

Terrorism: The Challenge and the Response

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I appreciate the opportunity to participate in this important conference on terrorism. I note from your program that you have already heard the perspectives of many distinguished academics and specialists; this afternoon, I would like to present our views on this scourge. More specifically, there are three questions that I want to address.

First, what exactly is terrorism?

Second, why is the United States so concerned about terrorism?

And third, what are we doing to combat it?

Let me begin with some observations on the nature of terrorism. In recent years, we have learned a good deal about what terrorism is and is not. What once may have seemed the random, senseless act of a few crazed individuals has come into clearer focus as a new pattern of low-technology and inexpensive warfare against the West and its friends. And, while it is an alarming pattern, it is a threat that we can identify, combat, and, ultimately, defeat.

Terrorism is a sophisticated form of political violence. It is neither random nor without purpose. On the contrary, terrorism is a strategy and tool of those who reject the norms and values of civilized people everywhere.

Today humanity is confronted by a wide assortment of terrorist groups whose stated objectives may range from separatist causes to ethnic grievances to social and political revolutions. Their methods include hijackings, bombings, kidnappings, and political assassinations. But the overreaching goal of virtually all terrorists is the same: to impose their will by using force against civilians.

The horrors they inflict on the defenseless are calculated to achieve very specific political purposes. They want people to feel vulnerable and afraid; they want citizens to lose faith in their government's ability to protect them; and they want to undermine the legitimacy not only of specific government policies but of the governments themselves.

Terrorists gain from the confusion and anarchy caused by their violence. They succeed when governments alter their policies out of intimidation. They also succeed when governments respond to terrorist violence with repressive, polarizing actions that alienate the authorities from the populace--and, thereby, play directly into the terrorists' hands.

STATE-SPONSORED TERRORISM

As you may well know, terrorist violence is hardly a new phenomenon. Nearly two centuries ago, for example, the Barbary pirates conducted their own form of terrorism, operating from North African ports and leading to the landing of U.S. marines on the shores of Tripoli. Similarly, the forerunner of the car bomb, the cart bomb dates back to Napoleonic times. Nevertheless, certain features of modern-day terrorism seem to be, if not historically unprecedented, then certainly very unusual.

To begin with, a good deal of contemporary terrorism is state sponsored. As an example, consider one of the most notorious terrorist groups of our day, the Abu Nidal organization. This group now receives backing and support from Libya; it finds sanctuary in Eastern Europe; and Damascus has provided it with important logistical support since 1983. Indeed, Syria allows Abu Nidal's group to maintain training camps in areas of Lebanon under Syrian control. Syria also provides the group with travel documents, permits its operatives to transit freely, and continues to sanction the operation of Abu Nidal's facilities in Damascus.

Nor is Abu Nidal the only terrorist group supported by Syria. Damascus also provides varying amounts of support to other radical Palestinian groups. Non-Palestinian terrorist groups, as well, have facilities or have received training in Syria or Syrian-controlled parts of Lebanon. These groups include the Japanese Red Army, the Kurdish Labor Party, the Armenian terrorist organization ASALA [Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia], and al-Zulfikar of Pakistan. In the past, we have had to rely on intelligence sources for information on Syrian support for international terrorism. More recently, however, public trials in London and Berlin have conclusively demonstrated Syria's complicity in terrorist actions.

Unfortunately, Syria is not the only state which supports terrorism. Iran, Cuba, Libya, and South Yemen are also key members of today's terrorist international. Indeed, the deadly combination of direct government assistance such as arms, explosives, and training, on the one hand, and violent individuals or groups, on the other hand, is a major factor in both the growth and the effectiveness of terrorism in recent years.

THE SOVIET ROLE

In the past, terrorism was almost exclusively the weapon of the weak, a gesture by small groups of determined extremists to call attention to their cause. Today, however, we see that even a major power like the Soviet Union supports terrorist activity in pursuit of its ambitions.

We should understand the Soviet role in international terrorism without exaggeration or distortion. The Soviet Union officially denounces the use of terrorism as an instrument of state policy. Yet here, as elsewhere, there is a wide disparity between Soviet statements and actions. The Soviet Union uses terrorist groups to advance its own purposes and goals, including the weakening of liberal democracy and the undermining of regional stability. One does not have to believe that the Soviets are puppeteers and the terrorists marionettes; violent or fanatic individuals and groups can be found in almost every society. But, certainly, in some countries terrorism has been more violent and pervasive because of support from the Soviet Union and its satellites--notably Bulgaria, East Germany, and Czechoslovakia.

TERRORISM AND DEMOCRACY

In thinking about terrorism, certain facts must be faced. All states and all political systems are vulnerable to terrorist assault. Nevertheless, the number of terrorist incidents in totalitarian states is minimal; markedly few acts are committed against their citizens abroad than against westerners.

This discrepancy has not arisen simply because police states make it harder for terrorists to carry out acts of violence. It also reflects the fundamental antagonism between terrorism and democracy.

