actions of officials in these cases.

- What are the best practices offered from the research about risk and crisis communication?
- Did officials use, or appear to use, these best practices in their delivery of public information?
- What affect did the methods of crisis communication by public officials have in the outcomes of each case?
- What elements of these events created the frenzy of media inquiries that thrust it onto a national stage as opposed to a routine local news story?
- Did the agencies involved have specific policies and procedures for releasing public information during an unfolding crisis? Were they followed?
- Did the agencies' method of providing public information prove to be effective in adequately information the public?

C. THEORETICAL SENSITIVITY

An important caveat to understand better the way the researcher selected the case studies and analyzed the specific point-in-time events is to acknowledge the influence of professional knowledge, experience and on-going practice in the field of risk and crisis communication. This transparency provides context for the nuances of analysis that may not be apparent to the reader, and recognizes the inherent biases of the researcher that may have shaped the findings, which is called "theoretical sensitivity," and is often

associated with grounded theory. “Theoretical sensitivity refers to the attribute of having insight, the ability to give meaning to data, the capacity to understand, and capability to separate the pertinent from that which isn’t. All this is done in conceptual rather than concrete terms.”[19] This sensitivity comes from a number of sources, such as knowledge of the literature, as well as professional and person experience.

Specific to this thesis, the researcher has over 20 years of experience working full-time in the field of risk and crisis communication, specifically in the public safety and law enforcement disciplines. He has been directly involved in crafting public messaging and delivering it to the public and media during some of the highest profile criminal cases of the past two decades, including the murder of three women in Yosemite National Park in 1999, the disappearance and murder of Washington intern Chandra Levy in 2001, and the murder trial of Scott Peterson, sentenced to death for the murder of his wife Laci and their unborn son. (A more detailed explanation of the significance of these past events is provided in the Conclusion and Reflection chapter of this thesis). In addition, the researcher has been a full-time public information officer and manager at two law enforcement agencies, as well as a part-time crisis communication instructor at the California Specialized Training Institute—the training arm of the Governor’s Office of Emergency Services. He has also served as the Commander of Media Relations for the California Highway Patrol and director of communication for both the Governor’s Office of Homeland Security and California Emergency Management Agency. At the time of this thesis, he was serving as a gubernatorial appointee leading the state’s crisis communication efforts in the Governor’s Office of Emergency Services.

Detailing this professional experience is not intended to be a self-serving curriculum vitae of the researcher, but rather an explanation the basis of his theoretical sensitivity and the lens through which he viewed the events to collect data and create small theoretical frameworks about concepts and their relationships. For example, specific press conferences are selected and examined as a part of the case studies offered in this thesis. To the layman, a reading of the written transcript of what was said by

[19] Barney G. Glaser, *Theoretical Sensitivity: Advances in the Methodology of Grounded Theory*, vol. 2, (Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press, 1978), 41.

officials might be deemed adequate for the analysis of the quality and effectiveness of risk and crisis communication performed. However, the researcher not only read the transcripts, but also carefully watched video recordings of the actual press coverage of the events and the methods of portrayal by the news media. The researcher knows from past experience, and the literature, that the totality of communication in this context includes nonverbal cues and behaviors, such as posture, facial expression, eye gaze, gestures, tone of voice, location, and attire. Research has demonstrated that appearance can alter physiological reactions, judgments, and interpretations. The recognition of these nonverbal cues and behaviors is critical to this research and sheds light on influences that may not be recognized by those involved in risk and crisis communication.[20]

D. OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

The following chapters use the problems and issue presented in Chapter I as a guide to expand upon the issues that influence the outcomes in high-profile cases.

Chapter II provides a more in-depth look at the literature and research in the field of risk and crisis communication and the role of the news media. It exemplifies some of the lessons learned from major events and explores practices of large government agencies, such as the U.S. Centers for Disease Control. It also looks at the role of leadership in law enforcement and the principles recommended to address critical incidents. This chapter also examines some of the issues that are not clear and need further research.

Chapter III describes the research design and methods used to conduct case studies on two similar high-profile law enforcement incidents that occurred in 2013—the Boston Marathon bombings and the Christopher Dorner manhunt. It also expands on why these cases were selected and the unique circumstances that provide a basis for analysis against best practices in the field of risk and crisis communication. It explains the method to employ *descriptive* and *exploratory* research paradigms to look for correlations and

[20] James M. Carroll and James A. Russell, "Do Facial Expressions Signal Specific Emotions? Judging Emotion from the Face in Context," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 70, no. 2 (1996): 205.

consistent themes related to the methods of crisis communication used by public officials in these events, and examine the outcomes and relative effectiveness.

Chapter IV focuses on the principles and best practices in the field of risk and crisis communication. This chapter explains the specific best practices selected for comparison in this thesis, and how they are focused on crisis communication principles and guidance used in a law enforcement context, as both case studies focused on law enforcement's response to unfolding crimes. It also focuses on the importance of delivering timely messages, how effective news conferences are conducted, the importance of advanced planning and practice, and the elements of communication that build and maintain trust during a crisis.

Chapter V is a case study focused on how the greater Los Angeles area faced an unprecedented nine-day manhunt in February 2013 for a particularly dangerous multiple-murder suspect named Christopher Dorner. It explains how this ex-LAPD officer posed an unprecedented threat to law enforcement and the unique challenges that his rampage posed. This chapter also looks at the statements made by the LAPD and other agencies and the secondary effects of public perception, as well as highlights some of the coordination challenges experienced because of not utilizing existing mutual aid systems and communication breakdowns between agencies.

Chapter VI is a case study focused on how fear and uncertainty gripped much of the greater Boston, Massachusetts area after two homemade bombs were detonated at the finish line of the Boston Marathon in April 2013. It focuses on the pre-event readiness and coordination conducted by a wide range of agencies and their effect on the outcomes. A few key press conferences are examined to determine if the statements of public officials were consistent with best practices in risk and crisis communication. It also highlights and examines the public safety consequences of those statements.

Chapter VII uses the valuable real-world insight into the complexities and challenges of communicating during a high-profile crisis to provide recommendations for public officials and organizations likely to face similar events in the future. These recommendations are derived from the best practices identified in literature review; analysis of the events described herein; and this researcher's 20 years of full-time career experience in risk and crisis communication during similar high-profile cases in the past.

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II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature reviewed for this thesis focused largely on research into the use of risk and crisis communication during high concern or high stress circumstances. Unlike the craft of marketing, communicating to affected populations during emergencies and disasters is not a sales pitch or political "spin." Crises are unique circumstances that involve complex psychological effects that influence the ability to process and understand messages. The literature also recognized the importance of public officials developing and using a risk and crisis communication strategy when responding to alarming, confusing, rapidly changing, or high concern/consequence events. It also highlighted the importance of leadership in effectively building public trust as an event unfolds. Experts in the field of risk and crisis communication also stressed the need for leaders and spokespersons to receive specific training in risk and crisis communication and then practice those skills before a crisis emerges. This review also investigated the changing field of journalism and how contemporary newsgathering has changed significantly since the days before 24-hour cable television news and the influence of people's access to the Internet.

A. CONVENTIONAL WISDOM ABOUT RISK AND CRISIS COMMUNICATION

According to the literature, a distinction exists between "risk communication" and "crisis communication." The National Academy of Sciences defines risk communication as an interactive process of exchange of information and opinion among individuals, groups, and institutions. It involves multiple messages about the nature of risk and other messages, not strictly about risk, that express concerns, opinions, or reactions to risk messages or to legal and institutional arrangements for risk management. Risk communication is often employed for complex issues and easily misunderstood concerns, such as a parent's decision to vaccinate a healthy baby against whooping cough or what the risks are to residents living near a nuclear power plant.

Crisis communication has a narrower focus that includes dynamic and unexpected events or threats, and requires immediate and effective actions to reduce harm. It generally describes the communication activities of an organization or agency facing a crisis, and the areas in which they need to communicate about that crisis to their organization, various partners, and the public.[21] For example, public safety officials may need to evacuate a town threatened by an approaching wildfire. To accomplish this task, they would use best practices in crisis communication to explain the risk quickly and motivate the town's residents to evacuate because the fire poses an immediate threat to life. In contrast, risk communication would be used to explain the relative risk of wildfire to residents when no immediate threat exists. The difference between risk and crisis communication is also described as what "might happen" versus what "is happening."[22]

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) created a specific category of risk and crisis communication combined together and called "crisis and emergency risk communication," or CERC. They make the distinction that this method of communicating involves a narrow time constraint and involves specific subject-matter experts who provide information to the public—as opposed to just leaders in emergency management, such as police and fire chiefs.[23]

Dr. Peter Sandman, an often-cited risk communication speaker and consultant, coined the equation "Risk = Hazard + Outrage." One of his most notable works is a 166-minute video, produced by the American Industrial Hygiene Association in 2004, that covers 25 crisis communication recommendations, and focuses chiefly on the most difficult messaging challenges that even experienced crisis communicators encounter. He argues that public officials often overuse the excuse that providing too much information, or unverified information, will cause a "panic" response from the public. Sandman asserts that, based on his research, panic rarely ever happens, and that effective communicators

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[21] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication Manual," 2012 ed. accessed February 14, 2014, http://emergency.cdc.gov/cerc/pdf/CERC_2012edition.pdf.

[22] Peter Sandman, "The Peter M. Sandman Risk Communication website," 2014, www.psandman.com.

[23] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication Manual," 6.

should not think it is panic when it instead is disobedience, mistrust, worry, or excessive caution. This situation proves a powerful point because the same fear associated with irrational reactions by the public appears to be the basis for poor decision making by officials in a crisis. Misinterpreting the public's reaction as panic causes a chain reaction of providing less information and fewer opportunities to communicate effectively during a crisis.[24]

Less than 5 percent of public stress is driven by facts, according to Dr. Vincent Covello, a nationally and internationally recognized trainer, researcher, consultant, and expert in crisis, conflict, change and risk communications. His research shows that public concerns typically are based 95 percent on perceptions and only 5 percent on facts. People's behavior usually is predicated on perceptions—often misperceptions—that differ substantially from reality (facts).[25] This aspect is a critical distinction where Covello highlights the difference between what people need to hear when they are stressed and what public officials actually say, or do not say, when a crisis strikes. He has authored or edited over 25 books and over 75 published articles on risk assessment, management, and communication.

The difference between communicating under normal circumstances and during a crisis is partially explained in the *Commanders Guide to Effective Crisis Communication*, written by Major Tyrone M. Woodyard of the U.S. Air Force. He concludes that a message can be shaped by the sender that can become distorted as it transmits through a medium or through interpretation of the receiver. During a crisis, the understanding of information provided by officials is affected by confusion, fear, stress, and pressure.[26] He claims that with the proper communication from leadership, the organization can gain control of a crisis, which is an important distinction because it elevates the importance of communication commensurate with tactical and response strategies often given the most

[24] Randall N. Hyer and Vincent T Covello, *Effective Media Communication during Public Health Emergencies*, World Health Organization, 2005, 11.

[25] Center for Risk Communication, "Determination of Trust."

[26] Tyrone M. Woodward, *Crisis Communication: A Commanders Guide to Effective Crisis Communication* (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air Command and Staff College, April 1998).

weight by emergency managers. Often, the focus of tactics is centered on life-safety actions, such as firefighting, rendering medical aid, stopping criminal behavior, etc.

Woodyard also cites a finding by Dr. Covell that effective crisis communication skills needed to be effective can be taught. As with most critical skills, however, proper training and practice must be received to maintain proficiency. Effective spokespersons must learn how to execute their skills and techniques under simulated and real crisis conditions. Woodyard ends his report by saying, "I have concluded the Air Force has a very solid and credible crisis communication program that teaches proven and effective crisis communication techniques."[27]

In a published report from the World Health Organization, a 2004 meeting of high-level decision makers collaborated on the topic of crisis communication and drew similar conclusions to those of Covello and Woodyard. "Unless the public is clear about what to do and why, the management of such a crisis can create confusion, anxiety and a breakdown of trust. Communication will directly influence how events evolve."[28] The report examines a variety of events concerning people's risk of various health-related crises. Specifically, they examined five cases of events including dioxin, avian flu, severe acute respiratory syndrome, risk communication on measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccination and health care errors. The authors observe that "risk communication" is part of crisis communication but focuses on the existence, nature, form, severity or acceptability of risks. One of the important variables in the ability to communicate is the public's trust—i.e., "Can I trust what these people are saying?" The cases studies shared a common climate of mistrust and suspicion, blame, and sometimes retribution. Interestingly, the report concludes that a "very different" perception of risk often occurs between the public and health professionals, which may explain why health professionals tend to appear disaffected, or lacking empathy, in the midst of high anxiety event fueled by misinformation or public misunderstanding of the facts by the public. The key

[27] Woodward, *Crisis Communication: A Commanders Guide to Effective Crisis Communication*, 35.

[28] World Health Organization, *Sixth Futures Forum on Crisis Communication: Reykjavik, Iceland, 10–11 May 2004*, Copenhagen, Denmark, 1.

question is, once again, why are leaders in health issues (physicians) often ineffective in building trust during a crisis?[29]

The importance of having well developed practiced risk and crisis communications plans and strategies in place before a crisis was a consistent theme throughout the literature. For example, the CDC examined their performance during major events, such as the 2001 Anthrax incident and the 2003 SARS outbreak. Although the CDC had operational plans in place for responding to health emergencies and stockpiles of the antibiotic Cipro (Anthrax is a bacterium that can be treated with antibiotics), media reports flooded the news channels in 2001 claiming a shortage existed. Despite their efforts to communicate effectively during the anthrax incident, national media criticized the CDC's Anthrax operation for more than a year afterwards. In 2001, the CDC did not have a communications plan or adequate resources devoted to communications. As a result, they invested heavily in creating a communications plan.[30] Working from a well-developed communications plan is as important as other emergency response activities. The public's perception of success or failure in an emergency is based partly on the actual success of response and recovery activities, but more so, on how well it was communicated. "As a leader, you need to know that the public judges the success of your operation, in great part, by the success of your communication," claims Dr. Barbara Reynolds.[31]

A comprehensive guide to best practices in crisis communication published by Booz Allen Hamilton, a U.S. government contractor, surveys a wide range of events in which best practices have resulted in both failure and successes in crisis and risk communication.[32] It reiterates the widely held definitions of crisis and risk communication, identifies strategies to be an effective communicator, and enumerates

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[29] Bev J. Holmes, Natalie Henrich, Sara Hancock, and Valia Lestou, "Communicating with the Public During Health Crises: Experts' Experiences and Opinions." *Journal of Risk Research* 12, no. 6 (2009): 793–807.

