

*"The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes."* —Marcel Proust

## **Building the Skill of Awareness**

One survival threat we seldom consider: modernity. Our basic human survival skills are being lost, replaced by technology and obscured by the busyness of everyday life. In general, people do not pay attention to their surroundings. When crisis strikes, they mentally stall and fall victim to preventable demise. People don't pull their heads out of their smartphones and tablets long enough to notice the clues that signal danger. We are losing our ability to be aware.

Some equate awareness to a sixth sense. Men call it instinct. Women call it intuition. Either way, it is one important way that we detect threats. Instinct is emotionally, subconsciously powered and very rarely interpreted by the brain. The "spidey senses" of some individuals seem to be evolved at higher levels, but can such awareness be taught?

As part of the research for this book, I conducted a brief survey of individuals in different occupations where awareness is instrumental to successful outcomes. The survey included fighter pilots, law enforcement SWAT officers, FBI agents, CIA clandestine operatives, special operation military operators, surgeons and others. I asked, "Do you believe some people are born with a heightened sense of awareness?" The overwhelming answer was yes.

The next question in the survey was "Do you believe awareness can be taught?" Again, the overwhelming answer was "Yes." These experienced, educated professionals agreed that some people are born with a heightened sense of awareness, but that awareness can be taught. Still, awareness is contextually based.

Even if you have great instincts, how good are those instincts going to be in an unfamiliar environment? When traveling, your instincts are hypercharged, firing off false alerts when you are first exposed to foreign surroundings.

Remember that Halloween when you dressed as your favorite superhero and waited in line at the season's first haunted house? You stood listening to the screams and let the anticipation flow. You entered, watching at every

corner, listening to every sound, and all the while trying so hard not to be frightened. No matter how hard you tried, you still got scared to death. Every time you thought something would happen—nothing. But the rest of the time, you jumped out of your skin. Stepping foot into another country can be the same. Your instincts tell you one thing, but the results are entirely different. Eventually, the false alerts desensitize your instincts. That can make you vulnerable to surprise or attack. The Total Awareness system will keep your guard up when your natural defense systems are down.

One person who was surveyed made an interesting point. He agreed that awareness skills could be taught, but questioned whether *anyone* could make the right decisions, under stress, after potentially dangerous clues are recognized. Interesting point.

How many times have you made the wrong decision in a critical or dramatic situation? When critiquing the information post-event, you've beaten your head against the wall, called yourself an idiot, and said, "I knew that was going to happen, but did nothing!" The answer is simple. You saw all the clues, did nothing, and you were an idiot.

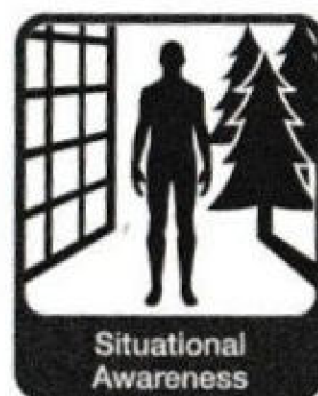
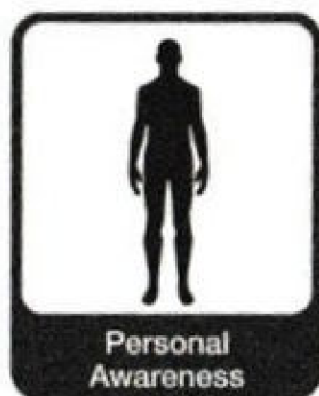
Connecting the dots and reacting in an effective manner takes education, experience and practice. To be successful, you have to recognize and analyze available clues and react swiftly. To constantly be aware of surroundings and make effective decisions based on clues and cues requires a change of lifestyle. The Total Awareness approach is a lifestyle. Like any skill, it takes practice. You need to do it all the time to be good at it. If it is not a lifestyle, failure increases exponentially, especially in dangerous environments.

Awareness is a weapon. If used properly, it can conceal your movements, ward off potential threats, prevent attacks, and ultimately, save your life and the lives of others. Awareness is free. It never runs out and is issued to each and every person who walks the earth. Harnessing the power of awareness can be difficult and tiring. With practice, however, awareness can become as natural as walking.

In this book, I will define the Total Awareness system and its components, showing you how to use this awareness to minimize and avoid threats while traveling. I'll give you tools and processes that will help you make good decisions without hesitation. First, you must understand that the Total Awareness system is more than just observation and instinct. It's a research and assessment tool to be used before traveling or entering unknown territory.