One of the reasons that the United States is so concerned about terrorism, wherever it takes place, is that it is largely directed against the democracies--often against our fundamental strategic interest, always against our most basic values. The moral values upon which democracy is based--individual rights, equality under the law, freedom of thought, freedom of religion, and the peaceful resolution of disputes--all stand in the way of those who seek to impose their will, their ideology, or their religious beliefs by force. The terrorists reject and despise the open processes of democratic society and, therefore, consider us their mortal enemy.

States that sponsor terrorism use it as another weapon of warfare against the United States and our allies. Through terrorism, they seek to gain strategic advantages where they cannot use conventional means of attack. When terrorists, reportedly with Iranian backing, set out to bomb Western personnel in Beirut, they hoped to weaken the West's commitment to defend its interests in the Middle East. When North Korea perpetrated the murder of South Korean Government officials in Rangoon, it sought to weaken the non-communist stronghold on the mainland of East Asia. When Syria participated in the attempt to blow up the *El Al* airliner and murder over 300 people, it attempted to strike a major blow against Israel, the United States, and Britain.

In Europe, the Middle East, and elsewhere, the United States is a principal target of terrorist violence, not so much because of what we do or don't do but, rather, because of what we are: a nation dedicated to the peaceful resolution of conflicts.

PREVENTING FUTURE TERRORIST VIOLENCE

Terrorist violence is taking an increasingly grim toll in human life. Last year, for example, nearly 800 terrorist attacks hit citizens and public facilities in 84 countries; over 900 persons were killed, of whom 38 were American. As an American official, I highlight the number of Americans who have been killed. But, no matter what their nationality, 900 deaths are just too many.

The potential of future incidents is even more worrying. Terrorists now rely on guns, grenades, and bombs to spread ruin and fear. That is bad enough. In the future, however, states which support terrorists could provide even more lethal means of destruction. The fact that this has not happened yet does not allow us to be complacent about the future. On the contrary, the essence of an effective policy is to identify a danger to our interests before it is self-evident and implement a sensible preventive response.

U.S. COUNTERTERRORIST POLICY

What I have said thus far should give you a clear conception of this Administration's view of the phenomenon of terrorism. Now let me turn to the third and final point I want to discuss this afternoon: U.S. counterterrorist policy. I hardly need say that this is a particularly controversial topic just now. Many of you, I am sure, have strong views on this subject. Yet, I urge you not to lose sight of the many real and substantial achievements this Administration has made in the fight against terrorism. Most of this effort receives little attention and takes place in the realm of intelligence gathering, in the cluttered offices of analysts, or in the laboratories of scientists trying to develop better ways of detecting hidden explosives.

What are these achievements? During the past few years, we have made remarkable progress in thwarting potential attacks. Only successful terrorist acts receive front-page coverage, but I'd like to draw your attention to the attempts that fail--largely due to our efforts. Last year alone, we and our friends foiled more than 120 planned terrorist attacks. For example, in Turkey this April, security officers arrested Libyan-supported terrorists who were planning to attack the U.S. officers

club in Ankara during a wedding celebration. In Paris, at about the same time, officials thwarted a similar attack planned against the visa line at the U.S. Embassy.

A number of initiatives have contributed to this progress. We have been developing our own intelligence capabilities vis-a-vis international terrorists and sharing that intelligence with other nations in a timely fashion. We have expanded international cooperation in the fields of law enforcement and counterterrorist training. Under the Anti-Terrorist Assistance Program, which began in April 1984, we have established active exchange and training programs with 32 foreign governments.

States which may not actually train and fund terrorists but which ignore terrorist activity in their own countries pose a particularly difficult problem. Unless their own citizens are the targets of terrorist acts, many nations assume it is not their problem. We are responding to this unwillingness to act by discussing terrorism with all nations--not just our allies. I recently returned from a trip to Eastern Europe, which is an area well known for its leniency towards terrorists. Eastern Europeans are realizing that terrorism is their problem too: there were Hungarians at the Vienna airport when it was attacked last year, and Romania recently stated its opposition to terrorism. There is more to be done in Eastern Europe, but with continued effort, we can make all countries understand that terrorism is a crime against humanity.

We are also putting teeth into international anti-terrorism conventions. For example, the International Civil Aviation Organization toughened its regulations dramatically after the hijacking of TWA Flight 847. In response to the *Achille Lauro* hijacking, the International Maritime Organization began to develop similar regulations for seaborne transportation. Last year, the U.N. General Assembly adopted a strong resolution declaring terrorism a crime, whatever the rationale.

We have taken great strides toward bringing our diplomatic installations in threatened areas up to the standards necessary to protect our people. All of our posts have conducted intensive reviews of their security needs, and these reviews have been the basis for speedy action. We have made immediate improvements at 23 high-threat posts. We are planning to construct new office buildings that will measure up to the latest security standards. The Inman Commission [Advisory Panel on Overseas Security] has estimated that improving the security of our institutions abroad will cost \$4.2 billion over a five-year period. Congress has approved less than \$1 billion for the first stage. There is obviously a great need for increased funding over the next five years.