[30] Barbara S. Reynolds, Julia Hunter Galdo, and Lynn Sokler, *Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication: By Leaders for Leaders*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2004.

[31] Ibid., 9.

[32] Booz Allen Hamilton, "*Best Practices for Government Agencies and Non-Profit Organizations*," 2010, http://www.boozallen.com/media/file/Risk-and-Crisis-Communications-Guide.pdf.

seven underemphasized areas (new technology, preparedness for dynamic risk incidents, culture, interconnectedness of agencies, organizational culture, and policies). "Experts agree that good communication cannot substitute for bad policies, ineffective decision making, or inadequate planning in other areas," concludes the report.[33] This fact is important because an appreciation for the "need" for training and practice in crisis communication is often present, but sometimes, organizations' own policies restrict the ability to communicate even the most basic information in a timely manner. Decision makers within those same organizations who believe that the media is inherently bad or biased will complicate the process of effective communication because they are focused on variables that are out of their control—i.e., how the media does its job.

In 2011, the Department of Justice's (DOJ) Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (the COPS Office) published a 124-page "toolkit" for law enforcement executives and communications executives to help them understand how the news media has changed over the past 20 years, how to develop a strategic communications plan focusing on the role of the chief and sheriff, and discusses the unique communication needs that crop up during times of crisis.[34] The report emphasizes the important leadership role the chief of police plays in critical external events, such as large-scale riots, and natural or man-made disasters. "In times of crisis, people look to their leaders for guidance, answers, accountability, and hope. The police executive must be the lead spokesperson in the wake of a crisis." The messages delivered by that executive must be evaluated in terms of two parts: content and position. Content is generally the facts, who, what, when, where, etc. Position is the official response by the agency or agencies relative to the events. The position is where statements and expressions of emotions, such as outrage and empathy, by leadership play a key role. If a leader does not provide both the facts and expresses empathy, the public's emotions risk being further inflamed. The report also recommends that agencies provide information as quickly as possible so that the agency has the ability to have an offensive, proactive position rather than allowing others to fill the void with their own information.

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[33] Booz Allen Hamilton, "*Best Practices for Government Agencies and Non-Profit Organizations*," 2.

[34] Stephens and Hill, *Strategic Communication Practices: A Toolkit for Police Executives*, 97.

B. WHAT ROLE DOES THE NEWS MEDIA PLAY?

The news media are key contributors, and sometimes creators, in the construction of and communication about risk.[35] Media coverage is a powerful factor in determining reaction to a perceived crisis. An almost insatiable appetite for information exists as a crisis emerges and the news media have been the best equipped to gather and disseminate what is known.[36] Unfortunately, the increasingly high turnover of journalists and de-emphasis on specialty reporting in most newsrooms has led to weaknesses in the interpretation and understanding of complex messages. News organizations have cut back on their newsroom staff by 30 percent since 2000.[37] According to a survey of newspapers in 2004 asking about their preparedness to report on public health emergencies, "More than 80 percent of respondents said they view journalists as important first responders to public health emergencies. Yet only 7 of the 164 responding papers reported that their staff received training specifically for public health emergencies, and only 25 reported having formal plans for public health emergencies."[38]

1. Media's Role in Spreading Negative Consequences

Widespread media coverage of large-scale, community-based traumas, such as the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, or the Boston Marathon bombings, may also play a role in the mental health of people exposed to the coverage. A 2013 study on the media's role in the Boston Marathon bombings examined whether collective media coverage may trigger psychological distress in individuals outside the directly affected community.[39] Researchers conducted a nationwide survey to determine whether repeated

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[35] Jenny Kitzinger, "Researching Risk and the Media," *Health, Risk & Society* 1, no. 1 (1999): 55–69.

[36] Wilson Lowrey, Karla Gower, William Evans, and Jenn Mackay. "Assessing Newspaper Preparedness for Public Health Emergencies," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 83, no. 2 (2006): 362–380.

[37] Lisa Silver, "Five Ways Journalism Is Changing," *Ijnet International Journalists' Network*, 2011, http://ijnet.org/stories/five-ways-journalism-changing.

[38] Lowrey, Gower, Evans, and Mackay, "Assessing Newspaper Preparedness for Public Health Emergencies," 367.

[39] E. Alison Holman, Dana Rose Garfin, and Roxane Cohen Silver, "Media's Role in Broadcasting Acute Stress Following the Boston Marathon Bombings," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 111, no. 1 (2014): 93–98.

media exposure to the Boston Marathon bombings was associated with acute stress and compared the impact of direct exposure (being at or near the bombings) vs. media exposure (bombing-related television, radio, print, online, and social media coverage) on acute stress. Interestingly, it found that people outside of the Boston area exposed to repeated media coverage experienced more stress than those directly exposed to the bombings. The study suggests that the news media may become a conduit that spreads negative consequences of community trauma beyond directly affected communities.

2. Influence of Social Media

Today, the flow of information is faster and more diverse with the birth of social media. Now, the public has access to more than just the tried-and-true network newscasts, such as NBC, ABC, CBS, and mass-circulation newspapers like the *New York Times* and *San Francisco Chronicle*. Among today's new, digital news consumers, 52 percent receive at least some news from Facebook and Twitter, according to a 2012 survey by the Pew Research Center. The study also revealed 92 percent go directly to news websites and 85 percent use search instead of waiting for the next edition of the newspaper or the by-appointment news. A companion study by Pew, they examined the "stickiness" of news websites versus social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter. Facebook users spent an average of 423 minutes each on the site in December. By contrast, a Pew analysis of Nielsen Net View data puts the average time on a top 25 news site at just under 12 minutes per month.[40]

The results suggest that social media is not simply replacing traditional news sources, but providing another avenue through which consumers to obtain information, which, presents both opportunities and peril for risk and crisis communicators. The ability to disseminate messages to the public is easier than ever because officials are not relying so heavily on mass media sources, such as their local newspapers, radio, or television stations. A wide range of tools, such at Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Flickr, and blogs, are now easily accessed, user friendly, and free to use.

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[40] Amy Mitchell, Tom Rosenstiel, and Leah Christian, "What Facebook and Twitter Mean for News | State of the Media," accessed January 11, 2013, *Pew Research Center Blog*, http://stateofthemedia.org/2012/what-facebook-and-twitter-mean-for-news/.

For example, former California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger had approximately 2.7 million followers of his account as of January 2013 (https://twitter.com/Schwarzenegger). He often circumvented the press release channels used by his press office and simply posted information on Twitter. In 2009, his private jet made an emergency landing at the Van Nuys Airport after the pilot reported smoke in the cockpit. He "tweeted" the incident and a photo of his plane to his followers, which was immediately picked up by mainstream media.[41] His staff first discovered the governor's in-fight emergency when mass media sources saw the Tweet and began calling the press office.

Some perils do exist in using social media to communicate with the public. Unless the organization is transparent and specific about how it intends to use these services, the general public may have unrealistic expectations of the agency. For example, in a survey by the American Red Cross in August 2012, three out of four Americans (76 percent) expect help in less than three hours of posting a request on social media, up from 68 percent in 2011.[42] Studies have also found that outdated, inaccurate, or false information has been disseminated via social media forums during disasters.[43]

C. WHAT WE DO NOT KNOW

Many guides to effective crisis and risk communication are in existence. They often provide bullet point lists of recommendations of what to do and what not to do when communicating with the public in a crisis. A simple Google search for "crisis communication tools" returns dozens of useful and valuable tools, including scholarly publications and links to presentations conducted for government organizations.

What appears to be missing in the literature is the connection between the plethora of "how to" materials available and their actual use and efficacy. Often, more

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[41] Amanda O'Donnell, "Schwarzenegger Tweets About Jet's Emergency Landing," *CNN.com*, June 20, 2009, http://www.cnn.com/2009/US/06/20/california.emergency.landing/index.html.

[42] American Red Cross, "More Americans Using Mobile Apps in Emergencies," August 31, 2012, http://www.redcross.org/news/press-release/More-Americans-Using-Mobile-Apps-in-Emergencies.

[43] Bruce R. Lindsay, "Social Media and Disasters: Current Uses, Future Options and Policy Considerations," *Journal of Current Issues in Media & Telecommunications* 2, no. 4 (2010): 6.

examples of bad public communication than good are seen, which leads to the belief that public officials involved in a crisis are either unaware of the best practices or do not employ them when they are needed the most. With the exception of the best practices highlighted by Booz Allen Hamilton, virtually no guidance about how to deal with sensitive internal issues that affect the outcome of communicating in a crisis is available, such as how to deal with an overbearing elected official who grandstands during a crisis, when (if ever) its appropriate to violate rules and regulations for the greater public good, and whether or not those who actually appear in the public eye are the ones receiving the training and practicing before disaster strikes. Often public information officers are relegated to background roles during a major crisis, and ironically, they are more likely to have the proper training and experience to deliver the most effective message. A gap appears to exist between knowledge and performance.

Government officials and communication experts also possess divergent opinions about how to incorporate new technologies, such as social media and mobile phones into risk and crisis communications plans.[44] Some government agencies still restrict access to social media platforms (i.e., Facebook, Twitter) because of ethical or legal concerns, records management challenges, impacts to employee productivity, and the agency's ability to devote adequate resources to maintain, monitor, and administer social media tools.[45] Fears and uncertainty about the implications of using social media may dissuade their use until agency leaders have a better understanding of their practicality. The rapidly changing functioning of these technologies also underpins a level of uncertainty about how reliable they will be in the long run. However, a growing number of real-world examples of effective use of social media are available, such as what is described in the Boston Marathon Bombing case study in this paper.

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[44] Marjorie Greene, "Using Social Media to Communicate During Crises: An Analytic Methodology," in *SPIE Defense, Security, and Sensing*, *International Society for Optics and Photonics* 8029 (2011): 24.

[45] Jodi Cramer, Erica Dornburg, and Steven Jawgiel, "Government Ethics and the Use of Social Media," presented at the Office of Government Ethics Conference, Orlando, Florida, September 2011, http://1.usa.gov/1iMLmEz.

D. CONCLUSION

When looking at the available research, risk and crisis communication plays an important role in the public's understanding of complex issues and emergencies. It is distinguished by its specific use when a high concern issue creates confusion, fear, anxiety and misunderstanding. It is also misunderstood. Many of the thought leaders in this discipline point out that risk and crisis communication is distinctly different from "public relations." The circumstances surrounding a crisis often cause the public to focus disproportionately on negative information, which is a central principle of modern psychology that people put greater value on losses (negative outcomes) than on gains (positive outcomes)—often called negativity bias or "negative dominance theory."[46] A greater emotional force is given to negative information, which affects perception, attention, judgment, and decision making. The disproportionally negative emotions of those experiencing a crisis, left without mitigating response by public officials, may lead to negative behaviors that hamper recovery or cause more harm. Therefore, when leaders are seen as ineffective communicators, and are unable to gain public trust and cooperation, those most impacted by a crisis ignore them. Worse, their incompetence can itself become a lead news story and distract from the disaster at hand.

[46] Abraham H. Maslow, *Motivation and Personality* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1970).

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III. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

This thesis focuses on public information and crisis communication methods used by public officials during two similar unfolding, high-profile crimes that occurred within the United States in 2013. It attempts to determine if officials followed their agency's own public information policies, and if those were consistent with risk and crisis communications best practices. The paper determines if the statements made by public officials affected the outcome of the event (helped or hindered) and if the agencies took any actions internally to change, amend or maintain their policies because of their crisis communication experience in these events.

Two specific incidents are the foundation for comparison, contrast and analysis.

- Murder spree by former LAPD officer Christopher Dorner and ensuing manhunt on February 3–12, 2013, in the greater Southern California area
- Boston Marathon bombings on April 15, 2013, and ensuing manhunt that led up to the capture of two suspects on April 19, 2013, in and around the Boston, Massachusetts area

These two events were chosen because they are contemporary law enforcement cases happening in the United States, within months of each other, during which fugitives were on the run for several days, which created building uncertainty and anxiety within the public. In addition, as known from the literature, the public's decision making is influenced by emotions that limit their ability to accept and process information. The public's safety was, in part, a factor in their trust in public officials and the effectiveness of messages that could keep people out of harm's way. They both attracted extensive media coverage beyond the routine local news audience market and become stories covered extensively nationally and internationally.

A. WIDESPREAD EFFECT

These cases are in those ways highly representative of events that gain an extraordinary amount of public interest and attention, and affect even those not directly impacted by the event. With the uncertainty of all the suspects' location(s) or plans, it could be argued that widespread jeopardy was experienced throughout the United States,

which differs from a criminal targeting (or has targeted) a specific individual, or has a singular focus of his anger (e.g., abortion doctors, executives in a workplace, community leaders, family members). In both these cases, the suspects seemed to be using violence both specifically and indiscriminately to make a statement.

B. COMPLEXITY AND UNFOLDING DYNAMIC

Since these events were dynamic and involved a high degree of risk (e.g., armed and dangerous fugitives likely to commit additional violence crimes), a need, and demand, for timely life-safety information releases by officials was required. Unlike events that begin and end in a relatively short amount of time during which the most damage and injury occur all at once (e.g., train derailment, earthquakes, tornadoes), these events were not "natural" and unfolded over the course of several days. The outcome could have been impacted, negatively or positively, by risk and crisis communication by public officials. Citizens were not only potentially in harm's way, but became part of the process of identifying and locating suspects before they were apprehended. In fact, officials relied on the public as heavily as on their internal investigative leads and skills. In both cases, the public provided the final tips to end the crises. These two events were also characterized by their complexity and the magnitude of response by multiple law enforcement agencies in relatively large metropolitan areas—Boston and Los Angeles.

C. SOURCES AND RESEARCH PARADIGMS

This thesis used comparative case study as the research method. The sources of data for analysis included news coverage footage, videotaped press conferences available online, and publicly available interviews with key leaders involved in the actual events, as well as any after action reports, publicly accessible agency investigative records and written procedures for public affairs and crisis management for the cities, counties and federal agencies identified as primarily responsible for the investigation and manhunt.

The goal was to employ descriptive and exploratory research paradigms to look for correlations and consistent themes related to the methods of crisis communication used by public officials in these events, and examine the outcomes and relative effectiveness.