## The Total Awareness™ System

The **Total Awareness (TA) System** is a risk assessment system that manages and reduces risks—or threat vulnerabilities—for the global traveler. The structured Total Awareness approach can be used by anyone but is designed for the professional traveler—the diplomat, government employee, journalist or businessperson.



### Components of the Total Awareness System

The Total Awareness system can be broken down into a set of components that, taken together, create a complete awareness profile. These components include:

- **Situational Awareness (SA)**, *a conscious and constant focus on the environment that seeks to detect, validate and confirm threats.* Your ability to detect potential threats can be a result of both instinct and observation. This chapter will discuss situational awareness in detail.
- **Personal Awareness (PA)**, *the image and demeanor you project.* Your demeanor can help you blend into a specific culture, reduce your threat exposure and reduce your visibility to others—or it can increase your vulnerability to risk. Honing your Personal Awareness will give you the ability to assess and manage specific character traits that could potentially make you stand out from the culture where you will be traveling. Chapter 3 will discuss Personal Awareness in detail.
- **Cultural Awareness (CA)**, *the assessment and understanding of the culture in a specific geographic location.* This awareness component covers areas such as cultural-specific social protocol, etiquette,

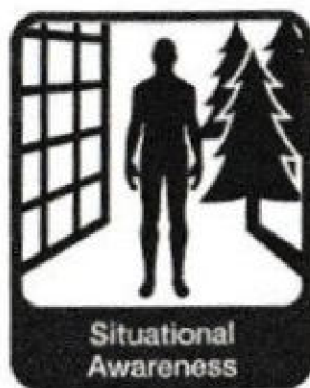
mannerisms and gestures. By combining Cultural and Personal Awareness, you will gain the ability to blend into the local culture and avoid standing out as a potential target. Chapter 4 will discuss Cultural Awareness in detail.

- **Third-Party Awareness (3PA)**, *the general public's perception of you and your actions*. In a nutshell, when you feel like everyone is staring at you, they probably are. Third-Party Awareness extends to groups like citizens, law enforcement, criminals, and even terrorists residing in the host country. Reducing Third-Party Awareness requires you to blend into the environment using Personal Awareness (managing the way your image and demeanor is projected within a cultural setting) and Situational Awareness skill sets. Chapter 5 will discuss 3PA in detail.
- **THREAT®** *is a risk-assessment tool* and an acronym that stands for **T**echnical, **H**ealth, **R**aid, **E**nvironmental, **A**gency, and **T**error threats in a specific geographic location. An educated global traveler will research and assess these threats before any international trip. By taking a holistic view of threats, you can prepare your senses, adjust your Situational and Personal Awareness, and decrease your vulnerabilities. Chapter 6 will discuss THREATs in detail.

Even when you are effectively practicing the Total Awareness system—fully locked in, absorbing and processing the information all around you like Jason Bourne of *The Bourne Identity*—you can still be caught off-guard by forces beyond your control. But even when taken by surprise, your reaction time and decision-making process will be better primed for effective action. Understanding the components of awareness can help you take control of forces normally *out* of your control.

To implement the Total Awareness system, you will need to properly assess and research a specific destination, prepare your senses and adapt your Personal Awareness traits. Once you are in an environment, you must begin to identify third parties and potential threats in an orderly fashion in a limited amount of time. To do this, you will follow a mental checklist (covered in detail in the following pages) that will enable you to manage the information you take in and make decisions based on instinct and observation.

Taking these steps will ultimately enable you to escape the wolf.



## Situational Awareness

Situational awareness enables you to focus on what is happening all around you. You take in all the information in the environment, recognizing how your own actions and the actions of others may influence the outcome.

Think about the difference between the experience of learning to drive a car and the way you now have internalized the process. You no longer hit the brake every time you see another car. You've learned to distinguish between false alarms and real threats, like the teenager who barrels through a red light. Eventually, the process for detecting travel security and safety threats will become the same. You will start to internalize this process, which keeps instinctively charged alerts in check with observed actions within the environment. Situational Awareness does just that and more.

## Types of Environments

As we start to learn about Situational Awareness, we must first define and understand the environment. The amount of control the local government has over crime, corruption and other potential threats to the community and everyone in it—including you—is an important consideration in your planning and preparation. Your preparations will differ in countries where the local government isn't strong, say in a country like Mexico, from the planning you would undertake when visiting a country where the local government is fairly strong, like the United Kingdom.

