

Florina Cristiana Matei and Nadav Morag reflect on the impact of Bruno Dias' CHDS thesis, "Blip on the Radar: School Safety Synergy through Early Warning and Information Sharing."

By Florina Cristiana Matei and Nadav Morag

School violence—which includes, inter alia, bombing, mass shooting, and active shooting incidents—has become an increasingly frequent phenomenon since the beginning of the 21st century.¹ The U.S. Department of Homeland Security categorizes school violence as a major threat to American citizens' physical and emotional safety and security, and has made school violence prevention one of its main homeland security threat prevention priority areas.² CHDS has supported alumni research into this area through its School Shooting Database, which compiles information from 25 different sources.³ In this context, Bruno Dias's M.A. thesis (December, 2020)—titled "Blip on the Radar: School Safety Synergy through Early Warning and Information Sharing"—which assesses existing opportunities to enhance the American education institutions' safety and security capabilities without jeopardizing privacy rights, is a substantial contribution to the development of both the field of and the academic literature on homeland security in at least two ways. First, using case studies of recent school violence incidents, Dias's thesis provides a thorough analysis of existing strengths, weaknesses, and lacunae in school safety and security related policies and practices—which homeland security practitioners can use in their current or future school safety assessments. Second, Dias's thesis findings and recommendations provide a holistic approach to school violence prevention which "leverage[s] the collective power of multiple stakeholders, ensure[s] accurate understanding of existing privacy rights to guide information sharing practices, develop[s] proper case management protocols, and implement[s] policies that ensure beneficial information is not lost as a child moves from school to school."⁴ In doing so, it complements the existing literature on school violence, while also providing guidelines for homeland security professionals, elected and appointed officials, and school safety and security experts in their efforts to devise strategies and policies to counter school violence, and ultimately keep the U.S. homeland safe and secure. Dias has used a phased approach starting at the local level in his own school district (Phase I), then liaising with other school districts and his local JTTF and Fusion Center (Phase II), and finally, reaching out to members of Congress and DHS to explore national implementation of his model (Phase III). This approach allows the incorporation of lessons from earlier phases into later phases and also provides evidence of success at the local level. Consequently, Dias's work not only provides a contribution to better preventing school violence, but also to implementing change at the local, state, and federal levels.

About the Authors

Florina Cristiana (Cris) Matei is a Lecturer at the Center for Homeland Defense and Security (CHDS), located at the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS), Monterey, California. Cris teaches M.A. courses (for both CHDS and NPS's National Security Affairs Department) that analyze the relationship between security institutions and political regimes.

Nadav Morag is an Instructor at the Center for Homeland Defense and Security (CHDS), United States Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California. He teaches in the MA program and lectures in the Executive Leaders Program. He concurrently serves as Professor and Chair of the Department of Security Studies in the College of Criminal Justice at Sam Houston State University. Between 2010 and 2015, he served as a Senior Fellow at The George Washington University Homeland Security Policy Institute. In 2001, Nadav took up a position, initially as Senior Director for Domestic Policy and subsequently as Senior Director for Foreign Policy, at Israel's National Security Council, Prime Minister's Office. At the Israeli NSC, Nadav worked with a team of ten other senior officials from the Israeli Military, Domestic Security Service, Mossad, Foreign Ministry and Police developing policy recommendations based on intelligence and other sources for then Prime Minister Ariel Sharon on matters of national security including counterterrorism policy, bilateral security relations with a number of regional countries and Europe and the development of a national security policy for the Israeli national police. He is the author of *Comparative Homeland Security: Global Lessons* (Wiley and Sons, 2011, 2nd Edition 2018) and has authored numerous articles and book chapters on terrorism, strategy and the Middle East. Nadav holds BA and MA degrees from UCLA and a PhD from Tel Aviv University, where he served on the faculty for nine years. He was also the 2009 recipient of the LCDR David L. Williams Outstanding Professor Award from the Naval Postgraduate School.

Notes

1. The most current such tragic examples include the Virginia Tech mass shooting on 16 April 2007, when a senior killed more than 30 people, the active shooter incident at the Marjory Stoneman Douglas school, in Parkland, Florida, on 14 February 2018, where a former student killed 17 and injured over 15 people; and the Santa Fe active shooter incident, on 18 May 2018, when a student of the Santa Fe High School (Texas) killed at least 10 people and injured over 15 others.
2. DHS, School and Workplace Violence, <https://www.dhs.gov/school-and-workplace-violence>.
3. CHDS, K-12 School Shooting Database, available at: <https://www.chds.us/ssdb/about>.
4. Bruno Dias, "Blip on the Radar: School Safety Synergy through Early Warning and Information Sharing," (master's thesis, Center for Homeland Defense, Naval Post-Graduate School, December 2020).

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