The intent was to identify what practices and outcomes, if any, correlate between these high-profile events and identify whether they were consistent with standard practices recommended by experts and successful practitioners in risk and crisis communication. Gaining a deeper insight beyond the traditional “after action report” method of evaluating the effectiveness of risk and crisis communication in critical events may shed new light on the adequacy of existing policies and provide valuable guidance to public officials facing similar challenges in the public eye. It may also provide real world validation for best practices identified in the research.

These two events are complex and multifaceted. A wide range of case studies could be conducted on these events focusing on areas, such as the unique demands of the criminal investigation, psychological profile of the offender(s), method of widespread operational deployment of personnel and resources, prevention and mitigation strategies for future similar events, etc.

However, this paper focused on the issue of risk and crisis communication by public officials in these two high consequence events. An in-depth look at the study of risk and crisis communication was examined to develop the baseline of known best practices. Then, research was conducted to determine who made public statements or provided public information and their intent of that action. An analysis was conducted to deconstruct the research materials to determine what, if anything, could be learned from these events.

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IV. PRINCIPLES AND BEST PRACTICES

In the field of risk and crisis communication, a significant amount of scientific literature, case studies and guidance analyzed and consolidated into "best practices" is available. For the purposes of this research, "best practices" are a set of principles and guidance about the process and content of communication.[47] They include a high degree of consensus among practitioners and scholars combined with new evidence and emerging lessons learned from real-world events, such as the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the anthrax episode of 2001, Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the transportation system bombings in London and Madrid (2004 and 2005), the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in 2010 and others.

The case studies examined in this paper were dynamic and unexpected events that required immediate and effective actions to reduce harm. The best practices selected for comparison in this paper are primarily focused on crisis communication principles and guidance used in a law enforcement context, as both case studies focused on law enforcement's response to unfolding crimes. Many of the best practices chosen for comparison in this paper are relevant to both risk and crisis communication, but some are especially critical during events in which public officials may have the opportunity use them to affect the outcome by mitigating additional harm and assisting in the apprehension of those responsible.

Although an extensive number of best practices are identified in various fields of emergency public safety communication, this paper focuses on six main principles that form the foundation for relevant best practices in crisis communication during unfolding and ongoing incidents similar to those examined in this paper. These seven principles are drawn from three primary sources: Booz Allen Hamilton's review of best practices in risk and crisis communication, CDC's review of best practices in crisis and emergency risk communication, and the World Health Organization's review of media best practices in crises and emergencies:

[47] Booz Allen Hamilton, "Risk and Crisis Communications," 1.

A. BUILDING AND MAINTAINING TRUST

High levels of trust can reduce social uncertainty and complexity, and influence risk perceptions and acceptance of risks. The public typically judges the trustworthiness of a message based on its content and source. "Who is telling me this?" and "Can I trust them?" If the public concludes that they cannot trust the source of the information, then the efforts by public officials to communicate effectively is likely to fail. Although trust is generally a long-term, cumulative process, it is easily lost and difficult to regain.[48]

The most important factors involved in trust include perceived

- Listening, caring, empathy and compassion
- Honesty, openness, candidness, transparency and accountability
- Expertise and competence
- Perseverance, dedication, commitment and responsiveness

Best practices identified in the literature to build and maintain trust include the following.

- Expressions of empathy and caring should be expressed within the first 30 seconds of a message
- Statement of the facts (what, when, where, why, who, etc.) and acknowledgement of what is not known and explain why
- Deploying spokespersons with authority and subject matter expertise
- Expressions of dedication and commitment (i.e., "We have deployed all the resources available")

B. DELIVERY OF TIMELY MESSAGES AND INFORMATION

The timeliness of the organization's initial public messages during a crisis is widely acknowledged as a critical best practice. In today's environment of rapid information sharing, those first to deliver information can frame the story of an incident through the Internet, social media, and mobile communication platforms. A crisis communication toolkit for police executives published by the DOJ in September 2011 emphasizes, "Whenever possible, speak first. It is the offensive, proactive position, which is almost always preferable to the defensive and reactive position. Framing the issue is

[48] Hyer and Covello, *Effective Media Communication during Public Health Emergencies*, 115.

the advantage that goes to the party that speaks first."[49] Since identifying their communication failures after the 2001 Anthrax attacks, the CDC made the speed of their communication a top priority. Their risk and crisis communication motto became "be first. be right. be credible." This situation acknowledged how the speed with which organizations respond to the public can be an indicator of how prepared they are to respond to the emergency, that a system is in place, and that needed action is being taken.[50] In general, the response to the public should be within the first hours of the incident and uninhibited by not knowing all the facts. Acknowledgment of uncertainty is acceptable and recommended to avoid expressions of overconfidence.[51]

Initial messages to the public should be as follows.

- **Focused** messages developed with a limited number of key messages: ideally three key messages or one key message with three parts for each underlying concern or specific question.
- **Short** messages keep individual messages brief: ideally less than three seconds or less than nine words for each key message and less than nine seconds (for television and radio) and 27 (for the print media) words for the entire set of three messages.
- **Relevant** information at the time of the message. Avoids a lot of background information or establishing the speaker or the organization.
- **Clear** messages unmistakably understandable by the target audience: typically at the 6th to 8th grade readability level of communications to the general public
- **Repeated** messages ensure consistency and durability of the message.

C. CONDUCTING EFFECTIVE NEWS CONFERENCES

Various information events can be developed to provide timely information during a crisis, and include town hall meetings, media availability sessions, and news conferences (sometimes referred to as press conferences). The most frequently used information event during a high-profile incident is the news conference. It provides an

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[49] Stephens and Hill, *Strategic Communication Practices: A Toolkit for Police Executives*, 91.

[50] Barbara Reynolds, Julia Hunter Galdo, and Lynn Sokler, *Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication* (Atlanta: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2002).

[51] Ibid., 37.

opportunity for journalists to receive information at one time and in one location. In high-profile incidents, the conference is often carried live on television or streamed online so anyone watching has the opportunity to hear directly from the agency, or agencies, responsible for responding to the crisis.

Best practices conducting effective news conferences include the following.

- **Location**—Find a well-known location convenient for journalists, preferably near the actual incident scene so reporters are more likely to attend
- **Timing**—In fast-breaking emergencies, consider holding at least two news conferences per day
- **Notification**—Contact the media about the news conference using a media advisory in advance that includes the date, location, start and finish times, and a brief description of what information will be provided
- **Preparation**—Ensure the room is the right size to accommodate the anticipated number of attendees, designate a moderator in advance of the news conference to keep the conference on schedule, establish ground rules and field reporters' questions, and ensure main spokespersons rehearsed the key messages developed for the crisis and are ready to answer questions
- **Conduct**—News conferences during a crisis are intended to provide only the latest information and allow journalists to ask questions
    - Make a formal opening statement brief—around 5 minutes
    - Mention all pertinent information (for example, who, what, where, when, why and how) in the opening statement
    - Allow time for questions (typically at least 10–15 minutes)
    - As a general rule, limit the number of speakers to no more than three and limit them to no more than five minutes each

D. GUIDING AND ENCOURAGING APPROPRIATE ATTITUDES, DECISIONS, ACTIONS AND BEHAVIORS

During a crisis, feelings of fear, anxiety, confusion and dread can build in the general public, which causes them to feel hopeless or helpless that can lead to irrational conclusions or unnecessary actions. A generally accepted way to reduce anxiety and restore a sense of control is to give them things to do. The actions suggested can be symbolic (e.g., put up the flag), preparatory (e.g., donate blood or create a family check-

in plan), or reactive (e.g., stay vigilant; report suspicious activity; take protective measures such as evacuations).

Best practices for guiding and encouraging appropriate attitudes, decisions, actions and behaviors include the following.

- Specific actions the public can take
- Who should take those actions
- When those actions should or should not be taken

E. COORDINATE, COLLABORATE AND ACT IN PARTNERSHIP WITH OTHER CREDIBLE SOURCES

In a crisis, local, state, regional and national response officials must work together to ensure messages are consistent. When faced with a new threat, people want a consistent and simple recommendation to follow. They want to hear agreement about what they should do from multiple experts through multiple sources. Messages do not have to be wrong to be damaging. If they are inconsistent, the public will lose trust in the response officials and begin to question every recommendation. Local, state, regional, and national response officials and their partners must work together to ensure messages are consistent, especially when the information is new to the public.

F. ADVANCED PLANNING AND PRACTICE

An overwhelming majority of the literature about risk and crisis communication reviewed, along with the experience of this researcher, supports the importance of pre-event planning that includes the development of a communications plan and strategy. “A well-prepared leader will have communication plans and resources in place to help minimize the number of decisions about communication that must be made in the moment,” claims Dr. Barbara Reynolds, creator of the CDC’s crisis emergency risk communication model. This planning is important because a written plan allows for a quick and effective response because a majority of the decisions about how to respond to a crisis have already been decided. It can enable leaders and spokespersons to focus on the quality, accuracy, and speed of the agency’s crisis communications response.

Components of an effective communications plan include the identification of the following.

- Procedures for gathering information on what has happened so far, what is currently happening, and what is expected to happen
- Identification of who delivers the information, how and when the information is communicated
- Preferred channels of communication—for example, through news releases, news conferences, the Internet, a toll-free telephone line, brochures, radio announcements, special events, door-to-door canvassing, or media interviews
- Communication tasks to be accomplished, and who is responsible
- Goals of messaging—for example, in informing, persuading or motivating

Having a plan is important, but its effectiveness is dependent on practicing the plan using training and exercises designed to simulate real-world events and learn from them. Generally, the literature recommends conducting tabletop exercises, drills, or simulations to train employees and others on the plan. These exercises can also expose weaknesses that can be fixed while there is still time. An important key is to include the involvement of other agencies and departments likely to become interwoven into the response. Establishing connections before disaster strikes is critical because it allows for discussions about how to mitigate differences in understanding between agencies into the communications response.

V. CHRISTOPHER DORNER MANHUNT

The greater Los Angeles area faced an unprecedented nine-day manhunt in February 2013 for a particularly dangerous multiple-murder suspect named Christopher Dorner. A highly armed former LAPD officer who began his rampage by allegedly murdering a couple in the city of Irvine on February 3, Dorner explicitly vowed to continue targeting and killing members of the greater law enforcement community to avenge his perceived defamation and discrimination by members of that agency. "I have exhausted all available means at obtaining my name back," wrote Dorner in an extensive 11,000-word manifesto published on his Facebook page on the night of his first alleged killings. "I will bring unconventional and asymmetrical warfare to those in LAPD uniform whether on or off duty. ISR [Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance] is my strength and your weakness. You will now live the life of the prey."[52]

These chilling threats combined with his fatalistic determination prompted law enforcement officials to launch one of the biggest and most complex multi-agency responses in southern California history. His words, fueled by social media and traditional media outlets, spread intense fear not only among the public, but also unusually deep within the law enforcement community. By the time of his eventual capture and death during a standoff with police on February 12, Dorner is alleged to have killed four people, including three police officers, injured at least six others and caused millions of tax dollars to be spent on trying to capture this extremely dangerous and elusive fugitive.

A. UNPRECEDENTED THREAT

Law enforcement agencies are routinely involved in some sort of fugitive manhunt as part of their public safety mission. Whether it is attempting to locate one of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) "Ten Most Wanted Fugitives," or searching for individuals alleged to have committed one of many various crimes that regularly

[52] Christopher Dorner Manhunt, "Manhunt Manifesto," *Los Angeles Times*, accessed January 13, 2014, http://documents.latimes.com/christopher-dorner-manifesto/.

occur throughout cities and counties, these are a matter of routine daily law enforcement business. However, what distinguishes the Dorner manhunt from others is evidenced by these characteristics: 1) the suspect was a former law enforcement officer with military training, 2) demonstrated deadly actions with explicit intent to continue killing to gain public attention and retribution, 3) insider knowledge of police tactics intended to elude capture, and 4) specific tactical focus on named members of the LAPD, their families, and anyone who attempted to intercede.

"The discovery of Dorner's letter posted online—coupled with the homicides of Monica Quan and Officer Keith Lawrence—created a dynamic rarely confronted by law enforcement," reads a nonpartisan review of law enforcements response by the Washington-based police foundation.[53] "Threats had not only been made against officers, but these threats had actually been carried out against the family members of a former LAPD captain."

LAPD, as well as several other law enforcement agencies, went on "tactical alert," which signaled one of the highest levels of mobilization. Officers were put on extended hours and off-duty officers were called back to work.[54] Law enforcement officers were posted guard in front of LAPD headquarters and other locations believed to be targets of Dorner. Officers in tactical uniforms carrying assault rifles were noticeable in many areas of the city. This heightened security was reinforced with images and videos of heavily armed officers repeatedly broadcast by media outlets.

Additionally, the manhunt and concurrent investigations expanded in both size and scope during the course of the event, which added to the difficulty of the law enforcement challenge. Multiple agencies spanning across five different southern California counties (Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego and Orange),

[53] Joe Nelson, "Washington-based Think Tank Reviewing Law Enforcement's Response to Dorner Rampage," July 16, 2013, http://www.dailynews.com/general-news/20130717/washington-based-think-tank-reviewing-law-enforcements-response-to-dorner-rampage.

[54] L.A. NOW, "LAPD Declares Citywide Tactical Alert," *Los Angeles Times*, February 2, 2013, http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/lanow/2013/02/los-angeles-police-declare-citywide-tactical-alert.html.

covering an estimated population of more than 20 million people, had some role to play in this high consequence event.[55]

At the center, the LAPD was the target of Dorner's threats, and the following key agencies were conducting separate criminal investigations believed to be associated with Dorner's actions: Irvine Police Department, Riverside Police Department, Torrance Police Department, and the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Office but does not account for the hundreds of other local, state and federal authorities that participated in various aspects of the response. Many were never directed to respond but self-deployed, which created significant problems with command and control.[56]

B. COORDINATION

The State of California is well known for its advanced emergency management systems and agreements. It uses the Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS), which is the fundamental structure for the response phase of emergency management.[57] The California Emergency Services Act (ESA) requires the use of this system for managing multiagency and multijurisdictional responses to emergencies in California. It is intended to unify all elements of California's emergency management community into a single integrated system and standardizes key elements. SEMS incorporates the use of the incident command system (ICS), California disaster and civil defense master mutual aid agreement (MMAA), the operational area (OA) concept, and multiagency or inter-agency coordination. State agencies are required to use SEMS and local government entities must use SEMS to be eligible for any reimbursement of response-related costs under the state's disaster assistance programs.

As Dorner's crimes expanded, and authorities located his burned truck in San Bernardino County, agencies involved in the manhunt realized their coordination efforts

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[55] United States Census Bureau, "California QuickFacts from the U.S. Census Bureau, 2012 Estimates," accessed January 18, 2014, http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/06000.html.