The globe can be divided into three kinds of environments, via U.S. government terminology used to assess international travel threats:

***Permissive environment*** - An area that is completely controlled by the government. Its citizens support the government. Most im-

portantly, the host government and its citizens support the United States. Utopia, if you will, where everyone lives in harmony. Not sure a fully permissive environment truly exists—Canada maybe?

***Semi-permissive environment*** - A government with questionable control. The citizens may or may not support the government. Corruption is usually the wolf in these locations. The government and citizens may or may not support the United States. Country example: Philippines. Most of the world is semi-permissive.

***Non-permissive environment*** – An area where little or no government exists, sometimes called a denied area. Control is induced through the hostile actions of non-government forces. Support of the United States or its citizens is minimal. Country examples: Somalia.

Note that though I defined each environment as an area, using countries as examples, all three environments can exist within one country, province or city. Two of the three exist in the United States. Permissive is not one of them.

You will want to research the area that you will be visiting. What sort of environment(s) will you encounter?

### **Identifying Real Threats from False Ones**

As you'll recall, **Situational Awareness (SA)** is the practice of focusing consciously and constantly on the environment around you to detect, validate and confirm threats. How do you screen out false alarms from real threats? The best way is through an approach that I call the **Modes of Awareness™ (MOA)** cycle. Just like the environment, Situational Awareness can be broken into a mental cycle (MOA), which you rotate through as threats present themselves.

### **OODA Loop**

It's hard to make good decisions when you are stressed and time crunched. As a result, I've incorporated a tactical decision-making process called the OODA loop (**O**bservation, **O**rientation, **D**ecision, and **A**ction) within the Modes of Awareness cycle.

Found in dozens of military and business strategy books, the OODA loop is a dynamic tool for tactical decision-making developed by John

Boyd, a U.S. Air Force fighter pilot. It was the approach that helped him win a standing bet to all newcomers as a pilot. Starting from a disadvantage in flight, he could lock on a missile within 40 seconds—or he'd pay 40 dollars, a fair chunk of change during his time. According to legend, he never lost, in large part because of the decision-making process that earned him the nickname "Forty Second" Boyd.

Boyd hypothesized that all intelligent organisms and organizations undergo a continuous cycle of interaction with their environment. He described four interrelated and overlapping processes through which an organism continuously cycles in a loop he believed to be critical to survival. The components of the OODA loop are:

- **Observation**, the collection of information or data by means of the senses.
- **Orientation**, the analysis and computation of collected information and data to form a real-time mental perspective.
- **Decision**, the course of action to be taken based on your current perspective.
- **Action**, the physical play-out of the decision.

### Practical Travel Example

Let's take a practical travel example. Say you are on business in a semi-permissive environment in the city of New Delhi in India. Your hotel is only a few blocks from the company you are going to meet with. Since you are running late, you decide to walk and skip the traffic jams. There is a shortcut, the same alley that your dinner companion from the night before used. It will save you precious time. The alley is not well lit, and you think you see some movement. Should you go in, or take the longer way across an open square? You only have a few minutes to make a quick decision. You can take care of yourself in most instances. But is this a case where you want to gamble?

Using Situational Awareness, your research should have begun at home. You would have learned that petty crime is common in India, as is the theft of U.S. passports, especially in major tourist areas. Some westerners, especially U.S. citizens, have been the victims of violent attacks, especially when they are alone. You should use the same common sense that you

would when at home. Would you venture into an alley alone in New York City? Be especially cautious in known target areas for crime, like train stations, poorly lit areas, alleys, market sites and crowded areas.

Using the OODA loop, you would **observe** by surveying the alley and the shadowy movement. Then you would **orient** by analyzing the data, both the research you've done before your trip and the visual survey you've just completed. You would **decide**, which in this case would be to choose the alternative of the safer, more open route. And, you would complete the loop by **acting**, actually walking across the square and avoiding the alley and the potential robber.

Boyd's loop is a commonsense approach. It's also an elegant framework for creating a competitive advantage. Not only can you observe, orient, decide and act, but you can also get inside the head of your opponent's OODA loop. It's what basketball players do when they fake a move on the court. Imagine operating "inside" the wolf's OODA loop, so you can out think and out maneuver threats.

