San José, Calif., March 1, 2017 — Terrorists see transit and passenger rail as an attractive target. Designed for public convenience, trains and stations offer terrorists easy access to crowds of people in confined environments where there is minimal security and attacks can cause high casualties, significant disruption, and great alarm. MTI’s recently published report, The Challenge of Protecting Transit and Passenger Rail: Understanding How Security Works Against Terrorism, written by Brian Michael Jenkins, Director of MTI’s National Transportation Safety and Security Center, examines the role security plays on terrorist decision-making.

Jenkins’ research combines a quantitative analysis of broad trends in terrorist tactics over the past four decades, statistical findings from MTI’s Database on Terrorist and Serious Criminal Attacks against Public Surface Transportation, case studies of past terrorist campaigns and events, and a review of the observed effects of security measures.

As Jenkins points out, “Terrorist attacks on public transport create significant alarm—daily commuters and other passengers cannot easily avoid what they perceive as a source of danger. At the same time, it is not easy to increase security without causing inconvenience and unreasonably slower travel times, while creating vulnerable queues of people waiting to pass through security checkpoints.”

Research findings focus on answering the key question: does security work? Empirical evidence is hard to come by as terrorist incidents are statistically rare and random, making it difficult to discern effects. However, the fact that terrorists focus most of their attacks on targets with little or no security suggests that security influences their choice of targets.

A number of key policy recommendations come directly from the research findings. First, enlisting the public in security efforts works — alert citizens, passengers, or staff, who notify authorities of suspicious objects have prevented potential terrorist attacks. It is also important to evaluate the “net security benefit” of added security measures to ensure that the new efforts do not merely push terrorists to other vulnerable targets. While cost-benefit analysis is a useful tool, it shouldn’t be the sole basis for assessing security measures. Finally, while security strategies understandably focus on risk reduction, there is a need to explore counterterror strategies that work to create a psychologically more resilient and less-vulnerable public mindset.

The report is available for free download from http://transweb.sjsu.edu/project/1130.html

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Brian Michael Jenkins is an international authority on terrorism and sophisticated crime. He directs the Mineta Transportation Institute’s National Transportation Safety and
Security Center, which focuses on research into protecting surface transportation against terrorist attacks. He is also a senior advisor to the president of RAND. He has authored several books, chapters, and articles on counterterrorism, including *International Terrorism: A New Mode of Conflict and Will Terrorists Go Nuclear?* Most recently, he published *When Armies Divide*, a discussion about nuclear arms in the hands of rebelling armies. He also has been principal investigator for many peer-reviewed security-focused research reports for MTI.

ABOUT THE MINETA TRANSPORTATION INSTITUTE
At the [Mineta Transportation Institute](https://www.mti.sjsu.edu) (MTI) at [San Jose State University](http://www.sjsu.edu) (SJSU) our mission is to increase mobility for all by improving the safety, efficiency, accessibility, and convenience of our nation's' transportation system through research, education, workforce development and technology transfer. We help create a connected world.

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