

International Terrorism

By

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[The following is a statement by Ambassador Robert B. Oakley, Acting Ambassador-at-Large for Counter-Terrorism, presented before the U.S. Conference of Mayors in San Juan, Puerto Rico on 16 June 1986.]

It is a pleasure to be with you today in lovely Puerto Rico. My subject matter--terrorism--is not a pleasant one, but it is obviously one of considerable concern to all our citizens. It probably has been the top story on TV and in the newspapers and magazines since the TWA 847 hijacking a year ago.

My job and that of my office at the State Department is to deal with international terrorism. The State Department is the leading agency in dealing with the international threat, while the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) is the key federal agency in dealing with terrorist threats within the United States. We work closely together, however, both on a day-to-day basis and in two interagency committees on counterterrorism established by the President. One of these I chair, and one is chaired by the National Security Council. In dealing with international terrorism--that is, terrorism involving persons or facilities of more than one country--all U.S. government agencies work closely together in the recognition that the first line of defense for the United States is overseas. . . .

We are at an interesting and important stage in the ebb and flow of international terrorism and efforts to combat it. As President Reagan said in his May 31 radio address: "History may well record that 1986 was the year when the world came to grips with the plague of international terrorism."

Over the past two years, there has been a major surge in terrorism, both internal (within Lebanon, India, Sri Lanka, Peru, and Chile) and international (especially in the Middle East, Europe, and Latin America). The number of international incidents rose from the 500 per year average for 1970-83 to 600 in 1984 and 800+ in 1985. This upward trend continued during the first several months this year. Preliminary tallies indicated there were about 346 international terrorist incidents for January-May of 1986, compared with 285 for 1985, although there seems to be some slowing up in recent weeks.

The number of casualties from international incidents also leapt upward, going from 1,279 (312 dead) in 1984 to 2,177 (877 dead) in 1985. So far in 1986, from January through May, there have been 1,081 casualties (318 dead). In 1983, while the worldwide statistics were not as bad, the bombing in Beirut caused over 250 U.S. marines and civilians killed and over 100 wounded. For the past decade U.S. citizens and installations have been far and away the number one target for terrorists abroad. Despite the impression made by recent highly publicized incidents, the percentage of attacks directed against the United States has actually decreased over the past three years from 40 percent to 25 percent.

DOMESTIC SITUATION

Inside the United States, the trend has been just the reverse. Aggressive investigation of terrorist acts and the successful prosecution of those responsible has helped prevent future crimes by domestic terrorists and reduce their threat to society. During the past three years, the FBI has obtained substantial success against domestic terrorist organizations. The results achieved in investigating the *Fuerzas Armadas de Liberacion*, United Freedom Front, May 19 Communist Organization (M19C), the Aryan Nations, and others are indicative of these positive accomplishments by the FBI. In 1985 the number of domestic terrorist incidents declined for the fourth straight year from a high of 51 in 1982 to a total of only seven, with twelve casualties, last year. None of them involved international connections, although there were several attempted incidents with international connections (involving Sikhs, Libyans, etc.) among the 23 prevented. So far this year, there has been only one domestic terrorist incident, that involving a former Puerto Rican policeman and his family.

Let us speculate on the reasons for these strikingly opposite trends. I hope my ideas stimulate your own thinking, which will be based upon direct local experience rather than deductive reasoning. First, this country has a reputation abroad for pretty effective controls upon the issuance of visas, which many others do not require, and careful checking of proposed points of entry. For some reason terrorists seem to prefer normal entry points into the United States, even with false papers, to trying to sneak across the relatively unguarded areas of our borders.

Second, we also have a reputation for good intelligence on terrorists trying to enter or operating inside the country, due to the combined good work of the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency], FBI, friendly governments, and state and local law enforcement agencies. The absence of terrorism from the Los Angeles Olympics is a good example of these first two points. (I would note that we are trying to also keep incident-free next year's pan-American games in Indianapolis.) The arrest earlier this month of five Sikh terrorists in Montreal before they could even get to New York City and put a bomb aboard an Air India flight is another example of the second point on the role of good intelligence, as well as good cooperation with other governments.