[56] "Police Under Attack. Southern California Law Enforcement Response to the Attacks by Christopher Dorner," *The Police Foundation*, February 2014, 49.

[57] California Governor's Office of Emergency Services, "Standardized Emergency Management System," accessed November 21, 2013, http://bit.ly/1dIZIRB.

were not adequate to account for the wide geographic range of activities. Leaders formed a multi-agency coordination center (MACC) located at the Joint Regional Intelligence Center (JRIC) in the city of Norwalk. Mixed reviews of its effectiveness were received. The Foundation report concluded, "…some MACC systems worked well and others did not." [58] Specifically, significant confusion occurred about the role of the MACC in both the manhunt and associated criminal investigations. Some agencies dispatched line-level officers and others sent command staff, which created an imbalance in decision-making authority and ability. Those familiar with the investigation said that much of the information compiled by the MACC was inaccurate.

As the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department (SBCSD) continued searching for Dorner in the Big Bear Lake area, some executives in the MACC determined that priorities needed to be set. As a result, they established several objectives for the MACC including a "media strategy." Differing accounts were received of what efforts were made to coordinate media messaging through a Joint Information Center (JIC), and it is unclear how extensive and/or effective that process was in the end.[59] A deliberately coordinated talking points or a clear strategy on how to harness the media on an on-going basis does not appear to have been created.

The SBCSD had two full-time PIOs on staff that became overwhelmed by media inquiries once Dorner's truck was discovered in their jurisdiction on February 7, 2013.[60] They worked long hours and were unable to keep up with the demand for information by hundreds of reporters from around the world. Although they were aware of some statements made by neighboring jurisdictions, notably incorrect ones, they did not benefit from a coordinated joint information system (JIJS) or center that was apparently a function of the MACC. The Riverside Police Department was also aware of the existence of a JIC at the MACC and sent non-PIO law enforcement representatives to participate in it. In hindsight, Riverside police officials, witnessing the fatigue of their public

[58] "Police Under Attack. Southern California Law Enforcement Response to the Attacks by Christopher Dorner," *The Police Foundation*, 53.

[59] Rick Braziel, *Information Sharing Meeting*, Governor's Office of Emergency Services, November 27, 2013.

[60] Cindy Bachman, SBCSD spokeswoman, telephone discussion, February 12, 2014.

information colleagues in San Bernardino County, wished they had reached out to provide mutual aid assistance.[61]

As for the multi-agency manhunt, the state's robust law enforcement mutual aid system was not harnessed as a clearinghouse for the long-term deployment of resources across the region. Interviews with leaders of the agencies involved generally understood the existing structures, such as National Incident Management System (NIMS) and SEMS, but commitment was lacking to using them for the overall coordination. "Agency heads must fully commit to coordinated efforts and the use of NIMS and the three key constructs: Incident Command System, Multi-Agency Coordination System, and Public Information. The lack of full commitment in each of these three areas lead to problems between agencies."[62]

C. CONSEQUENCES: "WHEN THE TRUTH COMES OUT, THE KILLING STOPS"

As with many high-profile investigations, law enforcement officials usually make careful public statements in an effort to satisfy the media's curiosity or announce results, such as the arrest of a suspect. Often statements are made after a crime has occurred or where the suspect has been running from authorities to escape capture. In the Dorner case, although he was attempting to elude capture, he was antagonistically targeting the same law enforcement officers frantically trying to capture him. In essence, he was running toward them and posed a prolonged immediate threat to them and the general public.

Authorities are often focused on crafting statements consistent with state law, and in the case of pending litigation, do not jeopardize the successful prosecution of the accused. In other cases, they may be aiming to improve their agency's public image by demonstrating their success and competence through press releases. Specifically, the LAPD had detailed policies on what can and cannot be released, where the media can and

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[61] Guy Toussaint, Lieutenant, Riverside Police Department, telephone discussion, February 14, 2014.

[62] "Police Under Attack. Southern California Law Enforcement Response to the Attacks by Christopher Dorner," *The Police Foundation*, 55.

cannot be, and how the agency will handle requests for public information.[63] Their media relations guide does not appear to provide specific strategies for complex, multi-agency investigations of the magnitude of this event.

The consequences of law enforcement's public statements were exceptionally high in this case, as evidenced by statements made in Dorner's Facebook post. "[LAPD] Chief Beck, this is when you need to have that come to Jesus talk with Sgt. Teresa Evans and everyone else who was involved in the conspiracy to have me terminated for doing the right thing,"[64] read the online manifesto. "I'll be waiting for a PUBLIC response at a press conference. When the truth comes out, the killing stops."

Thus, Dorner was not what many in law enforcement would consider a typical criminal on the run. He was an exceptionally dangerous and active killer demanding a public dialog with LAPD officials through press conferences. He exhibited similar patterns of terrorist behaviors—engaging in careful preparation, lived near his targets, conducted surveillance, and engaged in criminal activity.[65]

D. THE FIRST OFFICIAL STATEMENTS

The first substantial public statement by officials announcing Dorner as a suspect occurred late in the evening of February 6, 2013, when the Irvine Police Department called a press conference and officially declared Dorner a suspect. At around the same time the LAPD issued its own press release.[66] This release, or "statement," is attributed to "the Department" rather than any individual public official of the LAPD and followed a standard, just-the-facts type of news release. It described Dorner as being wanted in connection with the double murder that occurred on "February 4, 2013" (which is an incorrect date) in the City of Irvine and acknowledged the general threats made by

[63] Los Angeles Police Department, "LAPD Media Relations Guide 2008," accessed February 11, 2014, http://www.lapdonline.org/inside_the_lapd/content_basic_view/2023.

[64] Christopher Dorner Manhunt, "Manhunt Manifesto."

[65] Brent Smith, "A Look at Terrorist Behavior: How They Prepare, Where They Strike," *NIJ Journal* 260 (2008): 3.

[66] Los Angeles Police Department, "LAPD Statement on Former Officer Wanted in Double Homicide NR12037," February 6, 2013, http://www.lapdonline.org/newsroom/news_view/52948.

Dorner, but did not disclose that they originated from his manifesto posted on his Facebook page.[67]

"The Department has learned that Christopher Dorner has made threats against members of the LAPD and we are taking those threats very seriously as we do all threats against our personnel and the public," reads the release. It was written in third person and does not include any quotes from representatives or leaders, such as the police chief, in the release. This point is significant because no expression of concern or empathy was seen for those who were the target of his threats.

The Irvine Police Department also issued a written press release, although it was shorter (95 words in length), and it announced that Dorner was a suspect in their double homicide investigation.[68] It did not reference the extensive online manifesto or expand upon any of the specific threats made. It, too, did not include any quotes of public officials.

It is important to note that media coverage of the Irvine homicides was localized and slow to develop. Officials did not connect Dorner to the murders until a law enforcement intelligence officer uncovered Dorner's Facebook manifesto around 1:30 pm on February 6.[69] Since the Facebook posting was seen as a primary piece of evidence, investigators attempted to keep it secret by having it removed from social media. Although officials were successful in convincing Facebook to remove it from that platform within hours of its discovery, it was too late; members of the media had already found it and downloaded it. This manifesto became an uncontrolled catalyst that propelled the story onto the national news stage, spread fear in southern California, and focused urgent attention on law enforcement action.

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[67] According to press release issued by the Irvine Police Department on February 4, 2013, the murders actually occurred sometime before 9:10pm on February 3rd when it received the 9–1-1 call reporting the crime.

[68] Julie Engen, "Double Homicide Investigation," *Irvine Police Department*, February 4, 2013, http://www.cityofirvine.org/civica/press/display.asp?layout=1&Entry=1457.

[69] "Police Under Attack. Southern California Law Enforcement Response to the Attacks by Christopher Dorner," *The Police Foundation*, 86.

As a result, LAPD Chief Charlie Beck held a detailed press conference at the agency's headquarters the next morning, Thursday, February 7.[70] He was flanked by two other uniformed officers from his agency and spoke from a podium to a room full of reporters. He appeared serious and somewhat frustrated as he spent the first several minutes reading from prepared notes highlighting facts about the search for Dorner, the incidents that happened in other cities including the double murder in the City of Irvine, an attempted robbery in San Diego, the murder of a Riverside Police Officer earlier that morning in Riverside, and an officer involved shooting in the City of Torrance that injured two citizens and turned out to be a "case of mistaken identity by the officers." He also provided specific information about how people can provide tips and information, including phone numbers to Crime Stoppers and the robbery homicide division. Beck briefly acknowledged the existence of Dorner's "manifesto" and the fact that Dorner was a former Los Angeles police officer. However, Beck later rebuffed reporters' specific questions by refusing to engage in a dialog about Dorner's "ramblings on the Internet" and indirectly referred to Dorner as a coward.

Figure 1. LAPD Press Conference (Fox News)[71]

[70] Fox News Insider, "VIDEO: LAPD Press Conference on Christopher Dorner Manhunt," February 7, 2013, http://foxnewsinsider.com/2013/02/07/video-lapd-press-conference-on-christopher-dorner-manhunt.

[71] Ibid.

At the very end of Beck's prepared remarks, after more than six minutes into his press conference, he appeared slightly emotional while expressing specific empathy for the victims. "The city mourns the deaths of Monica Quan, Keith Lawrence and our brave Riverside police officer. I also feel great sadness for the injuries suffered by my officer, the second Riverside officer, and the two uninvolved citizens in Torrance. With that, I will answer a very few questions…" Most of the ensuing questions were to clarify facts. However, at one point, he described the evolving situation as "…extremely worrisome and scary, especially to the police officers involved…"

The Police Chief's statements can be characterized as the following.

- Appearing serious, sullen and official (in uniform)
- Deliberate, scripted and/or prepared remarks
- Providing extensive detailed facts (e.g., Dorner's physical description, getaway vehicle, dates, times and locations of other crimes, agency actions and priorities, tipster phone numbers)
- Empathetic towards specific victims
- Dismissive of the main suspect's alleged motivations
- Validating fear the LAPD was experiencing

This press conference was not the only public statement made by officials during the manhunt, but it was the one of the most significant and consequential. Chief Beck and members of the LAPD were specifically named by Dorner, which made them his primary target. Moreover, not only were public officials playing catch up to news outlets in an attempt to dispel inaccurate information and control the message, but also it was entirely possible that Dorner could have been watching to plot his next actions. The consequences of the statements made by LAPD's top official were high and could have meant the difference between life and death.

E. $1 MILLION REWARD ANNOUNCED BY THE MAYOR

On Sunday, February 10, 2013, while Dorner was still on the loose, another major press conference was held at the LAPD. This time, more than just LAPD representatives were present. In an apparent effort to show unity, mayors and police chiefs from some

affected communities joined Beck and Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa in announcing a $1 million reward.[72] Although Chief Beck spoke at this press conference, Mayor Villaraigosa was the highest-ranking official, and began by setting the tone for a reward announcement designed to expedite the capture of Dorner.

Villaraigosa dressed in a suit and tie, was flanked by at least 12 officials (some in uniform and others in suits), and spoke from prepared notes at a podium. His opening statement was delivered in a serious and determined tone, and his statements were succinct and, in part, directed at Dorner:

> Let me be clear. Our dedication to catching this killer remains steadfast. Our confidence that we will bring him to justice is unshaken. This search is not a matter of 'if,' it's a matter of 'when.' And I want Christopher Dorner to know that. To that end, we're all here for one purpose to stand united and say that we will not tolerate a killer targeting our officers and their families. Targeting innocent people in this city and in this region… collectively, this group lead by my office, is posting a reward of one million dollars for information that will lead to Mr. Dorner's capture.[73]

Figure 2. LAPD Press Conference (AP)[74]

[72] William M. Welch, "LAPD: Fugitive Ex-Cop a 'Domestic Terrorist,'" *USA TODAY*, February 11, 2013, http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/02/10/ex-cop-manhunt-continues/1906999/.

[73] Associated Press, "$1 Million Reward Offered in Dorner Case," February 10, 2013, YouTube, accessed March 7, 2014, http://youtu.be/35ei8fH37_o.

[74] Ibid.

The Mayor's statements can be characterized as the following.

- Appearing determined, focused and "in charge"
- Displaying collaboration and unity
- Deliberate, scripted and/or prepared remarks
- Challenging of Dorner
- Optimistic about bringing Dorner to justice

The performance by the mayor and the deliberate display of unity among jurisdictions provided a significant show of coordination and effort on behalf of more than just law enforcement. Despite the unprecedented fear and uncertainty within the law enforcement community, and greater community at large, the mayor's statements did not appear to reinforce that feeling.

The reward announcement resulted in nearly a thousand bad tips within the first 24 hours. False Dorner sightings were also reported from Denver to Chicago.[75]

F. SECONDARY EFFECTS: PUBLIC PERCEPTION

Rick Braziel, a member of the Police Foundation review panel and former police chief for the City of Sacramento, believes that the LAPD also faced a public relations crisis because of Dorner's detailed allegations of discrimination combined with LAPD's history of racial tension within the department and community.[76] The longer the agency delayed in responding to, or refuting, Dorner's claims, the more his allegations were amplified and reinforced by sympathetic voices on social media platforms.

A Facebook page entitled, "I Support Christopher Jordan Dorner," gained over 2,000 "likes" in less than a week after the discovery of his manifesto. The creator of the page told a reporter that he started the page to steer the conversation away from Dorner's

[75] Christopher Goffard, Joel Rubin, and Kurt Streeter, "The Manhunt for Christopher Dorner—Chapter 4—A Killer Vanishes," *Los Angeles Times*, December 13, 2013, http://graphics.latimes.com/christopher-dorner-manhunt/#chapter-four.

[76] Braziel, *Information Sharing Meeting*.

mental health.[77] During a LAPD press conference on February 19, 2013, a week after Dorner's death, Beck reflected on the influence of Dorner's manifesto.[78] "I don't for a minute discount the effect Dorner's manifesto has had on the reputation of the Los Angeles Police Department," he said. "I do not think it is justified."[79]

On February 9, 2013, a news release was issued by LAPD entitled, "Los Angeles Police Chief Charlie Beck's Statement on Christopher Jordan Dorner."[80] The Chief announced that the agency would reopen and review the Dorner complaint of 2007 and any new allegations revealed in the manifesto. "I do this not to appease a murderer. I do it to reassure the public that their police department is transparent and fair in all things we do." This release was spawned, in part, by recommendations from the department's psychologist who believed Dorner might hear it and "give him pause."[81] It was also intended to maintain the public's confidence in the agency. "As much as I value our success in reducing crime, I value even more our gains in public confidence," reads the statement.

