

Terrorism: Overview and Developments

By

Robert B. Oakley

[The following is an address by Ambassador Robert B. Oakley, Director, Office for Counter-Terrorism and Emergency Planning, before the Issues Management Association in Chicago, Illinois, on September 12, 1985. This address has been published by the Department of State as *Current Policy No. 744.*]

It was 15 years ago today that a major new chapter in international terrorist spectacles literally exploded on the world scene. Palestinian terrorists from the radical PFLP [Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine] faction hijacked four airliners and forced the pilots to fly three of them to a former World War II RAF [Royal Air Force] base in Jordan--Dawson Field. On September 13, 1970, they blew the planes up before the cameras. A fourth plane already had been blown up in Cairo. Those blazing explosions marked a new dimension in the ability of terrorists to catch our attention and make terrorism an act of macabre theater as well as deadly crime.

That mass hijacking attack brought the terrorist groups to the front pages--and, more important to them--to the prime-time evening television news around the world.

That spectacular did not benefit the terrorists in the short term. It led to King Hussein's expulsion of the PLO [Palestine Liberation Organization] from Jordan amid heavy fighting which cost hundreds, if not thousands, of Palestinian lives. However, the events of September 1970, which prompted one terrorist group to take on the name "Black September," set into motion a chain of events in Lebanon and elsewhere which are still unfolding. These range from the 1972 Olympic tragedy in Munich, the attack upon Lod Airport in Israel, all the way to current terrorist actions by Palestinians in the Middle East and Europe. Some of them are Palestinian vs. Palestinian, with mainline PLO and Jordanian officials targeted by dissident Palestinian groups, some of which receive help from Syria.

During the 1970s, West European terrorists struck at their own targets--the IRA [Irish Republican Army] assassinated Lord Mountbatten and killed hundreds of innocent people in Northern Ireland and Britain. Italian terrorists, notably the Red Brigades, killed former Prime Minister Moro, and scores of Italians became innocent victims. West German terrorists--the Red Army Faction--robbed banks, planted their bombs, killed, and kidnaped.

Today, new groups which were virtually unknown on the international terrorist scene a few years ago have suddenly emerged alongside the older groups to take their toll of lives.

- Muslim fundamentalist Shi'a terrorists, inspired by the Ayatollah Khomeini's "Islamic revolution" and supported by the Iranian Government, have committed suicide bombings against the U.S. Marine barracks and Embassy buildings in Lebanon and carried out attacks in Kuwait, including the U.S. Embassy, the French Embassy, and Kuwaiti facilities.

- Sikh terrorists have assassinated Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and several other Indian officials apparently planted the bombs which blew up the Air India 747 in mid-air and exploded at Tokyo's Narita Airport, and tried to conduct assassinations in the United States.

- In Latin America, leftist guerrilla groups and narcotics traffickers have used terrorists to attack and threaten U.S. ambassadors and other officials as well as local government leaders in several Latin American countries.

Some forms of terrorism had appeared to be on the decline, such as aircraft hijacking. But Shi'a terrorists last year [1984] revived that technique, which had been used by the Palestinians. Two American Government employees were killed when the terrorists hijacked a Kuwait airliner to Iran last December. A Jordanian airliner was hijacked and--in echoes of Dawson Field--blown up at Beirut airport this summer. And, of course, there was the hijacking of TWA 847 in June--the first time an American plane had been hijacked in the Middle East since a Pan Am plane was blown up during that September 1970 attack. Kidnaping has also appeared to be on the decline, but in the past two years seven Americans have been kidnaped in Beirut and remain as captives. A U.S. businessman was kidnaped in Bogota, Colombia, last month. And President Duarte's daughter has just been taken this week in El Salvador.

Nevertheless, the principal terrorist tactics in the past two years have been bombings and armed attacks with an increasing intent to kill, maim, and injure--not merely to frighten or inflict property damage. We have seen this in West Germany where a Red Army faction car bomb, five weeks ago, killed and injured Americans and Germans alike at a U.S. Air Force base near Frankfurt, and an American serviceman was brutally murdered for his identification card. In Madrid this week, an American businessman died of injuries received while jogging nearby as Basque terrorists set off a bomb which wounded some 16 Spanish policemen.

I mention these points not with the intention of providing a comprehensive overview--it would take more time than you have and a better memory or files than I have. Nor do I want to scare you into abandoning travel or business operations abroad for a retreat into fortress America. Rather, this brief introduction is meant to help illustrate one of the major problems in countering international terrorism--its shifting patterns and cycles--as well as to accentuate the need for security preparedness. Terrorism is a form of warfare in which unpredictability and surprise are major weapons. Those who indulge in this form of ripping at the thin veneer of civilization hide behind sneak attacks and faceless phone calls. Their favorite targets are usually not military or police installations but unarmed and unsuspecting civilians, particularly diplomats--and businessmen.