Third, by and large, the systematic organized commission of violent acts for political purposes against innocent persons is not a part of our culture. In Europe and the Middle East, it has been present generation after generation after generation. Violence in America tends to be either spontaneous or for criminal, not political, purposes. Terrorist groups do spring up from time to time in the United States, particularly during periods of high sociopolitical tension as in the 1970s. They usually wither away rapidly--with help from the FBI--rather than renew themselves as in the Middle East and Europe. It seems to me that this is, in good part, due to the deep-rooted belief by Americans that there are peaceful means of political change and for improving one's economic situation, that our system is ultimately responsive. Thus, the continuation of low levels of terrorism will depend, in good part, upon the continued responsiveness of our system of federal, state, and city government. In the present Gramm-Rudman era this will not be easy. You mayors will have a big role to play.

One might think that ethnic or nationality groups would be more prone to terrorism--particularly when it is rampant in their country or has been used by extremists of similar origin such as Armenians, Palestinians, and Iranians. However, the record shows this is not so. Unlike Europe, for example, where those of Middle East ethnic origin or national origin often feel and act as alienated strangers and so are more prone to provide help for terrorist activities by their brethren, in this country even those who have entered illegally tend to feel and act as Americans concerned with the well being of this country and with what they see as their rightful place in it. Again, it is important to continue this state of affairs, despite pressures building against it for reasons of our own self-interest.

Finally, I want to highlight the important role played by the FBI and other law enforcement agencies. In the United States combating terrorism is not the sole responsibility of the FBI but, rather, the joint responsibility of federal, state, and local law enforcement authorities. While the FBI has been designated the *lead* federal agency to counter terrorism within the United States, state and local agencies are charged with law enforcement and public safety responsibilities in their jurisdictions. In order effectively to achieve our mutual counterterrorism objectives, therefore, the FBI has entered into joint operations with local agencies in several field divisions where specific and persistent terrorist-related activities have been present. The significant successes achieved against domestic terrorist groups are attributable, in part, to a pooling of these personnel and resources.

The FBI first experimented with the task force concept in 1979, when the bank robbery problem in New York City had grown to epidemic proportions. It became clear to the leadership of the New York City Police Department and the FBI that an innovative solution was required to address an increasingly dangerous situation. Accordingly, a formalized agreement, sealed by a signed Memorandum of Understanding, was entered into by both agencies. Detectives and FBI agents were detailed to a newly created task force jointly supervised by the FBI and New York City Police Department personnel. The idea was to eliminate duplication of effort, share resources, and foster cooperation.

The experiment worked. In a very real way, the task force became more than a sum of its parts. The skills and knowledge possessed by the police officers complemented those possessed by the agents, and a spirit of cooperation replaced counterproductive competitiveness. The number of bank robberies soon declined dramatically, and the solution rate soared.

With this precedent having been established, a Joint Terrorist Task Force was established in New York in 1980. This task force, in its six years of existence, has been successful in the investigation of numerous domestic and international terrorist groups operating in the United States. Its success was instrumental in the establishment of the much bigger task force for the Los Angeles Olympics and encouraged the creation of similar task forces in Chicago, New Haven, Newark, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Boston, and Washington, D.C., to address specific terrorism problems in those areas.

OVERSEAS TERRORISM

Let us shift back to terrorism overseas and look at why it has gotten worse. In trying to get a broad picture of the international terrorism scene, it might be useful to start with regional pieces.

First, Middle East-related terrorism, which has been the major factor in the recent increase of international terrorism: the number of incidents in the region rose from 109 in 1983 to 378 in 1985. Also, in 1985 there were another 60 incidents by Middle East groups which took place in Europe or elsewhere, meaning that Mideast terrorism accounts for over 50 percent of the worldwide total for 1985. So far in 1986, there have been 214 incidents of Middle East origin with a dozen conducted by Middle East groups in Europe.