What this researcher was unable to determine is whether Dorner heard Chief Beck's statements during the manhunt, or those of any other public officials, and if the public statements influenced his actions. Dorner is deceased and it does not appear that any evidence of his deliberations are available other than his apparent quest to continue killing unabated.

It can be argued that the mainstream media fueled fear through its extensive news coverage and sometimes-inflammatory headlines. *USA Today*, a leading nationwide news outlet, published a story on February 11, 2013, entitled, "LAPD: Fugitive Ex-Cop a

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[77] Kathleen Miles, "Christopher Dorner Fans On Facebook, Twitter Call Alleged Cop Killer A 'Hero,' Citing Police Brutality," *Huffington Post*, February 8, 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/02/08/christopher-dorner-fans-facebook-twitter_n_2647754.html.

[78] Steven Hoffer, "Chris Dorner Reward: Los Angeles Police Chief Charlie Beck Says $1 Million 'Should Be Paid Out,'" *Huffington Post*, February 19, 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/02/19/chris-dorner-reward_n_2717718.html.

[79] Ibid.

[80] Los Angeles Police Department, "Chief Charlie Beck's Statement on Christopher Jordan Dorner," February 9, 2013, http://www.lapdonline.org/february_2013/news_view/52963.

[81] Goffard, Rubin, and Streeter, "The Manhunt for Christopher Dorner—Chapter 4—A Killer Vanishes."

'Domestic Terrorist.'" Television news outlets continually broadcast pictures of a muscular, clean-cut Dorner in military and police attire carrying a military assault rifle.

Internationally, a major news outlet overseas in the United Kingdom published a story with the headline, "Rampage of a Real-Life Rambo: Fear Grips the U.S. As Ex-Navy Officer Goes on Killing Spree in Revenge for Being Sacked by LAPD."[82] The assertion from this foreign press outlet was that the entirety of the United States was gripped with fear. However, Dorner provided explicit identification of his intended targets in his Facebook post—mostly individuals associated with the LAPD. Although it was anyone's guess where he was while a fugitive, the actions he took before he was captured were consistent with his writings. It is reasonable to conclude that individuals living outside the greater Los Angeles area experienced significantly less fear, especially those living in remote parts of the state and country.

G. CHRISTOPHER DORNER MANHUNT ANALYSIS

The tragic events and unprecedented manhunt for Christoper Dorner created extraordinary challenges for law enforcement in the Southern California region. The discovery of his online manifesto provided fuel for a dramatic, uncontrolled storyline by members of the news media, and created a level of fear that permeated deeply within the law enforcement community. When the Los Angeles police chief described the evolving situation as "…extremely worrisome and scary, especially to the police officers involved…" early in the manhunt, it signaled the seriousness of the unfolding threat to the community—a rapidly evolving threat that resulted in quick action by law enforcement throughout the region. However, inconsistent coordination in both the tactical and public information efforts emerged in the research.

[82] Tom Leonard and David Garner, "Rampage of a Real-Life Rambo: Fear Grips the U.S. as Ex-Navy Officer Goes on Killing Spree in Revenge for Being Sacked by LAPD." *Mail Online*, February 8, 2013, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2275992/Christopher-Dorner-Fear-grips-U-S-ex-navy-officer-goes-killing-spree-revenge-sacked.html.

1. Building and Maintaining Trust

As known from the principles and best practices described in Chapter IV, the appearance and tone of public officials standing before the media is often more influential than the facts provided in written news releases. The police chief and mayor had distinct differences in their tone and demeanor during these two separate news conferences, which likely caused the public's conflicting feelings about their safety, security, and trust in officials; an important distinction because the goal of gaining the public's trust and cooperation is critical in a crisis.

The first press conference held by the police department did not emphasize empathy or compassion for the victims until the very end of the police chief's statement. As known from best practices, a determination of trust by the public is made within the first 30 seconds of a statement. Those watching would witness six minutes of facts before they would hear an expression of empathy for Dorner's victims and families. Based on research in risk and crisis communication, people want to know that officials care before they care what they know. In fact, the chief appeared more frustrated and angry at the circumstances, rebuffed reporters' specific questions by refusing to engage in a dialog about Dorner's "ramblings on the Internet," and indirectly referred to Dorner as a coward. He said a coordinated effort was underway among law enforcement agencies to apprehend Dorner, and that they would stay in constant communication with those agencies until he was taken into custody. This statement emphasized their determination, which is a key element of building trust.

2. Delivery of Timely Messages and Information

Both the Riverside Police Department and LAPD issued written press releases within a few hours of confirming that Dorner was their lead suspect. Riverside also held a press conference that evening announcing him as a suspect in their murder case. The LAPD held their first press conference the next morning, which was a timely delivery of information. However, as Dorner continued on his rampage, various law enforcement agencies were releasing information about Dorner and his actions independent of the LAPD.

As with many complex criminal investigations, a struggle ensued between the evidentiary value of keeping his manifesto secret and the public's safety and right to know. The media's unexpected and rapid discovery on Facebook highlighted the influence of today's social media platforms and appears to have expedited the need for officials to try and "get ahead" of the story. Dorner took advantage of social media as a way to disseminate his story along with favorable photographs that supported his image. He, essentially, got the jump on the release of information through Facebook.

3. Conducting Effective News Conferences

The news conferences examined in this case study were specific to the LAPD's information events. The agency was consistent with best practices by conducting them at LAPD headquarters, where reporters were familiar with their facility and accommodations. However, the distance between downtown Los Angeles and the Big Bear community of San Bernardino County created challenges for reporters and news organizations. San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department public information officials conducted their news conferences three times a day outside their command post in Big Bear. They were unaware of what was happening at the LAPD and no apparent coordination occurred between public information events.[83] LAPD's press conferences were organized and officials appeared to be reading from prepared talking points or notes. During the press conference announcing a $1 million reward, the mayor was also reading from prepared notes and a consistent order of speakers was providing facts in short speaking sessions.

4. Guiding and Encouraging Appropriate Attitudes, Decisions, Actions and Behaviors

In each press conference and information product provided, law enforcement officials and leaders urged the public to report any sightings of Dorner by calling 9-1-1, and provide any tips through a special crime stoppers number. The purpose of announcing the $1 million reward was to motivate the public, and anyone who might be complicit in the actions of Dorner, to come forward and provide information that would

[83] Bachman, telephone discussion.

lead to the arrest and conviction of Dorner. Interestingly, this type of incentivizing of public tips can also create its own problems. Often, officials experience inaccurate tips and speculation that can distract from their efforts to capture a fugitive. It is uncertain if officials deliberated the unintended consequences of providing such an attractive reward amount.

5. Coordination and Collaboration

Dorner's rampage lasted nine days and was the focus of local, national and international news. Initial efforts to respond to the media were handled individually by each respective agency in the first few days. However, the multi agency coordination group recognized a gap and made the process of coordinating public information and responses to the media one its key objectives. It is unclear whether the joint information center process was consistent with SEMS/NIMS best practices or if it had a beneficial effect on their public messaging outcomes.

The lack of a consistent, repeated visual representation of solidarity and coordination among law enforcement agencies, as well as the singular dissemination of information on an agency-by-agency basis, was not consistent with the best practices described in the literature review, which is likely to have reduced the effectiveness of crisis communication efforts to reassure the public and reduce anxiety. A "culture of self reliance" was identified by an independent review conducted by the Police Foundation, which identified that the agencies involved in the Dorner manhunt were reticent to ask for help or rely on each other as was evident in discussions with both the public information officers in charge at the Riverside Police Department and San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department.

6. Advanced Planning and Practice

The greater Los Angeles and Long Beach area received $643,673,390 in urban area security initiative (UASI) funding between 2002–2012. The purpose of these funds is to help first responders prepare for, prevent, and respond to terrorist attacks and other disasters. The UASI grant program is designed to distribute federal funding to an urban region composed of multiple local governments and first responder agencies rather than a

single city. The purpose of the UASI program is to support regional collaboration among local jurisdictions and emergency response organizations.[84] Although the Los Angeles UASI has spent a significant amount of grant dollars on anti-terrorism related programs and equipment, it is unclear whether any significant multi-agency exercises or trainings that focused on risk and crisis communication in multi-jurisdiction incidents like they faced with Dorner have been conducted.

A multi-agency joint disaster planning effort in the greater Los Angeles Area is also managed by a regional catastrophic planning team (RCPT).[85] Their mission is to increase the emergency management capabilities of government, nonprofit, and community stakeholders within the five OA region, including Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, Santa Barbara, and Ventura. This effort is focused primarily on response to catastrophic natural disasters.

Based on the police foundation report and discussions with some of the officials directly involved in public information efforts in Riverside and San Bernardino County, it does not appear that any significant joint information system or center exercises or training occurred prior to Dorner's rampage. In fact, some confusion arose among those on the front line of public information efforts about the actual function of a JIC for this purpose.

7. Focus on LAPD and Press Conferences

It is important to acknowledge that the manhunt for Dorner was much more complex than the selected public information events described in this case study. Other agencies played an important role in providing critical public information during various local incidents, such as the murders and attempted murders in Corona, Irvine, Riverside, and the San Bernardino County mountain community where Dorner was eventually cornered. Their efforts included press conferences, press releases, individual interviews by officials within those jurisdictions, and other efforts to provide timely public

[84] U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Urban Area Security Initiative: FEMA Lacks Measures to Assess How Regional Collaboration Efforts Build Preparedness Capabilities* (2009).

[85] Regional Catastrophic Preparedness Planning, "Planning," accessed February 14, 2014, http://www.catastrophicplanning.org/index.html.

information. This research focused on the efforts of the largest law enforcement agency, LAPD, and specifically, on the press conferences conducted while Dorner was still on the loose. Due to the limited focus of this research, the efforts of other agencies are respected and left for additional research and recommendations.

VI. BOSTON MARATHON, BOMBINGS AND MANHUNT

Each year, the City of Boston, Massachusetts hosts the world's oldest annually contested marathon on the anniversary of Patriots' Day—the third Monday in April. The 26.2-mile course winds its way through streets in eight cities and towns, and finishes in a densely populated area of downtown Boston. The race attracts more than 500,000 spectators, which makes it one of the most widely viewed sporting events in New England.[86] This event is the second largest single day sporting event in the world, surpassed only by the Super Bowl. It is a high-profile event that receives extensive media coverage with more than 1,100 media members, represents more than 250 news outlets, and credentialed by race officials each year. In 2013, officials estimated over 23,000 runners from around the world participated in that year's race.[87]

At approximately 2:49 pm on April 15, 2013, the crowd's excitement and jubilation was extinguished in an instant when two explosions occurred 550 feet apart from each other near metal barriers where hundreds of spectators were watching runners approaching the finish line. Chaos ensued as thousands fled the smoke filled scene. Over 300 people suffering from amputated limbs, uncontrolled bleeding, and gruesome injuries were taken to area hospitals. Three people, including an 8-year-old boy, lost their lives. Police say it was a premeditated attack on innocent citizens using low-grade explosives housed in pressure cookers.[88] Although authorities knew it had to be an intentional act, they were unable to identify a motive or who was responsible quickly.

As might be expected, fear and uncertainty gripped much of the city as three days passed with many unanswered questions despite intense investigative work by federal, state and local authorities. In the vacuum of significant official information, the media and amateur digital forensic analysts online began trying to identify who may be

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[86] Boston Athletic Association, "Boston Marathon History: Boston Marathon Facts," accessed January 17, 2014, http://www.baa.org/races/boston-marathon/boston-marathon-history/boston-marathon-facts.aspx.

[87] U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, *FBI Criminal Complaint and Affidavit by Daniel Genck*, April 21, 2013, http://www.justice.gov/iso/opa/resources/363201342213441988148.pdf.

[88] Ibid., 8.

responsible for the explosions using the power of distributed problem solving, or "crowdsourcing." [89] Internet communities collected and compared online photos and videos from the event and published pictures of their own alleged suspects, and created speculative storylines about what happened.[90] This dissemination of information led to uncontrolled rumormongering and resulted in innocent individuals being wrongly targeted in the court of public opinion. The media fueled speculation with wall-to-wall live news coverage featuring former law enforcement officials and terrorism experts who conjectured about every aspect of the event.[91] This reaction is symptomatic of the public's widespread access to the Internet, mobile devices, and free social media tools.

On Thursday, April 18, the *New York Post* published a front-page photo of two men at the marathon under the headline "Bag Men" and implied that the two were prime suspects, although they were not the same men on which law enforcement officials were focused.[92] The FBI was then prompted to publish blurry photos of their suspects reluctantly that evening and ask for the public's help in identifying them.[93]

The FBI's images were widely rebroadcast on television, in newspapers and throughout the Internet. Within hours of their public release, two heavily armed suspects allegedly murdered an MIT campus police officer, carjacked a citizen, and stole his sport utility vehicle (SUV), and lead police on a chase and violent shootout in Watertown that left one suspect dead and another on the run. Police believed they were the suspects connected to the marathon bombings because small, improvised explosive devices were

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[89] Matt Buchanan, "The Internet Mystery-Solving Machine," *The New Yorker Blog*, April 18, 2013, http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/elements/2013/04/the-great-big-mystery-machine.html.

[90] Paul Joseph Watson, "Potential Boston Bombing Culprits and Persons of Interest Identified?" *Alex Jones' Infowars.com*, April 17, 2013, http://www.infowars.com/boston-bombing-culprits-found.

[91] Sabrina Siddiqui, "Boston Bombings Reveal Media Full of Mistakes, False Reports," *Huffington Post*, April 22, 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/04/22/boston-bombings-media-mistakes_n_3135105.html.

[92] Erik Wemple, "New York Post: 'Bag Men' Headline Was an 'Attention-Getter,'" *Washington Post*, November 4, 2013, http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/erik-wemple/wp/2013/11/04/new-york-post-bag-men-headline-was-an-attention-getter/.

[93] U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Remarks of Special Agent in Charge Richard DesLauriers at Press Conference on Bombing Investigation," April 18, 2013, http://www.fbi.gov/boston/press-releases/2013/remarks-of-special-agent-in-charge-richard-deslauriers-at-press-conference-on-bombing-investigation-1.

thrown at pursuing police officers and they found evidence of a similar explosive contained in a pressure cooker at the scene.[94]

Hundreds of heavily armed law enforcement officers searched for the remaining at-large suspect throughout the early morning hours of Friday, April 19, and went door-to-door in Watertown neighborhoods. Life in the greater Boston area was halted after Governor Deval Patrick decided all public transit would be suspended and asked people to shelter in place in Watertown and the greater Boston area.[95] Schools and universities closed and the normally bustling inner city became a virtual ghost town that day.

