

Terrorism

By

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Blast kills 2 at U.S. air base in West Germany

Car bombing, slaying tied to killing of GI for ID

Freeing of hundreds of hostages sought in negotiations

All too often we open the daily newspaper to read similar headlines. Each year numerous terrorist incidents occur in the world, and sadly, Americans are frequently victims. This article will explore three major facets of the terrorist phenomenon, and will specifically address three issues:

- What is terrorism?
- Why are you likely to be a target?
- What can you do about it?

WHAT IS TERRORISM?

Although it appears to be a modern phenomenon, terrorist activities can be observed throughout man's history. Early examples of Zealot resistance to the Roman occupation of Judea in the first century A.D. can readily be classified as "terrorist acts." The Jacobin excesses during the French Revolution's reign of terror provided some extreme examples, and gave terrorism its name. Partisan resistance to Nazi occupation during World War II furnishes further examples.

The inherent problem of coming to grips with terrorism is one of definition and perspective. One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter. It is difficult to compare the selfless martyrdom of French and Dutch resistance fighters with the wanton slaughter of Israeli olympic athletes or the murder of Lord Mountbatten. Yet the parallel exists. What is considered by Western observers to be a brutal act of violence is often viewed as a legitimate act in other areas of the world. We must first realize that, as Americans, we are imbued with a traditional Judeo-Christian ethic which impacts on our view of the world.

To understand the philosophy and motivation of the terrorist and what makes the terrorist tick, we must operate within an agreeable framework of definitions.

Terrorism is the use of violence, or threats of violence aimed at a target group wider than the immediate victims.

International terrorism is sponsored or directed by a foreign government or organization.

Narco-terrorism, a relative newcomer on the scene, involves narcotics trafficking by terrorist groups to raise operating capital; or conversely, the subsidy of terrorist groups or the adoption of terrorist tactics by narcotics dealers to protect their operations.

It is obvious that the definitions provided above are very general, generic, and provide only a loose basis for a meaningful look at terrorism. It is perhaps more beneficial to define terrorism and the terrorist psyche by examining what a terrorist is *not*, and dispelling some common myths.

Myth #1--Terrorists are crazy. Although certain unstable personalities may naturally gravitate to terrorism, they will not generally last very long. The clandestine existence of the terrorist is diametrically opposed to the flamboyant acts of a mental degenerate. Remember, terrorism is violence for a *purpose*, not just the pleasure of slaughter and mass destruction. The terrorist is goal-oriented, and although terrorist goals and methods may seem insane to an outside observer, terrorists are committed to them. Moreover, modern terrorism requires careful intelligence and detailed operational and logistics planning, which presupposes mentally stable personalities.

Myth #2--Terrorists are thrill seekers. For many of the reasons outlined above, the terrorist who frequently or commonly promotes attention to his act(s) will not willingly call attention to his identity. Terrorists are sometimes fanatical about maintaining their anonymity. Indeed, for urban terrorists, it is precisely this anonymity that heightens their chances for survival.

Myth #3--Terrorists are always men. Although in most cases males dominate terrorist organizations, recent history shows that more and more women are appearing on the scene. Terrorism can indeed be called "an equal opportunity employer."

Myth #4--Terrorists are long-haired Bolsheviks. The predominant western conception of the terrorist is probably that of the wild-eyed, Molotov Cocktail-throwing revolutionary. Although there are certainly examples of this character in terrorist organizations, they are not archetypical. The terrorist survives because of his anonymity, his ability to blend in and lose himself in the crowd. More often than not, the terrorist will not appear any different from the average person on the street in his area of operations.

Recent statistics indicate that terrorism is on the rise, and is likely to remain a major disruptive influence through the end of this century. There are numerous factors contributing to this trend, some of which are cited below.

- Each year sees fewer restrictions applied to international travel, and many countries are providing more open borders than in the past.
- Immediate worldwide publicity is available to the terrorist. The effect of the media on international terrorism has yet to be determined and is cause for a study in itself. It can be safely stated, however, that the worldwide media network and satellite media communications provide present-day terrorists with a heretofore unprecedented link to the rest of the world, a link which they need to spread their message of fear.
- It is becoming increasingly difficult to infiltrate terrorist organizations. Because of the clandestine nature of their activities, terrorist organizations consist mainly of small operational "cells" of perhaps five people or less. Generally, contact with other cells in the organization is extremely limited and tightly controlled.
- The relative inexpensiveness of terrorist activities. Although many terrorist organizations, most notably the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PROVOs), require annual operating budgets in the millions, this outlay is relatively inexpensive when compared to the cost of conventional warfare. This is particularly true of international terrorism sponsored

by states not militarily or financially equipped to conduct a protracted war against a major world power. Terrorism and the supporting of terrorist activities has become a weapon of choice in this arena, and several states have found themselves able to conduct "bargain basement" wars through the use of surrogates. What cannot be achieved by open combat can often become possible through a campaign of terrorism.

- Finally, there is the ever-present spectre of the U.S.S.R. A considerable number of active terrorists have received training, financing, weapons, and equipment, either from the U.S.S.R. or through its client states. It can be demonstrated that the Soviets have a fairly large stake in the terrorist cause, particularly in the Third World. Soviet-backed groups can force the commitment of free-world resources to terrorist problem-solving at home, thus, removing them from the Soviet sphere of interest. At worst, these groups can eventually come to power, as regimes friendly to the Soviet cause.

