
International Terrorism

[The following report is an official summary of recent terrorist activity, and includes a statement of U.S. policy regarding international terrorism. This report was originally published in the July 8, 1991 edition of the *U.S. Department of State Dispatch*, pp. 496-497.]

International terrorism is a serious threat to the U.S. and the world. The U.S. is a prime target because our policies, values, and culture are directly opposed by many terrorist groups and because the U.S. has an extensive official and commercial presence overseas. Israel, Western democracies, and moderate Arab governments are also major targets. State sponsorship of terrorist activity has caused great increases in both the number of attacks and the resulting casualties. Since 1980, nearly 7,000 international terrorist incidents have occurred worldwide, killing more than 5,000 people and wounding 12,300 others. About 2,000 attacks were against American targets. American casualties since 1980 have totaled 580 dead and 610 wounded.

TERRORIST ACTIVITY IN 1990

In 1990, international terrorism fell to its lowest level in 13 years, with only 455 attacks recorded. A large number (197) were directed against American targets; most of these (130) occurred in Latin America and consisted of low-level bombing attacks that resulted in minor damage and few casualties. Ten American citizens were killed and 34 wounded in terrorist attacks last year. The citizens and property of 73 countries were targeted by terrorists in 1990.

TERRORISM AND THE PERSIAN GULF WAR

Following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait last August, Saddam Hussein and other Iraqi officials repeatedly threatened to launch terrorist attacks against coalition members in the event of war and undertook actions consistent with these threats. In addition, a number of Palestinian terrorist groups pledged their support for Saddam Hussein and publicly threatened terrorist reprisals against the West, Israel, and moderate Arab targets. The U.S. added Iraq to the list of state sponsors of terrorism in September. By the end of 1990, the U.S. had evidence that Iraqi operatives were planning to mount a major terrorist campaign.

In response to these threats, the U.S. and 50 other nations expelled, deported, arrested, or detained hundreds of suspected Iraqi operatives, including Iraqi diplomats and embassy staff. President Bush stated that Saddam Hussein would be held "directly responsible" for any Iraqi sponsored terrorism. Other terrorist countries were warned of the consequences of mounting terrorist attacks, and those countries in turn reined in those groups over which they have influence. Security measures were enhanced at embassies, military installations, and other possible targets; airport security was increased worldwide to the highest level ever.

The disruption of Iraq's command and control infrastructure, the deterrent effect of our warnings, and tighter security all discouraged Iraqi terrorism. Iraq was linked to only a small number of attacks or attempted attacks. Some 200 terrorist incidents occurred during the Persian Gulf war, but most were perpetrated by indigenous terrorist groups in Turkey, Greece, Peru, and Chile who exploited the war to advance their own goals. The majority of these attacks were sporadic, uncoordinated bombings that caused few casualties and little property damage. About half of the attacks were directed at American targets. No "spectacular" terrorist attacks occurred during the war, and some planned attacks were thwarted. The level of international cooperation against the Iraqi terrorist threat was unprecedented. Cooperation among law enforcement and intelligence services in many countries increased the effectiveness of counter-terrorist efforts.

STEPS ANNOUNCED AT ECONOMIC SUMMITS

The seven industrialized countries known as the G-7 [Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, United Kingdom, United States] have repeatedly issued joint statements on terrorism at their annual economic summit meetings. The most important of these commit the G-7 to sever air links with any country that refuses to "prosecute or extradite" those responsible for attacks on civil aviation (Venice, 1987) or for hijackings (Bonn, 1978). Other statements have condemned hostage-taking, attacks on diplomatic personnel and premises, and state-sponsored terrorism. The seven have repeatedly expressed their resolve to improve air safety, exchange terrorist information, work toward closer cooperation among police and security agencies, and bring terrorists to justice.

U.S. POLICY

U.S. counter-terrorism policy was initially developed in the 1970s, and the three basic principles remain as valid today as they were then.

First, the U.S. makes no concessions to terrorists holding official or private American citizens hostage. Specifically, we will not pay ransom, release prisoners, or change our policies in response to terrorist demands. At the same time, the U.S. Government will make every effort, including contact with the captors or their representatives, to obtain the release of hostages without making concessions. Making deals with terrorists only encourages more terrorism.

Second, the U.S. works with other countries to put pressure on terrorist-supporting countries (such as Iraq, Iran, Libya, Syria, Cuba, and North Korea) to persuade them that such support is not cost free. These nations help terrorists by providing training, money, weapons, travel and identification documents, diplomatic pouch privileges, safe houses, and refuge. The U.S., working with friendly countries, seeks to isolate such countries by imposing economic, political, diplomatic, and—if all else fails—military pressures.

Third, the U.S. cooperates with friendly nations in developing practical measures to counter terrorism. These measures include:

- Identifying the terrorists by name and learning their goals, ideologies, sponsors, and areas of operation;
- Tracking them, particularly when they cross borders, and searching them for forged documents, weapons, and dangerous materials; and
- Apprehending, prosecuting, and punishing terrorists.

Although more needs to be done in these areas, we are beginning to see results. More terrorists are being caught before they can carry out their attacks, and more terrorists are being convicted and sentenced to stiff prison terms. Importantly, more terrorists are serving their full prison terms. As a result, the traditional terrorist tactic of taking hostages in order to secure the release of convicted terrorists from prison is increasingly ineffective. Laws covering prosecution, exchange of evidence, and extradition are being improved and used more frequently to punish terrorists.

The U.S. offers anti-terrorism training assistance to representatives of friendly governments trying to fight terrorism. More than 11,000 police and security personnel from nearly 70 countries have received such training since the program started in 1984. We also are working to provide more protection for American officials abroad and to make U.S. embassies and facilities overseas more secure.

Because most terrorism originates and is carried out abroad, continued international cooperation is a key to future success in countering the terrorist threat, and a high priority is being given to improving this cooperation.

International Terrorist Incidents, 1968-90