It would not be until later that evening when a citizen's tip led authorities to the second suspect as he was hiding in a boat behind a residence in Watertown. Despite many false media reports of a suspect in custody earlier in the afternoon, the Boston Police Department was the first to announce an official arrest on Twitter at around 8:45 pm, "@Boston_Police CAPTURED!!! The hunt is over. The search is done. The terror is over. And justice has won. Suspect in custody."

A. READINESS AND COORDINATION

Investments in preparedness, training and response over the years provided an important foundation for the public safety response to the tragic events of April 15. Many of the capabilities demonstrated in Boston and elsewhere were enabled through the preparedness suite of homeland security grant programs (HSGP), including the UASI grant program and the state homeland security program (SHSP), according to congressional testimony by Richard Serino, Deputy Administrator, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).[96] Between 2002 and 2013, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts has received more than $943 million in FEMA preparedness grant funds. Since 2003, Boston has received more than $369 million through eight grant programs,

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[94] U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, *FBI Criminal Complaint and Affidavit by Daniel Genck*, 6–9.

[95] Associated Press, "Shelter-in-Place Order Extends to Boston," video clip, 1:29, April 19, 2013, YouTube, http://youtu.be/TfXZd2Qtf_c.

[96] *Lessons Learned from the Boston Marathon Bombings: Preparing for and Responding to the Attack. United State Senate*, 113th Cong., 4 (2013) (statement of Richard Serino, Deputy Administrator, FEMA), Washington, DC, https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=740471.

including $179 million through UASI grants. The Boston Police Commissioner credited previous Urban Shield training with Boston's law enforcement and medical professionals as one of the most important preparation steps. He also noted that federally funded technology, such as command posts, armored vehicles, robots, harbor patrol vehicles, allowed police to capture the final suspect alive.[97]

In January, the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) brought together a multi-agency, multi-discipline team to develop operational plans for the upcoming race.[98] That working group identified worst-case scenarios and conducted a table-top exercise a few weeks before the event.

The Director of MEMA credits, "A longstanding commitment to and implementation of multi-agency, multi-discipline, and multi-jurisdictional training and exercises throughout the state," and "A strong record of collaboration, coordination and cooperation by public officials and public safety leaders," for the performance of first responders before, during, and after the marathon bombings and manhunt.[99] The relationship between public safety leaders and public officials was described as "open, positive and constructive." Decisions by public safety leaders were regularly communicated to elected officials and "reflected public safety concerns, needs and objectives."

On the day of the bombings, a MACC was already operating in the Massachusetts Emergency Operations Center to coordinate activities related to the marathon. It contained over 80 representatives from state and federal public safety agencies, along with members of the Boston's police, fire and emergency medical service (EMS) services. Other key public safety personnel from the seven cities and towns along the race route were part of the MACC. Early in the response, the Boston Police Department's

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[97] *Lessons Learned from the Boston Marathon Bombings: Preparing for and Responding to the Attack. United State Senate*, (statement of Richard Serino, Deputy Administrator, FEMA), 2.

[98] Ibid., 3.

[99] *Lessons Learned from the Boston Marathon Bombings: Preparing for and Responding to the Attack. United State Senate*, 113th Cong., 1–7 (2013) (statement of Kurt N. Schwartz, Director, Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency), Washington, DC, https://www.hsdl.org/?view &did=740471.

Chief Information Officer set up a daily phone call at 9am to understand what would be happening that day. A Joint JIC with representatives from each agency was also set up to handle media inquiries, coordinate consistent messages between agencies, and plan for news conferences. The JIC also coordinated the strategy for news conferences including pre-meetings to make decisions about who was going to speak, who was going to be on the podium, and the point of the news conference.[100]

As a result of the explosions, a criminal investigation was led by the FBI and involved over 120 federal, state and local law enforcement, and partner agencies. The Massachusetts State Police was the lead local law enforcement and public safety organization. The Massachusetts Emergency Operations Center was the designated operations center.

While public safety leaders applauded the overall cooperative spirit of law enforcement officials at command posts and crime scenes, Boston's Police Commissioner expressed dissatisfaction with the local joint terrorism task force (JTTF). He said, "there is a gap with information sharing at a higher level while there are still opportunities to intervene in the planning of these terrorist events."[101]

B. THE FIRST OFFICIAL STATEMENTS

As a matter of procedure, the Boston Police Department routinely uses its online website and news blog as a primary tool to disseminate public information.[102] At the time of the bombing, it received an average of 30,000 monthly views and was a popular source for news media.[103] However, due to the overwhelming demand for information in the hours following the bombings, its website crashed. The department's public information

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[100] U.S. Department of Justice, "Social Media during the Boston Marathon Bombings —Cheryl Fiandaca and Kimberly Brummett," *The Beat Podcast*, November 2013, http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/html/podcasts/the_beat/11-2013/TheBeat-112013_Fiandaca.txt.

[101] *Lessons Learned from the Boston Marathon Bombings: Preparing for and Responding to the Attack. United State Senate* (statement of Edward F. Davis, Commissioner, Boston Police Department), 2.

[102] Boston Police Department, "Home," January 11, 2014, http://www.bpdnews.com.

[103] Patricia Swann, "How the Boston Police Used Twitter during a Time of Terror," *PRSA*, May 24, 2013, http://www.prsa.org/Intelligence/Tactics/Articles/view/10197/1078/How_the_Boston_Police_used_Twitter_during_a_time_o.

bureau chief decided to use an alternative method of disseminating information—Twitter—in the immediate aftermath of the bombings. Twitter is a free, online social networking and microblogging service that enables users to send and read "tweets," which are text messages limited to 140 characters.

The first official message was sent from @bostonpolice stating, "Boston Police confirming explosion at marathon finish line with injuries. #tweetfromthebeat via @CherylFiandaca."

Figure 3. Boston Police Department, 2013, Tweet Confirming Explosion at Marathon Finish Line[104]

The agency provided 10 additional updates using Twitter in the first 90 minutes.[105] The public and the news media were hungry for official information and quickly relied upon the police department's updates through that social networking platform. Officials would post 148 Tweets during the five-day manhunt, many of which were re-Tweeted hundreds of times by news outlets and the general public. The agency went from approximately 40,000 followers before the bombings to more than 300,000 by the end of the crisis.[106] Boston's Police Commissioner would later testify before the Senate saying, "We learned that social media gave us the immediate ability to correct

[104] Boston Police Department, Twitter post, April 15, 2013, 12:39a.m., http://www.twitter.com/bostonpolice.

[105] Ibid.

[106] Bar-tur Yael, "Boston Police Schooled Us All on Social Media." *Mashable*, April 22, 2013, http://mashable.com/2013/04/22/boston-police-social-media/.

misinformation and break news. Even news outlets were waiting for our Twitter information before they reported on developments."[107]

The first official press conference was held at 4:50 pm on April 15, 2013, at the Westin Hotel, less than a block from where the bombings occurred two hours earlier.[108] Most major news outlets including *CNN* covered it live. Massachusetts Governor Patrick Deval began by describing the incident as a "horrific attack," briefly explained how they would provide information, and introduced Boston's Police Commissioner Ed Davis.[109]

Figure 4. First Press Conference after Marathon Explosions (The Boston Globe)[110]

[107] *Lessons Learned from the Boston Marathon Bombings: Preparing for and Responding to the Attack. United State Senate*, 113th Cong., 4 (2013) (statement of Edward F. Davis, Commissioner, Boston Police Department), Washington, DC, https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=740471.

[108] CNN, "Boston Marathon Bombings Press Conference," video clip, You Tube, April 15, 2013, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CPBd9-Ga10E.

[109] The Boston Globe, "First Press Conference Boston Marathon Attack," video clip, YouTube, April 15, 2013, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EJMoavpu6g8.

[110] Ibid.

Figure 5. First Press Conference after Marathon Explosions (CNN)[111]

The commissioner was flanked by at least 10 other officials from various agencies and departments, such as the FBI, Massachusetts State Police and National Guard, Boston Fire Department, and others. Five representatives were in official agency uniforms. The commissioner spoke from a lectern wearing a button down shirt covered by a blue jacket with the Boston Police Department logo on the chest. He began by providing factual details, such as the time, location and that, "simultaneous explosions occurred 50 to 100 yards apart and resulted in multiple casualties." His tone was serious and matter-of-fact, and he did not appear to be reading from any prepared remarks or talking points. He described the initial actions of first responders and his efforts to coordinate with allied agencies.

Less than two minutes into the press conference, the commissioner made a connection between the marathon explosions and an incident three miles away at the JFK Presidential Library and Museum. "We have, at this point in time, determined that there has been a third incident that has occurred. There was an explosion that occurred at the JFK library… We are not certain these incidents are related, but we are treating them as if they are,"[112] he said. Media outlets listening to Boston police and fire radio transmissions

111 CNN, "First Press Conference Boston Marathon Attack."

112 James Vaznis, "JFK Library Evacuated after Explosion, Fire; Police Probe Possible Link to Marathon Blast," *BostonGlobe.com*, April 15, 2013, http://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2013/04/15/jfk-library-evacuated-after-explosion-fire-polie-probe-possible-link-marathon-blast/4gQintGxnUv8he2Ul8THLI/story.html.

had already been reporting an "incendiary device" at the library, which caused many in the public to believe multiple attacks were happening throughout the city. This information turned out to be incorrect as officials later determined an unrelated mechanical fire was burning at the library that happened to be coincidental.[113]

The commissioner then warned people to stay home and not to congregate in large crowds. He announced two public information telephone numbers, one for families affected and another for crime tips. He ended his four minutes of remarks by saying, "People should be calm, but they should understand that this is an ongoing event, and they should understand that we need all the information we can get available to us. Thank you."[114]

The commissioner's statements can be characterized as the following.

- Appearing concerned, serious and official
- Unscripted and authentic
- Providing few incident facts (e.g., no casualty count, identified suspects or motives)
- Speculative (connecting JFK incident to downtown explosions)
- Providing call to action for the public (e.g., stay home, not congregate in crowds, provide tips)

The governor returned to the lectern with remarks about his conversation with the President of the United States, and urged people not to congregate in crowds and that they needed tips from the public. He and the commissioner then answered nearly a dozen clarifying questions about potential suspect vehicles, number of casualties and details of the library incident. One reporter asked if officials were describing this event as a "terrorist attack." The commissioner responded, "We're not being definitive on this right now. You can reach your own conclusions based upon what happened."[115] The press conference lasted approximately eight minutes.

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[113] Vaznis, "JFK Library Evacuated after Explosion, Fire; Police Probe Possible Link to Marathon Blast."

[114] Ibid.

[115] Ibid.

C. PRESS CONFERENCE UPDATE: DETERMINATION AND EMPATHY EMERGES

Later that evening, officials held a second press conference at the Westin Hotel.[116] A slightly larger group of officials, including federal agency representatives, joined the governor. This time, he appeared to be reading from notes and described that federal, state and local agencies were coordinating together in an active investigation. He said the City of Boston will be open the next day, but it "will not be business as usual." He asked everyone to be on a heightened state of vigilance and to report suspicious activity to law enforcement. Then he expressed determination and optimism:

> We're going to get through this… I can tell you from the President to the members of our congressional delegation, to many many fellow governors who have called to check in, to all of the leaders in law enforcement here in the state, at the local level and at the federal level, we are all coming together to do everything we can to get to the bottom of this.[117]

Figure 6. Press Conference Updates, Boston Marathon Explosions[118]

The supervisory agent in charge of the FBI's Boston field office then came to the lectern and began by announcing "the most important fact" is that his agency is asserting federal jurisdiction and taking the lead in the investigation. He emphasized that it is a

[116] PBS NewsHour, "Press Conference Updates, Boston Marathon Explosions, Says FBI in Charge of Investigation," video clip, April 15, 2013, YouTube, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZBkPFRY9VTY.

[117] Ibid.

[118] Ibid.

"potential terrorist investigation" and urged "a heightened state of vigilance" in the Boston area, and repeated a plea for public tips.[119]

At nearly eight minutes into the press conference, the Boston Police Commissioner took the stage and began by offering a statement of compassion and determination.

> On behalf of Mayor Menino, I'd like to offer my sympathies to the victims and the families of this horrendous event. This cowardly act will not be taken in stride, we will turn every rock over to find the people who are responsible for this.[120]

The Suffolk County District Attorney also spoke at the podium and read from prepared remarks. He described how he and other top public safety leaders had just returned from a tour of the "large and disturbing scene." He also expressed empathy and determination by saying, "Much like you, I'm praying for the victims and their loved ones. This is a terrible, terrible day for them. They, and the public at large, can count on our very best and seamless work in the days to come."[121]

Overall, the statements made by officials can be characterized as the following.

- Realistic (e.g., not business as usual)
- Scripted and focused
- Empathetic and compassionate
- Determined and optimistic (e.g., we are going to get through this)
- Providing call to action for the public (e.g., heightened state of vigilance)

Officials then took questions, rebuffing several specific questions from reporters about the criminal investigation. The press conference lasted for 14 minutes.

D. DEBATE ABOUT PUBLICLY RELEASING SUSPECT PHOTOS

Minutes after the explosions, one of the first priorities of the Boston Police Department was to begin collecting surveillance video from businesses near the finish

[119] PBS NewsHour, "Press Conference Updates, Boston Marathon Explosions, Says FBI in Charge of Investigation."

[120] Ibid.

[121] Ibid.

line. Investigators reviewed hundreds of images and dozens of videotape recordings. "Within a day or so, we identified an individual who was very suspicious. He appeared to have a package with him, he put the package down, and we realized that this was, most likely, the bomber," said Commissioner Davis.[122]

Initially, the FBI decided not to release images they uncovered of the men they thought were responsible, in part, because they were hoping to identify them on their own and make an arrest.[123] Secrecy of the visual evidence would be maintained, only to be revealed later in court. However, the vacuum of information and lack of an identified suspect led to a virtual Wild West of amateur detective work, and spiraled into a witch-hunt by the media and the public. Innocent citizens were being wrongly associated with the crime and investigators felt compelled to release images of their yet-to-be identified suspects. Considerable debate occurred within the investigative team about the pros and cons of releasing these images. U.S. Attorney General Eric H. Holder Jr. and Director Robert S. Mueller III of the FBI were directly involved in the decision to release the images.[124]

On Thursday, April 18 at around 5:30 the FBI held a news conference and released several images of two men they identified as "suspect 1" and "suspect 2." Referring to the slew of misidentified suspects being published online and in the media, FBI Special Agent in Charge Richard DesLauriers told reporters, "For clarity, these images should be the only ones—the only ones—that the public should view to assist us. Other photos should not be deemed credible and unnecessarily divert the public's attention in the wrong direction and create undue work for vital law enforcement resources."[125]

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[122] Miles O'Brien, "Manhunt–Boston Bombers," *NOVA*, May 29, 2013, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/tech/manhunt-boston-bombers.html.