Terrorism is not a new scourge. It is too easy to forget that even terrorism has a history and that some of the terrorists of today are following trends set hundreds of years ago and set in the same part of the world. In the Middle East, terrorism has been known at least since the 1st century A.D. during the Zealot's struggle against the Romans in ancient Palestine. In the 11th century A.D. the Assassins sect emerged in Persia and spread to Syria where they attacked the Christian crusaders as well as other local officials.

The Barbary pirates conducted their own form of terrorism, operating from what is now Libya and leading to the landing by the U.S. Marines on the shores of Tripoli a century and a half ago. The forerunner of the car bomb, the cart bomb, was reported in Napoleonic times.

The more modern versions of terrorism and its ideological underpinnings emerged in the latter part of the 19th century, particularly in Russia and other European countries. The German radical, Karl Heinzen, of the mid-19th century wrote: "If you have to blow up half a continent and pour out a sea of blood in order to destroy the Barbarians, have no scruples of conscience." The leftist terrorist groups in Europe, such as the German Red Army Faction, appear to have inherited this sort of pseudo-intellectual rationalization for their violent attacks upon society.

CURRENT TRENDS

Terrorism has ebbed and flowed, but today the number of incidents is greater than before, and it is increasingly a worldwide phenomenon. In 1984, there were more than 600 international terrorist incidents, a 20 percent increase over the average level of the previous five years. The number of incidents is up further this year--480 for the first eight months, compared with 382 for the same period last year.

Here are some of the trends we are likely to see over the next few years:

First, international terrorism is and will remain a prominent factor on the international political landscape, despite the intensified efforts we and other governments are making. Terrorism will not easily disappear for many reasons: a worldwide system of competitive arms sales makes modern weapons available more easily to terrorist groups; mass communications assures instantaneous publicity for terrorist acts; travel is easier between different countries, and border controls are diminishing, particularly in Western Europe; the copycat phenomenon causes more and more desperate or amoral individuals and groups to adopt terrorism; and, most important, in an age when weapons of mass destruction as well as increasingly lethal conventional armaments have made regular warfare too costly, terrorism is viewed by certain countries as a cheap way to strike a blow at their enemies with little or no retaliatory action.

Second, for the United States the problem is likely to continue to be much more external than internal. Incidents within the United States, especially externally connected terrorism, have been decreasing, altogether representing less than one percent of the world total, whereas the United States abroad has been the number one target for terrorists. This is due, in large part, to the exceedingly effective work of the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation], generally tighter controls on visas and at U.S. points of entry, and an aversion by the American people to foreign-inspired violence.

Domestic terrorism [in the United States] is a serious problem, with the principal threats coming from Puerto Rican terrorists plus individuals and groups, often loosely linked, who reflect inchoate neo-Nazi, white supremacy attitudes. But the effective work of the FBI and local law enforcement agencies has kept it from getting out of hand.

There is a potential foreign terrorist threat of major dimensions within the United States, particularly from several Moslem and other ethnic groups (e.g., Libyan, Iranian, Palestinian, Sikh, Armenian, etc.). Excellent work by the FBI, and other law enforcement agencies, and our intelligence community, plus fear by the state sponsors of terrorism of the consequences were they to be caught supporting attacks within the United States, have kept this threat under control so far. However, we can never feel safe, never slacken vigilance, as shown by the FBI prevention this spring of planned attacks in this country by Sikh and Libyan terrorists and its arrest last month of Puerto Rican terrorists linked to Cuba.

Third, open societies will remain the principal targets of terrorists, although no societies are immune. Democratic societies are vulnerable to terrorism, on the one hand, because the terrorists might succeed more easily in bringing the democratic governments to their knees due to their very openness and concern for their citizens; or, on the other hand, overreaction by a democratic state to the threat could destroy the very nature of the society. Terrorists would welcome either outcome.

The means of attack which are increasingly available to the opponents of democratic states are also available to a lesser degree, to the opponents of dictatorships. They may have tighter controls at home where basic freedoms do not count, but they are vulnerable abroad, and during 1984 the Soviet Union ranked number seven on the international terrorist victim list. This is far behind the United States and other free countries, probably because most groups abroad are vaguely leftist or

Marxist in ideology. We have little evidence of direct Soviet support to such terrorist groups. However, their objectives clearly parallel those of the U.S.S.R. and they receive indirect support and encouragement.