The real takeaway is the cycle or loop itself. Each stage of the loop relates to the other, leading to a speedy tactical decision. I have integrated this loop into each of the Modes of Awareness cycle to eliminate indecisiveness in times of crisis. Using the OODA loop to guide your transitions from mode to mode will force observation, orientation, and decision prior to acting. The loop prevents action without planning—and as everyone knows, the difference between an emergency and chaos is having a plan.

If you decide to read some of Boyd's theories, be warned that he did a great job of making the OODA loop the equivalent to rocket science. In my opinion, simple is good, particularly when it comes to survival. The less there is to remember, the better.

### **The Modes of Awareness Cycle**

The Modes of Awareness cycle is a continuum of alertness, which can be divided into three stages—*Alert*, *Pre-Crisis*, and *Crisis*. You can shift from mode to mode by second, minute, hour or day, depending on the perceived threat and the environment around you.

Often in a wolf-rich environment, your senses of feeling, sight, smell and sound are your best assets. The pressure of a hand against your wallet, the smell of smoke, the sight of a crowd, or the sound of a gunshot should all

trigger responses and cause you to adjust your awareness as you move through the appropriate phases of the Modes of Awareness cycle. During this process, you will be setting invisible thresholds that act as lines or trip-wires. If breached or crossed, these thresholds will initiate your actions. An action could be as simple as transitioning from mode to mode, or as dynamic as acting out a decision to fight or escape the potential threat.

Here are the Modes of Awareness—Alert, Pre-Crisis, and Crisis—defined:

## **Alert Mode**

### **Potential Time in Mode: *Hours, Days, Months***

**Alert Mode** – Alert Mode is the constant observation of the environment, a perpetual scan for potential threats. You should be in Alert Mode the majority of the time you are traveling. Time in Alert Mode may last days, weeks, or months. Transition from Alert to Pre-Crisis Mode is triggered by the recognition of potential threats. To avoid freezing or stalled decisions, set invisible thresholds and use the OODA loop process to manage your reactions.

- You are in alert or preparatory phase. You are always mentally preparing to move to the next level. Within Alert, you are identifying, positioning and acting based on POTENTIAL threats.
  - *Observation* – You are feeling, looking, listening and smelling your environment.
  - *Orientation* – You are mentally changing your position based on the information being collected and processed from potential threats.
  - *Decision* – You are constantly making decisions to mitigate any potential threats.
  - *Action* – You are acting on the decisions to maintain the greatest advantage over perceived potential threats. You are deliberately trying to confirm potential threats.

## Pre-Crisis Mode

### Potential Time in Mode: *Minutes, Hours*

**Pre-Crisis Mode** – Pre-Crisis Mode is the constant observation of identified potential threats. Time in Pre-Crisis Mode may last hours or days. This mode allows a person to determine courses of action and designates an invisible threshold that activates Crisis Mode. The decisions made in this mode allow you to be in the best position should the Crisis Mode become necessary. If the threat breaches the invisible threshold, then you initiate Crisis Mode.

- In Pre-Crisis, you are identifying, positioning and acting based on CONFIRMED threat(s).
  - *Observation* – You feel, see, hear or smell the confirmed threat(s).
  - *Orientation* – You are physically and mentally changing your position to gain the greatest advantage over the confirmed threat(s).
  - *Decision* – You are constantly reevaluating the environment, developing courses of action to increase your odds of mitigation and escape from the confirmed threat(s).
  - *Action* – You are setting invisible thresholds that will initiate Crisis Mode if breached by the threat(s). You are arranging the situation to prepare for Crisis Mode.

## Crisis Mode

### Potential Time in Mode: *Seconds, Minutes*

**Crisis Mode** – Crisis Mode is when you take tactical act against the threat. At this stage, your goal is to elude, escape or dominate the threat so you can quickly and successful transition back to Pre-Crisis Mode. It's no time for decision-making, which should have been completed in Pre-Crisis Mode. Crisis Mode is triggered by the breach of the invisible threshold you have set. Crisis Mode may last seconds or minutes. Transitioning back to Pre-Crisis Mode should occur sooner rather than later. Prolonged exposure to the threat may decrease survivability.