There are a variety of factors and actors behind this situation, of which the Israeli-Palestinian dispute is only one component. This category includes terrorism conducted by radical Arab governments and Palestinian groups trying to disrupt the peace process, destroy moderate Arab governments, carry on intra-Arab power struggles, or seize a place in the world power structure as well as vent their anger at Israel and the United States.

State support is a major reason for increased Middle East terrorism. Muammer Qadhafi of Libya has used and supported terrorism around the world more for purposes of personal pride and national power than for any real concern for Palestinians or the Arab-Israeli dispute. Syria has also

used terrorism systematically to enhance its power in the region. Iranian terrorism is inspired by Khomeini's brand of politico-religious fanaticism, linked both to the Iran-Iraq war and the desire to *purify* the Islamic world by removing pro-Western Arab governments and the Western cultural presence, starting with the United States and France.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, Cuba and Nicaragua are active state supporters of terrorism, in some cases sharing support for terrorist groups with Iran or Libya. The traditional politico-economic stimulus for guerrilla warfare and terrorism in this part of the world has recently been raised by narcotics trafficking--with traffickers using terrorists to protect processing centers and as hit men, and the terrorists obtaining money and arms from narcotics traffickers. Colombia is a particularly flagrant case in point. There is also increased cooperation and coordination among terrorist groups, especially the M-19 of Colombia and Alfara Lives of Ecuador. Peruvian and Chilean terrorism, very much on the increase, is more indigenous than dependent upon outside support. Puerto Rico is astride some of the routes used by these terrorists--including Cuba, which has actively tried to fish in troubled waters--and the narcotics traffickers. It is a serious challenge.

In Western Europe there has been a slowdown over the past year of traditional indigenous, ideological terrorism even while the spillover of Middle East terrorism has increased. This slowdown results primarily from increased security awareness and counterterrorist measures, which make operations more difficult. Belgian successes in capturing key terrorists and crippling the CCC [Communist Combatant Cells]; France capturing Andre Olivier, leader of the national faction of *Action Directe*, thus reducing the capability of this group; and Italian authorities last month in Naples convicting 62 Red Brigades terrorists and continuing to dismantle that once intimidating organization.

U.S. PROGRAM

Looking back, a key turning point for the United States in the fight against international terrorism was 1983, when the bombings took so many lives at the American Marine barracks and Embassy building in Beirut. This prompted the Reagan Administration to undertake, in late 1983, a special presidential study and issue specific new policy guidance.

This new presidential guidance led to a comprehensive counterterrorism program with higher priorities, which is based upon a combination of unilateral, multilateral, and international actions. It uses a variety of diplomatic, economic, legal, intelligence, and military means, based upon the premise that the primary legal, political, moral, and practical responsibility for dealing with terrorism abroad is that of foreign governments. If they do not have the political will or the ability to act against terrorism, the problem will get worse rather than better. What we can do alone in other countries is obviously limited, although we are strengthening our capabilities to do so. Many of our programs are aimed at getting others to do more.

Actions Taken Over the Past Two Years . The pace of our unilateral and cooperative international programs and other activities aimed at terrorism abroad has been quickening.

- We have intensified our bilateral relationships with friends around the world. We already work closely with such friends as Canada, Britain, and Israel. Meanwhile we are discussing common counterterrorism efforts with countries where we have previously not had such close ties, such as Italy, the Netherlands, Turkey, and Egypt. In one form or another we have significant cooperation efforts underway with some 50 governments.

- We have dedicated more resources and given a still higher priority to collecting, analyzing, and disseminating intelligence on terrorist groups and activities abroad, as well as sharing it with other key governments.

- We have improved the security of our embassies and consulates and heightened the security awareness of our personnel; major improvements have been made in the physical security of over 100 U.S. diplomatic missions over the past 2 years.

- Improved intelligence collection, better security, and closer international cooperation helped us deter or preempt more than 180 international terrorist actions over the past 18 months.