Fourth, there has been an unmistakable rise in state-supported terrorism over the past few years, with Iran, Libya, Syria, Cuba, and Nicaragua as the most active, determined, systematic supporters of terrorist groups and activities. The combination of direct government assistance in arms, explosives, communications, travel documents, and training with fanatic individuals or groups goes a long way to explaining the shift in tactics toward bombing and armed attack and the accompanying increase in the casualty rates from terrorist attacks. The fact that the states I have mentioned--except Iran--receive large quantities of Soviet arms, which, in turn, flow secretly to the terrorists, is hardly coincidental.

Fifth, there is a trend toward greater lethality. To date, terrorists have, by and large, used conventional methods of attack (high explosives, firearms, hand grenades, car bombs, etc.) with great effect. However, as our defenses against conventional weapons improve, so does the likelihood that terrorists groups will move to more sophisticated and esoteric methods of attack. The potential impact to our society and to our national security is catastrophic in nature. In recognition of the enormity of the potential, we have been developing interagency plans for the response to and the countering of plausible terrorist threats in either nuclear or chemical/biological attacks.

The Current International Terrorist Scene. Looking behind these trends in more detail at the international terrorist scene, we note that the Middle East has become the primary sources of international terrorism, accounting for about 35 percent of the incidents. But international travel has permitted the export of Middle Eastern terrorism elsewhere. There are two main categories of Middle Eastern terrorists:

First, fanatical Palestinians who have split off from the mainline PLO led by Arafat and often have the direct support of Libya and Syria; and

Second, Shi'a zealots residing in many Arab countries, especially Lebanon, who are inspired, trained, and often armed, financed, and, to varying degrees, guided by Iran. They have bombed the U.S. Embassy and Marines and the French Military in Beirut, hijacked U.S. and French aircraft, and taken U.S., French, British, and other nationals hostage. They are responsible for terrorist activities against various Arab states.

In addition, Libya is becoming an increasing threat to its neighbors in North Africa, to many states in black Africa, and to peace and stability in the Middle East, using propaganda and subversion or overt military attempts as well as terrorism. Moreover, Qadhafi's worldwide ambitions--which strongly resemble those of the U.S.S.R. and certain of its close allies--have brought Libyan agents and money to terrorist operations in the Carribean, Central America, New Zealand, and even the South Pacific islands of New Caledonia. At present, the greatest Libyan threat is to the moderate and black states of Africa--mostly Tunisia, Algiers, Egypt, Sudan, Chad, and others further south. The United States is working with these states to help them resist Libyan aggressive plans.

The targets of Middle East terrorism fall principally into four groups: Israel; Western governments and citizens, particularly France and the United States; moderate Arab governments and officials, including the mainline PLO as well as Jordan, Egypt, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia; and critics of radical regimes, particularly Libyans, who are targeted by their own governments.

While the Middle East might be the source of most terrorism, Europe is the location of the largest number of incidents, ranging from 36 percent to 53 percent of the total during each of the

past five years. Nearly 25 percent of these incidents, however are of Middle Eastern origin. Indigenous European terrorists consist of:

- Elements of ethnic groups, such as Corsicans, Basques, Croations, and Armenians, which have been fighting for autonomy or to redress reputed grievances; in particular, the Armenian groups which have waged a deadly and relentless campaign, both here in the United States and in Europe, against Turkish interests in an effort to establish an Armenian state.
- Leftist groups such as the Red Brigades in Italy, Direct Action in France, Red Army Faction in Germany, the CCC [French acronym for Fighting Communist Cells] in Belgium, Grapo in Spain, and November 17 in Greece.
- Special note should be made of the Provisional Irish Republican Army, the PIRA, which is both ethnic and leftist. It is the most deadly of all European groups, having killed some 50 people in 1984. This group should be distinguished from the IRA of earlier days.

For many years these groups pursued their separate targets independent of each other, but a new phenomenon developed during late 1984 among some of the European leftist groups. Aside from an apparent increase in mutual logistical and propaganda support, groups in Germany, Belgium, and France all attacked NATO-related targets over a period of several months. This resurgence accounted for most of the increase in the total number of incidents in Europe during the past year. There was a lull at the end of the hunger strike by jailed terrorists in Germany, followed by a rash of incidents preceding the annual summit meeting in Bonn. Experts expect that we will see similar outbreaks during future months.