Our research into new technologies for enhancing physical security is also continuing. We have begun working with the private sector to help corporations improve their capacity for dealing with terrorists. We have passed tougher laws against terrorism, such as the Omnibus Anti-Terrorist Act of 1986, which makes terrorist acts against Americans abroad punishable in U.S. courts. And we are urging other nations to tighten their procedures for issuing visas to suspected terrorists.

We have also developed our own counterterrorist military capabilities to react swiftly to terrorist situations. In both the *Achille Lauro* affair and last April's assault on Tripoli, we demonstrated our willingness and ability to use force against terrorists and against states that support them. Col. Qadhafi now has no illusions about our determination--and neither should any others who would use terrorist violence against us.

Most important, perhaps, we are helping to educate the public about the real nature of the terrorist threat. Over the years, too many of us have accepted uncritically certain very misleading views about the nature of terrorism--views which disarm us intellectually and strengthen our adversaries. For any counterterrorism policy to be effective, these misconceptions must be dispelled.

MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT TERRORISM

What misconceptions am I referring to? Let me briefly mention three of them. We have all heard the insidious assertion that "one person's terrorist is another's freedom fighter." What this constitutes, of course, is an attempt to justify terrorism as a legitimate form of warfare and political struggle.

When Secretary Shultz addresses this issue, he sometimes quotes the powerful rebuttal of this kind of moral relativism made by the late Senator Henry Jackson. Senator Jackson's statement bears repeating today.

The idea that one person's "terrorist" is another's "freedom fighter" cannot be sanctioned. Freedom fighters or revolutionaries don't blow up buses containing non-combatants; terrorist murderers do. Freedom fighters don't set out to capture and slaughter school children; terrorist murderers do. Freedom fighters don't assassinate innocent businessmen, or hijack and hold hostage innocent men, women and children; terrorist murderers do. It is a disgrace that democracies would allow the treasured word "freedom" to be associated with terrorists.

So spoke Scoop Jackson. So should we all speak..

Another fallacy we often hear is that military action taken to retaliate against or preempt terrorism is contrary to international law. Some have even suggested that to use force against terrorism is to lower ourselves to the barbaric level of the terrorists. But, as the President and Secretary Shultz have pointed out time and again, the U.N. Charter is not a suicide pact. Article 51 explicitly allows the right of self-defense. It is absurd to argue that international law prohibits us from acting in our self-defense. On the contrary, there is ample legal authority for the view that a state which supports terrorist or subversive attacks against another state or which supports terrorist planning within its own territory is responsible for such attacks. Such conduct can amount to an ongoing armed aggression against the other state in international law. As the President said in connection with Libya's support of terrorist violence: "By providing material support to terrorist groups which attack U.S. citizens, Libya has engaged in armed aggression against the United States under established principles of international law, just as if [it] had used its own armed forces."

All of us can agree, I hope, that the United States has not only the right but the obligation to defend its citizens against terrorist violence. We should use our military power only if the stakes justify it, if other measures are unavailable, and then only in a manner appropriate to a clear objective. But we cannot rule out the use of armed force in every context. Our morality must be a source of strength, not paralysis. Otherwise, we will be surrendering the world's future to those who are most brutal, most unscrupulous, and most hostile to everything we believe in.

A third argument we sometimes hear is that by openly discussing terrorism, we're only giving the terrorists unwarranted recognition and legitimacy. According to this line of reasoning, we should downplay public expression of our concerns in the hope that a low profile will deprive the terrorists of the visibility they seek. Unfortunately, terrorist groups have shown great skill in dealing with the media, and their crimes are likely to attract considerable press and television attention, regardless of what the U.S. Government does. Under these circumstances, our duty is clear: we must persist in our campaign to build a broad coalition, at home and abroad, willing to stand up against terrorism.

CONCLUSION

Let me conclude with a final observation. Recent events may have raised doubts in some minds about the credibility of U.S. counterterrorist policy. But I can assure you that this Administration's overall policy is well in place, and it remains a sound framework for countering the terrorist scourge. Today, as in the past, our policy is based on four principles.

- We consider terrorism a criminal activity that no political cause can justify.
- We refuse to make concessions to terrorists.
- We regard state-sponsored terrorism as a menace to all nations and promote cooperation among states on practical measures to track down, arrest, and prosecute terrorists.
- We encourage international cooperation in isolating terrorist states to make it clear that costs will be imposed on those states that support or facilitate the use of terror.

Implementing these guidelines will not be easy. There are no magic solutions or quick fixes; and, as in all situations where human lives are at stake, there are political complexities and moral dilemmas that cannot be wished away. But, bilaterally, and multilaterally, we are working at home and abroad in our war against terrorists. We are in this war for the duration, and we are determined to win.