

PROLOGUE

Dateline: Lima, Peru. Time: 2:00 a.m. on a Wednesday.

I was working with local law enforcement on behalf of one of our company's clients on an operation against 64 targets selling counterfeit electrical parts and supplies. The location was a huge covered market spanning an entire downtown city block.

Because crowds usually flocked to the market during the day, the federal prosecutor running the operation decided we should conduct the enforcement action in the wee hours, thereby minimizing the risk of disruption or uprising, whether among the workers, the merchants, their operatives or the general public.

We arrived at the location shortly before the designated time with the prosecutor, six assistant prosecutors and 115 riot police. Using bolt cutters, we unlocked the main door and entered the market. We quickly discovered, however, that we could not turn on the interior lights because the building's power used a password-protected timer. Resorting to flashlights, we proceeded to break into and search the padlocked targeted stands, finding large quantities of counterfeit goods. Most of the items were sitting inside the small shops, but others had been placed in an attic loft,

stacked precariously among the rafters. About 45 minutes into the operation, an angry mob of about 50 men suddenly appeared. Alerted to our presence by hidden security cameras, they had broken through a side entrance of the market and were carrying rocks, bottles and other makeshift projectiles, which they began hurling at us.

Despite the large police presence, the mob continued their advance, picking up and throwing chairs and other loose items along the way. Instead of standing their ground, many of the police, despite their full riot gear, turned tail and ran toward the exits. I wasn't going to face the thugs on my own, so I followed suit.

Still about a hundred feet from the main exit, the police, now fearing for their safety, began deploying tear gas, slowing the mob's advance. The officer directly in front of me panicked, unholstered his weapon and began shooting blindly over his shoulder as he ran – and placing me directly in the line of fire.

Lucky for me, the officer squeezed off only three rounds before making it out the door and onto a waiting bus. All three shots landed harmlessly against nearby shops, and no one was injured. But the incident gave me an extra jolt of adrenaline I didn't need.

Most of the raiding party made it out the front door, but the mob captured the lead prosecutor and two of her assistants. Apparently, the police commander felt no concern for the prosecutor, because he and his men finished piling into the waiting buses and were preparing to leave. I caught up with him and related what had happened, but the commander told me he would not risk sending his men back into the building because shots had been fired.

When I explained that his own man had fired the shots, he responded that if I mentioned this to anyone he would throw me in jail for lying. I informed him that if he did not order his men to rescue the prosecutor and her assistants I would contact every newspaper and radio station in the country and elsewhere and tell them what had happened on this night.

The threat worked. The commander, though annoyed, ordered a team back into the

market building. They rescued the hostages without injuries. Unfortunately, they also left behind the seized product as they made their quick exit.

I returned to my hotel, packed and checked out quickly, headed to the airport and took the next flight home. There, I noted several phone messages from the police commander, again warning me to keep quiet

about the errant shots fired. The prosecutor also had left me a message, and I returned her call immediately. She thanked me profusely for insisting that the police send a rescue team. She said she and her colleagues were repeatedly assaulted verbally and physically, and she had feared the worst until the team arrived. She told me her biggest concern was being left behind to fend for herself, and if not for my intervention that is what would have happened. The prosecutor was angry that the officers who were sworn to protect her had given so little thought to her safety.

Not every incident involving counterfeiting results in violence or a potential hostage situation. Nevertheless, counterfeiting is a crime – and it is big business, worth the equivalent of many billions of dollars annually. Counterfeiting also corrupts institutions and individuals. It knows no borders and inflicts much harm, economic and otherwise. Perhaps worst of all, the culprits go largely unpunished, and counterfeiting is often ignored by law enforcement and perceived as harmless by the general public.