Latin America is the third great center of terrorist incidents, accounting for approximately 20 percent of the events worldwide. Social, economic, and political turmoil have served to prolong existing patterns of insurgency, which have assumed terrorist dimensions in some countries--particularly Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Peru. There has been some spillover into Latin America from terrorism in the Middle East and Europe, particularly Iran and Libya. Cuba and Nicaragua provide the strongest encouragement and direct support for terrorist activities in other Latin American countries, particularly those with insurgency situations. They, of course, receive support from the Soviet bloc. In addition, Italian and possibly other leftist terrorist have found refuge in Nicaragua.

U.S. ACTIONS

What is the United States doing to defend itself and its citizens abroad, unilaterally and in cooperation with other governments? Has this been, will it be successful? Given the current preoccupation with the use of force to counter terrorism and the controversy over the lack of U.S. military retaliation to terrorist acts, it may surprise you to learn that there have been successes.

We have identified over 90 planned attacks upon U.S. citizens or facilities abroad during the past year which we are satisfied have been preempted by improved intelligence, stronger security, and cooperation from other governments. There are unconfirmed reports of additional incidents which may have been planned against the United States, but they are not counted because we are uncertain of the validity. There are undoubtedly other incidents of which we are completely unaware. But only terrorist successes receive public attention, leaving the impression that they are all powerful and always successful. Obviously, we cannot divulge too much about our successes and about where and why the terrorists failed. This would give the enemy our game plan and the means to overcome our defenses. However, there are several illustrative incidents from the 90 successful cases which can be cited:

- Last fall, the Italian Government prevented a group of Shi'a terrorists from blowing up our Embassy in Rome and arrested the terrorists.
- Our Ambassador and Embassy in Colombia avoided several specific terrorist attacks, including a bomb attack which was stopped short of the Embassy and several bombs destined for U.S. business concerns.
- We have preempted several specific plans to bomb the Embassy residence in Beirut and assassinate or kidnap the Ambassador and other senior officials.
- We detected and defused a large car bomb which would have caused dozens of casualties at a U.S. and NATO training facility in Oberammergau, West Germany.
- The United Kingdom avoided a series of Brighton-type bombings and arrested 14 IRA terrorists in June.

To improve security of diplomatic installations, a new approach was set in motion after the 1983 bombings in Beirut and funded by Congress last fall. Some \$55 million has been spent to enhance physical and operational security of our diplomatic posts abroad in the past year. In fiscal years (FY) 1986 and 1987, budget requests for overall security resources total \$391 million and \$331 million respectively. The number of professional State Department security officers abroad will double during the 1985-86 period and the marine security guard complement has been augmented. Seventy major perimeter security enhancement projects are scheduled for FY 85-86, and a dozen new embassies are being built to replace those in high-threat countries which are far below acceptable standards. New turnkey procedures involving joint action by the Department of State and private business have been adopted in order to cut completion time to one-third of what it once was.

The Inman panel, headed by Admiral Robert Inman, the former Deputy Director of the CIA, recently proposed a large expansion of the embassy security program. For the 1986 fiscal year, six specific areas are highlighted for increased security enhancement. These are:

- Construction, relocation, and renovation of scores of buildings that will meet new physical and technical security standards;
- Residential security (to include guard services and field support);
- Perimeter security program;
- Technical countermeasures and counterintelligence programs;
- Foreign Service security training (security training development, overseas guard and post security officers, general security, Federal law enforcement, coping with violence abroad, and firearms and evasive driving); and
- Protective security resources, additional personnel.

OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

It is important to note that in countering terrorism abroad the United States is limited in what it can do alone because we must rely very heavily upon the cooperation of foreign governments who control the countries from which the terrorists come and those in which they operate. We are working hard to increase this cooperation and have made progress. But much more remains to be done.

- The recent series of hijackings, aircraft and airport bombings, as well as the attacks against targets in Western Europe associated with the NATO alliance, has spurred moves toward greater cooperation with our European allies. We are working with friendly countries in Europe and elsewhere to improve sharing of information and techniques in dealing with terrorists.

- In Latin America, progress has also been made, although the travel threat remains very high. For example, during the past year, a coordinated interagency counterterrorist program in Colombia has helped that government regain the initiative from the terrorists and narcotics traffickers.

We will soon be requesting funds urgently for a similar but larger Administration counterterrorism program for Central America. The threat there is becoming more serious. For example, in El Salvador, the guerrillas and terrorists have decided to move into the cities reacting to the successes of U.S.-supported counterinsurgency programs in rural areas. As the assassinations of the American marines and the kidnaping of President Duarte's daughter have indicated, the same trend is likely to continue. This means that the police, who have been getting no assistance and are in poor shape, must bear the burden of defending their governments--and U.S. personnel--from terrorist attack. It is essential that Congress act to approve the Administration request for carefully controlled counter-terrorist assistance to Central American police forces, administered by the State Department and coordinated with military programs administered by the Defense Department.