As stated previously, terrorism as a phenomena is not new; however, appearances indicate that it will continue to be a major influence for years to come. With this basic understanding of terrorism, we will now explore the value of Americans, particularly the military, as targets for terrorist actions.

WHY ARE YOU A TARGET?

The principal weapon of the terrorist is fear. By striking indiscriminately at the innocent (e.g., a bomb in a crowded terminal), the terrorist is able to project this fear, sometimes to the point of paranoia, throughout an entire population.

The tactics of the terrorist are those of the guerrilla: surprise, maximum violence with minimum risk, and subsequent disappearance. The terrorist will not, and indeed cannot, afford to "come out and fight like a man." His main strength lies in his anonymity. The terrorist will continue to hit and run, because he will only strike when the odds are clearly in his favor, and the risks are acceptable.

As U.S. military personnel, we find ourselves in many areas of the world as a projection of the U.S. image. Our uniforms, automobiles, manner of dress and speech, personal habits, and actions readily identify us as Americans, members of a society that is hated by many ideologies and sects. Like it or not, our very status as Americans is often sufficient justification for a terrorist strike. It is not always the high-ranking officer or diplomat who is finally selected as a target. Oftentimes the risk involved in "hitting" these individuals and the obstacles to be negotiated are unacceptable, and the terrorist will turn his attention to a more vulnerable target--any American.

Even families are not immune. Although it is abhorrent to our psyches to ruthlessly attack women and children, the terrorist will do so if the occasion demands and the benefits to be derived are worth the risk. Often these targets are "softer" and easier to hit, and pose little or no risk. The ensuing publicity from such an action can be far greater than that resulting from the attack on an officer or diplomat.

The victims selected by terrorists are often as varied as the groups themselves. It has been stated that we can learn the most about a terrorist group by studying its victims. The terrorist will strike for any number of reasons. A corporate executive may be kidnapped for ransom; a diplomat or academician may be attacked for expressing his views about a given ideology or regime; military personnel may be executed as "punishment" for real or imagined crimes; or a wanton act of destruction may be perpetrated merely to call attention to the terrorists and their demands. For our purposes here, the reasons behind the acts are not as important as the fact that they indicate

everyone is a possible victim. We may easily find ourselves singled out because we wear the uniform of the United States, because we are associated with "imperialism" and "decadence," or perhaps just because we happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT IT?

Just as the major weapons of the terrorist are fear, surprise, violence, and anonymity, so the major defense an individual has is *awareness*. Terrorism observes no boundaries; no level of society, indeed, no person is immune. Terrorism can strike *anyone, anywhere, anyplace..* It does not always happen to "the other guy."

Too often, as Americans, we fall into the "complacency trap." Because we have never been the victim of a terrorist act, we feel certain that nothing will happen to us. Or, conversely, we feel that we are just not important enough targets to warrant the attention of a terrorist group. *Complacency kills.*

There is a plethora of publications, guidelines, hints, and instructions available on self-protection and the avoidance of terrorist acts. The thousands of pages that have been written on personal protection all boil down to one simple word--*AWARENESS*. *YOU* may be the weakest link in your own chain of personal security. All of the sophisticated devices in the world cannot protect an individual from a determined attack if that person does not take steps to protect himself.

Although no one can be totally immune from terrorist violence, the literature abounds with protective measures, both active and passive, that can reduce a person's vulnerability. It is readily discernible that many of the precautions noted are nothing more than simple common sense and awareness. We would like, however, to elaborate on a few of the basics.

- **Awareness.** This point cannot be overemphasized. Only by being aware that there is a real threat, and that we are possible targets, can we begin to take the steps necessary to reduce the risk of becoming victims, and increase the chances for survival if we do become victims.
- **Predictability.** Terrorist operations have striking similarities to military operations. The terrorist cannot take unacceptable risks; he must strike and survive. Typically, a terrorist group will conduct a surveillance operation for weeks or even months on several probable targets. By the time he "hits," the terrorist probably knows as much about the victim's routine as the victim does. Altering your pattern, doing unpredictable things at unpredictable times can cause the terrorist to turn his attentions elsewhere, to a more routine and vulnerable target. Avoid routine at all costs.
- **Use Your Senses.** Be alert to those activities that are not "normal." Know your surroundings. If you are not aware of what is "normal" in a given area, you will not be attuned to something out of the ordinary.

Terrorism, as an institution, is growing, and will probably be a major factor throughout our lives. By understanding the terrorist, his tactics and weapons, and his methods of operations, we can increase our own personal security and provide some additional measures of protection for ourselves and our families.

Although it is difficult for us to imagine ourselves as the victim of a terrorist campaign, the very real possibility exists that we, particularly those of use who serve abroad, or someone close to us, could suffer at the hands of a terrorist.

We can become our own best defense. Only through awareness will we be able to take those steps ultimately necessary to protect ourselves. Although no one can be guaranteed total immunity, we can certainly lessen the probability of disaster, and increase the odds in favor of our own survival.

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