[123] Timothy Alben, "Boston Marathon 2013—'Crisis Leadership & Event Security'" presented to CHDS Cohort 1205/1206, October 29, 2013, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA.

[124] Katharine Q. Cooper, Michael Seelye, and Michael S. Schmidt, "F.B.I. Seeks Public Aid in Finding Two Men Suspected in Bombings," *The New York Times*, April 18, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/19/us/fbi-releases-video-of-boston-bombing-suspects.html.

[125] Federal Bureau of Investigation, Remarks of Special Agent in Charge Richard DesLauriers at Press Conference on Bombing Investigation.

Officials received thousands of citizen tips from around the country as a result. However, their fears were realized when the release of photos set off an extraordinary chain of events later that evening.

E. WATERTOWN MANHUNT LEADS TO COMMUNITY LOCKDOWN

While Boston residents remained gripped by an eerie silence since Monday's bombings, a neighborhood across the Charles River in the small community of Watertown was jolted awake by the sounds of gunfire and explosives early Friday morning. Shortly after midnight, law enforcement found the two men they believed to be the prime suspects in the marathon bombings. They were seen driving in a stolen vehicle in a densely populated residential neighborhood. Less than two hours earlier, officials allege they carjacked a Mercedes SUV, bragging to the driver they are the Marathon bombers.[126] It is believed that the suspects also murdered a Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) police officer in an abort effort to steal his gun.[127]

Once the suspects knew police were closing in on them, a gunfight erupted between authorities and the heavily armed men. Hundreds of rounds were fired between the police and suspects. They threw several improvised explosive devices at officers in their attempt to flee. Eventually, one suspect was mortally wounded when his accomplice ran him over with their getaway vehicle, and was later pronounced dead at a local hospital. The second suspect ran from the scene without being captured.

Hundreds of law enforcement officers converged on Watertown in search of the remaining suspect at large. Residents were told to stay in-doors and remain vigilant as the hours passed with no sign of the second suspect. At an early morning press conference, Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick announced a decision to lock down Watertown and the surrounding areas, including Boston, with a shelter-in-place request. "We're asking people to shelter in place," Patrick said. "In other words, to stay indoors with their doors locked, and not to open their door for anyone other than a properly identified law

[126] U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, *FBI Criminal Complaint and Affidavit by Daniel Genck*, 7.

[127] U.S. Department of Justice, "United States of America v. Dzhokhar A. Tsarnaev [Grand Jury 30 count indictment]," June 27, 2013, 10, http://www.justice.gov/iso/opa/resources/378201362714364690711.pdf.

enforcement officer."[128] Courthouses were shut down, area schools were closed, public transit ceased and the Federal Aviation Administration instituted a no-fly-zone over the Watertown area.[129] After a day of intense searching with no luck, officials held a press conference on the streets of Watertown that evening. They decided to lift the shelter-in-place despite the public's continuing anxiety and fear.

Consistent with the organization of other press conferences held by officials earlier in the week, the governor began by explaining what authorities would talk about and then turned the stage over to law enforcement leaders. Rather than the FBI being the predominant agency, the Massachusetts State Police accounted for a majority of this briefing. Standing before a bank of news microphones wearing his official police uniform and hat, Colonel Timothy Alben of the state was flanked by more than a dozen local, state and federal officials.

Figure 7. Boston Manhunt News Conference: Local, state and federal officials support Superintendent of Massachusetts State Police Col. Timothy Alben (right) at the podium[130]

[128] Brian Naylor, "Boston Lockdown 'Extraordinary' But Prudent, Experts Say." *NPR.org.* April 19, 2013, http://www.npr.org/2013/04/22/178446136/boston-lockdown-extraordinary-but-prudent-experts-say.

[129] Ibid.

[130] CNN, "Boston Marathon Bombings Press Conference," video clip, YouTube, April 19, 2013, http://youtu.be/Meqt-yTVouk.

Figure 8. Boston Manhunt News Conference: Col. Timothy Alben speaks [131]

He began by thanking the community for being patient and acknowledged how tired everyone was. In a professional and determined tone, he reassured the public, "…But we remain committed to this. We do not have an apprehension of our suspect this afternoon. But we will have one. We're committed to that."[132]

His two-minute statement included an explanation of how tactical teams had searched door-to-door looking for the suspect, and additional forensic work was being completed at local crime scenes. He emphasized the continuing presence of law enforcement in Watertown was to assure the safety of the people in the community. At the end of his statement, he repeated law enforcement's determination to end the reign of terror the community had been enduring. He appeared slightly emotional, perhaps expressing grief and anger, and said, "But for the sake of everyone that were hurt or killed during the marathon or those police officers that lost their life or were seriously injured, we are committed to seeing a conclusion to this case. Thank you."[133]

The press conference, broadcast live on major news outlets, continued for more than 15 minutes with statements from the governor, Mayor of Boston and Watertown Police Chief.[134] The governor announced that they were lifting the shelter-in-place

[131] CNN, "Boston Marathon Bombings Press Conference."

[132] Ibid.

[133] Ibid.

[134] CNN, "Breaking News: LIVE CNN," April 19, 2013, Transcript, LexisNexis Academic.

request, but asked the public to remain vigilant. Boston's Mayor thanked the public for their cooperation and reassured the public, "But together, we will get through this crisis." Watertown's Police Chief thanked the community of Watertown and asked people to "go about your business," acknowledging that many events were occurring in their city the next day.[135]

Reporters asked officials more than 27 questions focused on a wide range of details about the suspects, shootout, and overall bombing investigation. The superintendent responded to almost all the questions, but avoided specifics about the FBI's investigation, and repeated the message to the public to be vigilant and report any suspicious activity. He was also asked what his message was for the suspect. The superintendent responded, "My message to the suspect is to give himself up, to stop any further violence towards anyone."[136]

Overall, the statements made by officials can be characterized as the following.

- Determined and reassuring (e.g., we will have an apprehension)
- Optimistic (e.g., together we will get through this)
- Unscripted remarks but coordinated messages
- Empathetic and compassionate
- Repeating call to action for the public (e.g., heightened state of vigilance)

Shortly after this press conference, and just a few blocks away, a resident notified authorities he found blood on his boat parked on a trailer in his backyard, which turned out to be where the remaining 19-year-old suspect was hiding. Police engaged in another flurry of gunfire with the suspect as he holed up in the boat. Eventually, tactical teams forced him out at gunpoint and took him into custody alive—putting an end to the tragic, five-day reign of terror that besieged the greater Boston area.

[135] CNN, "Breaking News: LIVE CNN."

[136] Ibid.

F. BOSTON MARATHON BOMBING ANALYSIS

Officials in Boston faced the challenge of responding to a plausible worst-case scenario of terrorism at a highly public, large-scale event. The premeditated attack on innocent people at the Boston Marathon finish line, and deadly manhunt that followed, which caused a prolonged heightened level of fear and uncertainty in the greater Boston area—arguably on a similar, but distinctly different, level as the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. The repeated broadcasts of eyewitness video of the explosions, along with gruesome high definition images of carnage and human suffering, permeated far beyond the boundaries of Massachusetts. Communities throughout the nation watched and wondered if they would be next. The pressure on law enforcement to identify those responsible and apprehend them as quickly as possible was tremendous. So much so, that President Obama issued an emergency declaration for the State of Massachusetts and called for increased security throughout the United States.[137] He also directed a massive federal response to Boston, and committed the full resources of the federal government to help investigate.

1. Building and Maintaining Trust

Although the Boston Police Chief did not offer a clear expression of empathy or compassion in this first appearance before news media cameras and microphones on the day of the bombings, a visible appearance of multi-agency coordination, determination and authority of the speakers was apparent. The individuals standing behind the podium were all familiar leaders of their various city and state public safety organizations. The failure by the Police Chief to provide a clear expression of empathy or compassion at the first Boston news conference was a lost opportunity. As known from the research in risk and crisis communication, the ability to build trust, and reduce irrational actions by the public, is highly dependent on the primacy of expressions of caring, compassion, and empathy for those affected. The adage in crisis communication is, "people want to know that you care, before they care what you know." However, a deliberate effort to display

[137] CNN Politics, "Transcript: Obama Reacts to 'Senseless' Bombings," April 15, 2013, http://politicalticker.blogs.cnn.com/2013/04/15/transcript-obama-reacts-to-senseless-bombings/.

and reinforce empathy and compassion emerged from leadership in Boston only at subsequent news conferences that evening and throughout the week.

During the press conferences examined in this case study, leaders provided factual information about what they knew at the time and were transparent about what they did not know, which is a best practice recommended in virtually all the literature on risk and crisis communication. A conscious decision was also made to switch the lead spokesperson from the FBI to the Colonel of the Massachusetts State Police when press conferences were held in the community of Watertown that done to reassure residents that a familiar face in state law enforcement was managing the law enforcement actions happening in their neighborhoods.

2. Delivery of Timely Messages and Information

The public anticipates that officials may not have all the answers in the middle or the immediate aftermath of a crisis. In some cases, the lack of significant facts causes a reticence among public officials to provide timely announcements and releases of information. In the case of the Boston Police Department, its pre-existing diversity of public information delivery tools, such as Twitter and Facebook, and quick thinking on behalf of its public information bureau chief, led to successful game changing methods of communication that allowed for the quick dissemination of information as evidenced by the media's quick reliance on their @bostonpolice Twitter account and significant "retweeting" of official information by journalists, allied agencies, and the general public. Its ability to think quickly and take advantage of tools to about its information in the public arena rapidly allowed for the delivery of official messages. Waiting for an official press release or press conference is likely to lead to early speculation and a scramble to "catch up" to the storyline formed by unofficial sources or the news media.

3. Conducting Effective News Conferences

The first official press conference was held at 4:50 pm on April 15, 2013, at the Westin Hotel, less than a block from where the bombings occurred two hours earlier, which maximized the ability for news media to continue covering the aftermath at the finish line and conveniently receive updates on the actions of public safety organizations.

Regularly scheduled press conferences were held each day, even if no new information was available, to allow the media to ask questions about issues that emerged. The room selected for the press conferences was large enough to handle the number of officials needed to be behind the podium, as well as the numerous print, radio, and television journalists covering the story. The room also provided access to news organizations satellite trucks parked outside, which afforded the ability for live coverage. This set up is important because it allows for direct dissemination to the public at the time information is available, rather than journalists recording and editing sound bites that may be taken out of context.

The conduct at the news briefings was also consistent with best practices. The Governor gave a brief formal opening about the basic who, what, when, where and why answers in the first few minutes of the press briefing. The overall appearance of the coordinated press conferences provided a reassurance that officials were in control.

4. Coordination and Collaboration

The response to the Boston Marathon bombings benefitted from the extensive event coordination conducted prior to the attacks. They were ready with a thoroughly exercised MACC at the Massachusetts Emergency Operations Center where most activities related to the marathon were coordinated. It contained over 80 representatives from state and federal public safety agencies, along with members of the Boston's police, fire, and EMS services. Other key public safety personnel from the seven cities and towns along the race route were part of the MACC.

The existence of a clearly defined JIC with representatives from each agency set up to handle media inquiries, coordinate consistent messages between agencies, and plan for news conferences, is a model of best practices in emergency crisis communication. Unlike the non-specific JIC set up in the Dorner investigation, Boston's coordinated the strategy for news conferences to include pre-meetings to make decisions about who is going to speak, who is going to be on the podium, and the point of the news conference to allow consistency in the dissemination of messages critical to public safety as events continued to unfold.

5. Guiding and Encouraging Appropriate Decision and Actions

When law enforcement authorities were unable to locate the at-large suspect in Watertown, they chose to make that announcement despite an extreme level of fear and anxiety among the general public. It was wise for leaders to agree to let local public safety officials make this announcement (as opposed to the FBI that made it clear it were "in charge" earlier in the week) as they were more likely to be known and trusted by the community. Their repeated reassurances of focus on the safety of the community, and enlistment of the public's help to provide tips (reducing their feeling of helplessness), was also consistent with best practices.

At each press briefing, they also emphasized that the public should provide any information they had to authorities and be alert and vigilant to provide an appropriate action for the public who was experiencing fear, lack of control and anxiety.

6. Advanced Planning and Practice

Thankfully, it appears that previous significant investments in public safety planning, training, exercising, response, and recovery benefitted the community in the hours and days that followed the initial attack. Although it is unclear how much training public officials may have received in risk and crisis communication, the overall effect of building and maintaining close relationships between agencies allowed for a consistent effort to display leadership, coordination and effectiveness publicly throughout most of the response. The same core group of leaders appeared in unity at all major press conferences. They were also very familiar with each other as they had been involved in other events and had worked closely together in the planning and coordination of major events, such as previous Boston Marathons, political conventions, and large sporting venues at which security coordination was essential.

7. Focus on Public Information Actions during Height of Fear and Uncertainty

It should be noted that several other releases of public information in the form of individual interviews, press briefings, written news releases by authorities were available—a significant press conference immediately following the capture of the final

suspect. This research focused on select events and individual actions of key public officials during the height of fear and uncertainty. Due to the limitations of this research, undocumented efforts not included, but related to the overall event, are left for further research and examination.

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VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

The case studies and events examined in this research have provided valuable real-world insight into the complexities and challenges of communicating during a contemporary high-profile crisis. Based primarily on the best practices described in Chapter IV—Principles and Best Practices—the following are key recommendations for leaders who are likely to face similar high consequence events in the future.