- You are actively ENGAGED with the threat(s). In full-on crisis mode, you are attacking, defending yourself against, or escaping the threat(s). You are identifying, positioning, and acting against the threat(s) to return to Pre-Crisis Mode as quickly as possible.
  - *Observation* – You are feeling, looking, listening and smelling for a Pre-Crisis environment.
  - *Orientation* – You are physically and mentally changing your position based on the information being processed in the Crisis Mode.
  - *Decision* – You are constantly making decisions that will mitigate or eliminate the threat(s).
  - *Action* – You are acting out the decisions that will enable you to defeat the threat, survive and return to Pre-Crisis Mode.

### **Practical Travel Example**

Let's use another real-life travel example to illustrate how the MOA cycle works. I was once assigned to train another country's secret organization on how to conduct surveillance operations. Surveillance is one of those skills that can't be taught solely in a classroom, and unfortunately, I was in an environment where much of the population disliked Westerners. But my assignment meant I had to conduct training among the people, moving around in a hostile community without the population knowing that surveillance training was taking place.

I teach surveillance based on the systematic, team-based static and mobile observation of a target. Fundamentally, there are only two phases of any surveillance, the "pick up" and the "follow." The "pick up" is the point at which the surveillance team sets up on the target and waits for the target to move. The "follow" is the discreet trail behind or ahead of the target during movement. That may sound simple, but surveillance is very difficult to master, hampered by elements such as lack of area knowledge, poor communication equipment, personnel constraints, and surprise obstacles that slow or prevent a team from maintaining eyes on its target.

After some classroom time teaching the basics, it was time to get out and try it. I decided to be the target and let the team follow me for an hour or

so, after which I planned for us to head back to the classroom to debrief. I had already selected a walking route, with the goal of having the team keep me under observation without being detected by me, the target. If the technique is done correctly, I shouldn't know that I'm being followed, because each member of the team will rotate through different positions and never allow me to see the same face twice. New teams usually fail miserably at this for days and even weeks.

So there I am, walking through a town where the local population is less than fond of Westerners, trying to keep track of my team to accurately debrief them. Of course, I am very ALERT, on the lookout for potential threats as I scanned the crowds, observing and orientating myself to people and faces to distinguish students from real threats.

Ahead, I notice two young men walking toward me on the same side of the street. From a distance, their facial expressions say, "I hate you." I recognize that they are not my students. In Alert Mode, I observe them and decide that crossing the street and continuing in the same direction of travel is the best option. I decide to make the street my invisible threshold, which will trigger Pre-Crisis Mode. If they cross as well, then I will go into Pre-Crisis Mode (confirming the threat). So I nonchalantly cross the street, as if that's what I planned, doing so without giving the two young men any obvious attention.

Now I had plenty of space between them and me. I was already thinking about Pre-Crisis Mode and what I was doing next if they breached the threshold by crossing the street. I knew the team was nearby, and if Pre-Crisis was triggered, then I would make my way to them in a hasty manner. Fortunately, the men stayed on their side of the street. But, I noticed one of them was waving his arm to get my attention. I looked, and they both ran their extended thumbs across their necks, the international sign for "we want to cut your head off."

Threat confirmed! Pre-Crisis Mode activated. Decision made. I went right into Crisis Mode (act out decisions already made in Pre-Crisis). I acted upon the decision to find my team and make them aware of the problem.

I ducked into a shop where I had noticed one of my students pretending to be shopping. Seeing him was a huge relief. I discreetly informed him of the threats. He radioed the rest of the team, and we exited the shop together. The young men were not in sight, and we made our way back to the vehicles and then to the classroom. This reaction may seem extreme, but I can

assure you, the environment was hostile. You never know how many threats there really are or if an ambush is already in place.

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As this example demonstrates, a multilevel personal crisis management system can increase awareness, confirm threats, and prevent victimization, compromise and even death. The transfers from mode to mode (Alert, Pre-Crisis, and Crisis) depend heavily on two identified stages of the OODA loop, *observation* and *decision*. Both are instrumental in guiding the most effective action against a variety of threats.

In the following chapter, I will explore how your powers of observation and decision-making can be used to augment Situational Awareness and the Modes of Awareness cycle.

*"Don't tell me how educated you are,  
tell me how much you traveled." —Mohammed*

## Chapter 1 Review

### Practice Assignment – Modes of Awareness Cycle

In this section, we've tackled the important concepts of Situational Awareness and the Modes of Awareness. Situational Awareness *is a conscious and constant focus on the environment* that seeks to detect, validate and confirm threats. Your ability to detect potential threats can result from natural instinct, but can also be developed as a skill. Situational Awareness is a habit of mind. Like any other, it takes time to develop and should be approached as a way of life.