- We have used a wide range of our unilateral sanctions against such countries as Syria, Libya, Iran, Cuba, and Nicaragua: banning all weapon sales, imposing limitations on financial dealings, maintaining close surveillance of any of their government officials who wish to come to the United States, and imposing controls on exports of key spare parts and equipment.

- Our covert action and military capabilities for action against terrorists have been strengthened. I cannot go into details, for obvious reasons, but the success in apprehending the terrorists who hijacked the *Achille Lauro* is one example of what they can do. Another, and even more dramatic, example was the military operation against Libya in April. We will be judicious in the use of these capabilities but shall not hesitate to act when the circumstances are right.

- We have begun to cooperate more closely with the private sector in sharing information on threats abroad and how to counter them. The Overseas Security Advisory Panel has been active in systematically exchanging information on techniques and technology to counter terrorism as well as threat information. A regular but informal relationship has recently been established with the tourist industry.

- We have worked hard and successfully in international organizations such as the U.N. General Assembly and Security Council in establishing the principle that terrorism is a threat to all nations and should be considered as a crime. In the specialized U.N. agencies, new standards for aviation and maritime security have been established.

- We have made effective use of recent legislative tools, such as the rewards program, the Crime Act of 1984, and the Foreign Assistance Act. We believe it is useful to have more legal tools for the antiterrorism effort. We support, for example, S. 1429, which recently passed the Senate, making it a Federal crime to kill or conduct other terrorist acts against American overseas.

- In 2 years over 2,000 civilian officials from 32 friendly foreign governments have participated in our antiterrorism assistance (ATA) program managed by the State Department; this not only improves their abilities to protect their own governments and U.S. and other citizens in their countries from terrorist attack, it also means closer cooperation with the United States in combating terrorism.

The ATA program is a very good example of a cooperative effort against terrorism which involves local governments such as yours. A number of metropolitan police departments around the country--ranging from New York City to Charleston, South Carolina, and Miami, Florida, to San Diego, California--have helped train their counterparts from overseas. This has been a very successful program. The State Department helps organize the sessions; local U.S. city and county authorities, such as police departments, and the FBI, the FAA [Federal Aviation Administration], and others provide the facilities and skilled manpower on a reimbursable basis. We also provide some limited equipment, such as airport x-rays and bomb disposal equipment. If your police or other experts are invited to take part in the program, I hope you can participate. Fighting terrorism has been a cooperative effort.

THE PAST YEAR

In June 1985, a year ago, we suffered through the hijacking, hostage-taking, and murder aboard TWA 847. This dramatically televised 17-day event was followed by the *Achille Lauro* hijacking and murder plus the deliberate killing of unarmed U.S. marines and civilians in San Salvador, terrorist attacks in Colombia, bombing of military bases in German, and the December 27 bloody attacks upon the Rome and Vienna airports. These underlined the importance of the new action study being completed at year's end by Vice President Bush's task force and its recommendations for a still more active unilateral and multilateral effort to counter terrorism. The task force report found the system in place to be sound but in need of fine-tuning and higher priority with a more action-oriented urgent approach.

The first tangible reaction was the President's January 8 decision to stop all U.S. business activities in Libya, seize its assets in this country, and call for our allies to join in a campaign of collective, nonmilitary pressure strong enough to convince Qadhafi to stop his support for terrorism. The President made clear that the United States reserved the right to take unilateral action if collective action failed to deter Qadhafi. Unfortunately, there was virtually no response by our allies, and Libyan-supported terrorism directed against the United States became more blatant, widespread, and deadly. This included orders in late March from Tripoli to Libyan embassies to conduct attacks on U.S.-related targets in dozens of countries aimed at inflicting large-scale, indiscriminate casualties.