As known from the research, high levels of trust can reduce social uncertainty and complexity, and influence risk perceptions and acceptance of risks. The public typically judges the trustworthiness of a message based on its content and source. "Who is telling me this?" and "Can I trust them?" As a matter of best practice, public officials need to express appropriate care, compassion, and empathy as a first order of business during a press conference or in a written statement. All too often officials jump right into providing facts and figures and never clearly articulate that they care—or sometimes subjugate that to the end of their statement as witnessed at the first official press conferences conducted by officials in both the Boston Marathon Bombing and the Dorner Manhunt. They jumped right into the facts and showed far less compassion and empathy than would have been most effective, which did change over time, however. It is important to understand that over 50 percent of public officials' credibility will be dependent upon whether or not they are perceived as empathetic and caring.[138] In most communications, the audience will decide this credibility in the first 9–30 seconds. The higher the level of the audience's emotion or distrust, the more officials will need to communicate consistently that they are listening, that they care, and that they are empathetic. Research has shown a long-term erosion of public confidence and trust in government over the past few decades.[139] This erosion creates a challenge for public

[138] Ken Makovsky, "Communications in High Stress Environments," *Forbes*, October 3, 2013, http://www.forbes.com/sites/kenmakovsky/2013/10/03/1159/.

[139] Richard G. Peters, Vincent T. Covello, and David B. McCallum. "The Determinants of Trust and Credibility in Environmental Risk Communication: An Empirical Study," *Risk Analysis* 17, no. 1 (1997): 49.

officials communicating during an emergency. The goal is to build trust and galvanize the population to take a positive action or avoid harm.[140]

This topic cannot be over emphasized. Officials need to understand that their "human side" is extremely important to, and expected by, the public in uncertain and stressful times. Re-examining the communications blunders of BP CEO Tony Hayward is a primary example of lack of empathy and understanding, which leads causes the public to distrust what officials are saying during a crisis that, effectively, renders the veracity of those statements as irrelevant.

A. FOCUS SPECIFICALLY ON CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS BEST PRACTICES FOR LEADERSHIP

The best practices identified in this thesis emphasize the role of advanced planning and practice. Inherent in that role is the development of specific training on risk and crisis communication—not just how to write a press release or conduct a media interview. Having a plan is important, but its effectiveness is dependent on the knowledge and training of those likely to engage in risk and crisis communication. Public officials and leaders should receive specially tailored training that familiarizes them with the limitations of the public's understanding of messages when faced with a crisis, and why existing communication methods used in non-emergencies may not be effective or appropriate. Key differences exist between routine local emergencies and high-profile regional incidents, such as the Dorner manhunt and the bombings of the Boston Marathon. Most notably, the highest-level public safety leaders and elected officials become the focus of media attention, rather than designated public information officers from specific agencies, which might be a deliberate choice based on the hierarchy of government, an expectation of the public, or an on-the-fly choice based on the circumstances. Elected public officials who are not regularly involved in, or familiar with, public safety responses are likely to become the focus of the media's attention, which can cause problems for first responders and the general public if their statements

[140] Barbara Reynolds and Sandra Crouse Quinn, "Effective Communication During an Influenza Pandemic: The Value of Using a Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication Framework," *Health Promotion Practice* 9, no. 4 suppl (2008): 13S-17S, doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1524839908325267.

conflict with the response strategy, or they focus on the wrong objective, such as their personal image, or their "15 minutes of fame." This situation is often due to their lack of familiarization and appreciation of best practices in risk and crisis communication. For example, California's Governor's Office of Emergency Services has created a two-hour "public officials training" that attempts to fill this gap. Greater focus by FEMA and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is needed to emphasize the importance of this training.

B. EMPHASIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF BUILDING PRE-EVENT PARTNERSHIPS/RELATIONSHIPS

As seen in the effects of Boston's pre-event planning and exercises, all public safety officials should take advantage of opportunities to build relationships with allied agencies and local elected officials through exercises, training, and non-emergency events. Part of the best practices emphasizes establishing connections before disaster strikes because it allows for discussions about how to mitigate differences in understanding between agencies into the communications response. that may seem like common sense, but many examples of agencies and organizations working in stovepipes are abundant, and they never fully test their ability to work together until a disaster happens. In contrast, the coordinated response to the Boston Marathon bombings is an effect of strong relationships built long before officials faced the extraordinary challenges of that tragic series of events. These connections resulted from their need to collaborate on the planning of major events, such as the annual marathon, and significant investments in planning and exercises funded by the DHS. In some cases, leaders have said their bonds and friendships with other officials are part of Boston's culture.

C. DIFFERENTIATE THE TACTICS FROM THE STRATEGIES

Numerous courses are available on how to conduct successful interviews with journalists, write news releases, organize press conferences and set up JISs and JICs, etc. The ability to execute these functions and tactics is important, but the strategy behind "why" officials deploy these tactics is most important. In high concern events and disasters, risk and crisis communication efforts have the potential for significant impacts

on the outcome of the event. In the best practices offered in this thesis, the development of a communications strategy provides a platform to differentiate the tactics from the strategic. Officials should take the time to develop an overall communication strategy for the agency that includes the tools, tactics, and outcomes necessary to be successful in communicating with the public in both non-crisis and crisis times. Once they have developed a strategy, it is equally important to test that strategy on a regular basis through table-top exercises and training to identify gaps and ensure familiarity among those who will execute it.

VIII. CONCLUSION AND REFLECTION

This thesis has researched the public information and crisis communication efforts by officials in two unique, high-profile criminal incidents in 2013. Both these cases provide important insight into the challenges faced by public safety officials in a vastly different communication environment forever changed by the introduction of the Internet and social media. As a practitioner in risk and crisis communication with over 20 years of training, experience and first-hand knowledge of some of the most well-known high-profile events, the researcher is always a keen observer of how well, or not so well, officials communicate, in hopes of learning something new and validating the best practices described in research. His unique on-the-job experience over the years has laid a foundation for his ongoing fascination with not just big events, but complex crises that challenge leaders to perform at a high level of communication competency. To understand the lens through which he researched and analyzed the two case studies in this thesis, it is important to understand what high-profile events have shaped his knowledge and interest in risk and crisis communication throughout the years.

A. YOSEMITE SIGHTSEER MURDERS

The first major case the researcher experienced as a public information officer was the disappearance of three women sightseeing in Yosemite National Park. Between February and July 1999, the FBI and several local law enforcement agencies in Northern California conducted a multi-agency investigation into their disappearance, and ultimately found all three deceased and the victims of murder. The FBI's special agent in charge became the main spokesperson for the task force and was later criticized and removed from his post for his handling of the investigation. The researcher vividly recalls watching him conduct a press conference in the park the day after a fourth woman, unrelated to the original three who disappeared, was found in the park murdered and beheaded. Standing in front of dozens of local and national cameras and journalists he confidently stated, "We have absolutely no reason to believe there is a connection''

between the two cases."[141] His statement flew in the face of common sense, regardless of its validity, and proved to be one of the researcher's first stunning examples of poor risk and crisis communication. In that instance, he was also able to see how distrust forms in the minds journalists, and knew several journalists personally and heard their candid criticisms of the FBI. In addition, as the original case unfolded over the course of several months, he was able to witness the effects of a lack of information, media hype, interagency squabbles, and public grandstanding on the part of many officials and opportunists to get their 15 minutes of fame. It taught him a lot about the unique dynamics of events that garner unusually high media interest and the importance of public trust, or lack thereof. Cary Stayner, a handyman at a lodge just outside Yosemite was eventually arrested. He confessed and was convicted of the murder of the four women, despite months of intense investigation of completely unrelated individuals targeted by the FBI.

B. CHANDRA LEVY DISAPPEARANCE AND MURDER

Less than two years later, the researcher would become entwined with the case of missing Washington intern Chandra Levy. As the manager of media relations for the Stanislaus County Sheriff's Department, he was assigned to wrangle the hundreds of reporters and dozens of cameras that overwhelmed Chandra's parents home in north Modesto, California. Levy's parents and friends held numerous vigils and news conferences in the Modesto area as an attempt to keep her disappearance the top news story.

The press dynamics were similar to what he had experienced in the Yosemite case, with one significant exception—the media found a "suspect" and their focus became then local Congressman Gary Condit. The drawn-out investigation into her disappearance led to media allegations that Condit had an affair with Levy and a cloud of suspicion was raised that he might have had something to do with her disappearance. National news outlets hired local high school students to sit outside the homes of

[141] Christine Hanley, "Yosemite Naturalist Found Dead," *Online Athens, Athens Banner-Herald*, July 24, 1999, http://onlineathens.com/stories/072499/new_0724990005.shtml.

Condit's family and at his work, and report any movements via cell phone. News cameras chased members of his staff between their office and restaurants during lunch hours in hopes of getting interviews. In addition, Condit himself was seen several times on national news broadcasts angrily pushing reporters out of the way, as he tried to get from his Washington, DC apartment and the Capitol.

Although the media's sensational allegations against Condit were never substantiated, and he was eventually cleared by law enforcement of any involvement in her disappearance, his terse and combative responses to the persistent media inquiries provided the researcher vivid examples of how not to respond in a crisis. Results of a national FOX News/Opinion Dynamics poll showed 70 percent thought Condit was not telling everything he knew about Levy, and about a quarter of Americans (27 percent) thought he should resign his office.[142] In an attempt to repair his damaged public image, the researcher was in the unique position to personally witness Condit conduct a live, 30-minute nationally televised interview on ABC with journalist Connie Chung. Although he stuck to his talking points and advice from legal advisors, he did not provide the mea culpa the public was hoping to hear. An editorial in the *New York Times* three days after the interview read, "…whatever happened between Gary Condit and Chandra Ann Levy, a measure of candor from Mr. Condit, even at this late date, would have been the principled choice. In fact, when a 24-year-old woman is missing, it's the only decent alternative."[143] Not surprisingly, a nationwide poll conducted after the interview aired showed three-quarters of all adults described him as immoral; two-thirds say he was uncaring, and 79 percent felt he was dishonest. More than six-in-ten believed it is likely that Condit was directly involved in Chandra Levy's disappearance.[144] It would not be until nine years later that an unrelated man was arrested by investigators and convicted of the murder of Chandra Levy.

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[142] Dana Blanton, "FOX News/Opinion Dynamics Poll: Condit's Acting Guilty," *FoxNews.com*, July 27, 2001, http://www.foxnews.com/story/2001/07/27/fox-newsopinion-dynamics-poll-condit-acting-guilty.

[143] Jedediah Purdy, "Gary Condit's Strong, Silent Act," *The New York Times*, August 26, 2001, http://www.nytimes.com/2001/08/26/opinion/gary-condit-s-strong-silent-act.html.

[144] Keating Holland, "Poll: Condit Media Blitz Falls Short," *CNN*, August 27, 2001, http://edition.cnn.com/2001/ALLPOLITICS/08/27/cnn.poll.condit/index.html.

The Levy case was an eye opener for the researcher. He was able to watch a sustained, over-the-top frenzy of local and national media outlets competing against each other to maintain the dramatic storyline of a sex scandal and unsolved crime. It also gave him the opportunity to see the underbelly of politics, public image, and reputation management. This ability alone was a tremendous learning experience as politicians who must always worry about their reputation are often intertwined into public safety crises like the Boston Marathon bombings and the Christopher Dorner manhunt.

C. LACI PETERSON DISAPPEARANCE AND MURDER

In addition to corroborating the adage that "bad things come in threes," the researcher, was chosen by the Superior Court of Stanislaus County to manage the media during the early phases of the murder trial of Scott Peterson—accused of murdering his wife Laci Peterson and their unborn son in 2002. This case progressed with some of the same high-profile-making elements of the Yosemite sightseer and Chandra Levy cases, an unfolding drama and unsolved crime, and a solid cast of characters willing to speculate with reporters and family members encouraging continuous news media coverage.

The researcher was lucky enough not to have to handle the daily no-new-information press briefings that his colleagues at the Modesto Police Department endured in the days preceding Scott's arrest. However, as soon as he was taken into custody, the entire media establishment quickly shifted its focus to his incarceration and court proceedings. On the first day of his arraignment, journalists made over 400 requests to sit in the 70-seat courtroom. Jockeying for the best position in front of the courthouse turned into a melee between photographers and producers staking their ground on limited sidewalk space. Add to that, the network "big gun" celebrities were dispatched to sway their stardom in hopes of getting an advantage over other news networks—Maria Shriver with Dateline NBC, Katie Couric, Geraldo Rivera, Nancy Grace, and Rita Cosby to name a few.

Taking a page from the book of best practices in risk and crisis communication, the exercise of fairness and need for collaboration and agreement among both

government entities and the news media was critical to balance the day-to-day court operations with the spectacle that was the Peterson trial. A plan was developed on where to park large satellite trucks and a map of equal allocation of real estate in front of the courthouse for news networks. A daily lottery system was established for the seats in the courtroom designated for the media and the public. Weekly meetings with representatives of print, radio, and television entities were held to ensure that everyone was on the same page and understood the rules. As an experiment in handling the dissemination of court information and documents, the researcher collaborated with a friend and created a special website called www.pressupdate.info. This website became the foundation through which all information was provided to the news media that turned out to be a fortuitous experiment in the use of the Internet to provide information in a JIC fashion. Perhaps, it is the same sort of experiment in technology the Boston Police Department undertook by relying on Twitter as the quickest way to dissemination information to hundreds of media outlets simultaneously.

From the beginning of the Peterson trial, an extreme sensitivity to the effects of news stories on the court proceedings was present. However, the litany of criminal justice "experts," spontaneous new "witnesses" and fame seekers from soliciting the news producers to fill the endless hours of daily live news coverage was not stopped. Since the court issued a gag order on everyone involved in the case, the only source of "new" official information was that presented in court during hearing dates. On non-court days, these opportunists found their way into news stories and onto television broadcasts. As acutely witnessed in the examination of the Boston Marathon bombings and the Dorner manhunt, speculation and misinformation created unique challenges for officials trying to maintain accurate information throughout the event.

Eventually, the overwhelming daily media coverage proved to be too much for the local court system and a "change of venue" motion by the defense led to the trial being moved to the San Francisco bay area for the remainder of the proceedings. With the help of many of the researcher's colleagues, he had managed the daily media onslaught from April 2003 to February 2004. He believes these efforts were mostly successful. He

has used this experience as a case study and teaching opportunity for leaders who may face a similar event in their jurisdiction.

The culmination of experiences since 1999 has helped solidify the importance of the best practices described in the literature and highlighted in this thesis. Understanding key principles and practices of building and maintaining trust, delivery of timely messages and information, conducting effective news briefings, coordinating and collaborating with other entities, and most importantly, advanced planning and preparation, are critical lessons for leaders and practitioners. Those faced with the challenges and demands of high profile, high consequence events are certain to be judged more by their success at communicating effectively before, during, and after the crisis than by how well they handle the tactical response.

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