As a way of practicing that skill, let's see how you would apply the Modes of Awareness and OODA concepts to the scenario below.

#### Practical Example

- Semi-permissive environment (area with limited government control)
- Visiting on assignment with a colleague who knows the local environment

In this scenario, you are traveling on assignment in Mexico. You've made arrangements with the local lead and feel comfortable with the information he has supplied. He picks you up at the Mexico City airport. Using Situational Awareness, you've done your homework and recognize that it will be important to be cautious because both American and Mexicans are vulnerable to crime and the risk of kidnapping in Mexico City.

During the ride from the airport, you discuss the overall security situation with your colleague, gaining additional information. Your associate drops you off at your hotel in a nice part of town. You are in **Alert Mode**, in the *observation* stage of the OODA loop process, scanning the environment for potential threats. You are orienting yourself to the environment both on the ride and as you survey your hotel room. You make a note of the individuals in the hotel, the check-in and checkout procedures, the fire emergency process and any potential threats.

After a successful meeting, you return to your hotel. In the lobby, a uniformed man approaches you. He stops you and indicates that he is with the local police force and needs to speak with you. You are still in Alert Mode and should be quickly analyzing this new information (*orient*).

## Study Guide Questions

***What should you do next? Are you still in Alert Mode? Why or why not?***

***Do you think this person is a threat? Why or why not? How would you determine this?***

***What do you think happens in this scenario?***

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## Study Guide Answers

***What should you do next? Are you still in Alert Mode? Why or why not?***

Did you continue with your OODA loop process? The next step would be to make a *decision*—in the *Alert Mode* stage, you should be making key decisions, as there won't be much time for decision-making in the *Pre-Crisis* and *Crisis Modes*. You should also be setting the *invisible thresholds* that will determine a shift into Pre-Crisis mode. At this point, you are still in Alert Mode.

In this case, you might have done some homework before traveling and learned of recent incidents in which impersonators donned uniforms to perpetrate a crime. All that information is being pulled together in the *orient* step of the OODA loop. Given the environment, you decide that your invisible threshold will be breached if the individual tries to forcibly take you somewhere. Your instincts are telling you that something just doesn't seem right.

You are also making decisions at this point about what you will do if this person *does* try to take you somewhere. You are getting ready to *act*, to shift to Pre-Crisis, if the invisible threshold is crossed.

***Do you think this person is a threat? Why or why not? How would you determine this?***

Good research can help give you a head start about potential threats like this one. Instinct also comes into play. In this case, the uniformed individual grabs your arm and tries to move you toward the door of the hotel. He is saying something unintelligible about going to the police station. Yep, a

*confirmed* threat. Your invisible threshold has been breached, and you shift into *Pre-Crisis Mode*.

### ***What do you think happened in this scenario?***

The uniformed individual begins to make a scene. Americans hate scenes, and most will comply with orders in order to put a halt to a heated interaction. But if you have quickly run through the Observe, Orient, Decide and Act process and determined the individual's behavior to be a trap, you will shift from *Pre-Crisis* to *Crisis Mode*. You will do the unexpected and *act* based on the decisions you made in Pre-Alert Mode.

You pull your arm away and walk quickly toward the hotel front desk. You pull out your cell phone and call your colleague. The uniformed individual comes after you. You remain calm but keep walking to stay ahead of him. You explain the situation to your colleague to make sure someone else knows what is happening.

You reach the hotel front desk, making sure a number of people are around as witnesses. You request assistance and explain you do not think this person is really a police officer. Suddenly, the uniformed individual disappears. The threat is over—for now. Your homework and your ability to analyze and respond quickly to a potential threat has served you well. What was it all about? Most likely, it was a potential kidnapping scheme. Thanks to thorough preparation, and the ability to process information quickly using the Modes of Awareness cycle and the OODA loop, you were able to elude this threat. Congratulations!

### **Lessons Learned:**

- Research threats before traveling. Learn as much about the environment you are going into as possible.
- Use Situational Awareness, the Modes of Awareness cycle and the OODA loop to give you the advantage over potential threats. With these proven approaches and processes, you won't be frozen in place by the unanticipated and unexpected. You'll always be thinking ahead and ready to act.

**NOTES:**