One result of Qadhafi's orders was the bombing of Berlin's La Belle Discotheque where there were 200 casualties, including two American sergeants killed. Similar, but abortive, attempts took place elsewhere. For example, French and Turkish security forces working with the United States discovered, prevented, and publicly exposed actions by Libyan officials to conduct very lethal attacks against U.S. Government installations. In other countries, the Libyans never got that far, probably recognizing their inadequacies in the face of close controls.

President Reagan's response was to invoke the right of any country to self-defense when attacked by another country. This led to the carefully calibrated April 15 raids upon terrorist-related targets in Tripoli and Benghazi, a tremendous shock to Qadhafi who apparently believed he could insult and even kill Americans with impunity.

What has been the result of the limited use of force in self-defense against Libya?

First, a marked reduction in Qadhafi-supported terrorism, apparently due to internal Libyan disarray, the compromise of Libya's external terror network, and the tighter control placed on Libyan activities all around the world by governments more determined than before to avoid terrorism in their countries.

Second, absence of strong negative reaction, which some had feared (and Qadhafi had expected) from other Arab governments or the U.S.S.R. The former have showed little sympathy and no tangible support for Qadhafi, to his evident anger. The latter's words have been strongly supportive, but their military support has been zero--another shock to Qadhafi's flawed preception of the world.

Third, a sudden recognition by European and other governments of the serious dangers posed by international terrorism and a new willingness to work together to deter and prevent it.

For example, the Foreign Ministers of the 12 European Community (EC) countries on April 21 agreed to reduce the size of the Libyan People's Bureaus and increase cooperation among law enforcement and intelligence agencies. They also agreed to impose tight controls upon the entry and movement of all Libyans, including diplomats and other government officials. On May 5 in

Tokyo, the leaders of the seven governments of the economic summit countries agreed to a series of actions to be taken against international terrorism and states who support it, again identifying Libya. In addition to reiterating and strengthening the actions agreed to by the EC, the Tokyo statement called for improved extradition procedures, strengthening the Bonn declaration on civil aviation security, and greater international cooperation generally, including use of the United Nations.

The Europeans also agreed to cut off military sales to Libya and not to fill in behind the departing American skilled personnel. Italy--which has longstanding major historic, cultural, and economic ties with Libya--nevertheless has reduced its presence from about 17,000 to less than 2,000 since the beginning of this year and is beginning to cut its imports of Libyan oil.

Actions to make Qadhafi understand he must pay an increasing price for supporting terrorism have now been taken by 14 of the 15 governments who participated in these two meetings, Greece being the only exception. Some 100 Libyans, most of them so-called diplomats, have been expelled; economic and commercial ties have dwindled rapidly. The specific actions vary from country to country, but we can draw two conclusions about them. First, they are unquestionably having a significant direct political and economic impact on Libya and seem to be having an indirect but also appreciable impact on other governments which support terrorism; second, they represent an unprecedented collective effort to combat terrorism, which has important future implications for international enforcement.

We must keep the momentum going, both unilaterally and multilaterally. At the same time, we must not exaggerate the threat or allow ourselves to be intimidated by it. Nothing encourages terrorists more than seeing that they have succeeded in panicking public or political opinion, which is a paramount objective.

While losses of tourist dollars help prod some countries, such as Greece, to tighten up their security, and changed vacation plans have benefited some U.S. cities and the Caribbean, there seems to have been an excessive preoccupation with terrorism by the media and public in recent months. Let us remember that only 28 Americans died of international terrorism last year, 28 too many, but still not a large number compared to the millions who went abroad. A number of friendly countries are suffering important economic losses as a result of U.S. public reaction. This may cause the terrorists to feel that they are succeeding in creating tensions within the Western Alliance and to believe that they can be successful over time in creating an isolationist mentality in this country, which will erode our important economic, strategic, and political interests abroad. Such a feeling would only encourage more attacks upon Americans as well as damage our broader interests.

In summation, we must take a cool, calm, and cooperative as well as determined approach in fighting terrorism. The terrorists must not be allowed to get the best of us. Progress has been made and more will be, but fighting terrorism is a long-term effort which will draw on the best within us.