- In the Middle East, we will continue our efforts to release the seven Americans still held hostage by Iranian-supported Shi'a terrorists. We will also continue to work with Israel, Jordan, Egypt, and the moderate states of the gulf in opposing terrorism as well as helping them face the threat of conventional attack instigated by Libya, Iran, or Syria. We will not change our policies, give up on the peace process, or be driven out of the region, despite the threats to U.S. facilities and citizens.

- In the civil aviation field, the Departments of State and Transportation have taken several important steps, unilaterally and with other governments, to improve security. These include air marshalls, better security screening at U.S. airports and for U.S. airlines abroad, and pressure on other governments to tighten their own security. We are also providing training and technical assistance to some 20 governments in this field. We will not hesitate to act, as we did with Greece and Lebanon, where foreign governments refuse to provide adequate security.

TRAINING COOPERATION

Since most terrorism takes place abroad, it is obvious that cooperation with other governments is extremely important in combating this menace. We work on this in many different ways, from publicized, top-level meetings between chiefs of state to unpublicized liaison contact between the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] and FBI and services of other governments. The Anti-Terrorist Assistance (ATA) Program has been in operation for only 16 months but is paying big dividends in improved cooperation and support from foreign governments. In the past year we have held high-level, interagency policy consultations on how better to combat terrorism and how to improve bilateral cooperation with a range of governments such as the United Kingdom, Italy, Israel, Egypt, Turkey, Greece, Colombia, Honduras, and Denmark. India and Pakistan are among those planning to participate. The ATA Program provides training for foreign, civilian law enforcement agencies, focusing upon such fields as civilian aviation and airport security, bomb detection and disposal, and hostage negotiations and rescue. Metropolitan police forces in such cities as New York, Los Angeles, Boston, Washington, D.C., Miami, and Chicago have participated, as well as numerous law enforcement organizations. By January 1, 1986, the program will have almost 2,000 participants from 32 countries.

We are also increasing cooperation with American businesses operating overseas. The Threat Analysis Group of the Office of Security in Washington and regional security officers at posts overseas encourage contact with the private sector on security issues. The Secretary announced in February the formation of the Overseas Security Advisory Council. It is now operating to bring public sector and private sector officials together to exchange information on security issues and make recommendations for closer operational cooperation.

We continue to explore and develop a number of other multilateral, bilateral, and unilateral options, including the potential use of military force. Secretary of State Shultz has been foremost among those who have said that we need to consider the use of military tools when appropriate. Each terrorist event presents a different situation, however, and while our military forces have been in a high state of readiness in recent crises, the situation has not been appropriate to their actual employment. We must be and are willing to use force, carefully, if the circumstances call for it.

Although sometimes the media seems to assume that the use of U.S. military force for retaliation is the only means to fight terrorists, this is usually not the case. We and other governments have made preventive strikes through police action--arresting terrorists before they can attack, as was done in Rome. And as we recently saw in El Salvador, where effective action has been taken against some of those responsible for killing American servicemen and civilians in June, military action does not necessarily require the use of American forces. That is one reason why we place so much emphasis upon military and police training and assistance programs for other countries and on closer intelligence and law enforcement cooperation with them.

CONCLUSION

This overview is by no means the complete story of international terrorism. Books have been written on this subject, and more will be. The same goes for TV. But, I hope it has been useful. On closing, it is important to keep a few things clearly in mind.

The United States must not take a defeatist attitude toward international terrorism. We can make and are making progress. But it will be long and difficult; it takes a great deal of effort and requires cooperation by other nations; and there will be occasional incidents, because the United States is the number one target.

It is also costly. There are the costs of improving the physical security of our embassies and other installations overseas. Private business must also increase expenditures for security, at home and abroad. Using economic pressure or not shipping arms has an impact on governments such as Libya and Iran and others who support terrorism, although it may result in financial pain to individual companies who hope to make lucrative sales.

But we must not and will not retreat, close our military bases, abandon our businesses, change our policies, or let down our allies, because of terrorist attacks. That would be much more costly, economically as well as in political and strategic coin. It would also lead to still more terrorism.

Terrorism, as many experts have said, is a form of low-intensity warfare. It is not an easy one to fight. There are no magic weapons--there are no quick fixes. However, I assure you that we are in the struggle for the duration. With your support and that of other sectors of the American public, we will continue to make progress, and the chances for still more success will continue to improve.