Practical Measures for Dealing with Terrorism

By

Honorable L. Paul Bremer, III
Ambassador-at-Large for
Counter Terrorism

[The following is an address by Ambassador Bremer before the Discover Conference on Terrorism in a Technological World, presented in Washington D.C., on 22 January 1987. The address has been published as *Current Policy No. 913* by the Bureau of Public Affairs, Department of State.]

Today I would like to discuss how our government is working to suppress terrorism. The problem is global, but it presents a special problem for those of us who live in democratic countries. We face this special problem because terrorism's most significant characteristic is that it despises and seeks to destroy the fundamentals of Western democracy--respect for individual life and the rule of law.

Terrorism is very real, the numbers are sobering.

- Last year there were almost 800 incidents of international terrorism.
- The citizens and property of over 80 countries were the victims or targets of international terrorist attacks.
- International terrorist activity in 1986 caused almost 2,000 casualties.

For me terrorism has a personal side. There are memorial plaques in the State Department lobby listing the names of American diplomats who died in the line of duty since 1776. When I joined the Foreign Service 20 years ago, there were 81 names on those plaques. All but four died from earthquakes, plagues, and other nonpurposeful causes. But in the last 20 years, 73 additional names have been added to these plaques--Americans serving in U.S. diplomatic missions. In other words for the first 172 years of our nation's existence, we in the Foreign Service lost a member to violent, purposeful death about every 40 years. Since I joined, we have averaged one such loss about every 90 days.

These facts, listed on plaques not 50 yards from my office, are a constant reminder of the rise of terrorism in the past two decades. But this rise is not uncontested. The U.S. Government, working on its own and in coordination with friendly states, actively pursues coordinated strategies to suppress terrorism at home and abroad.

Our strategy stresses practical measures to identify, track, apprehend, prosecute, and punish terrorists. Additionally, we are working to impose diplomatic, economic, and--where all else fails--military burdens on states supporting terrorism.

PRACTICAL MEASURES AGAINST TERRORISTS

Let me say a word first about these practical measures.

Identification of terrorists is the first and perhaps most difficult step. If we are to prevent terrorist attacks, if we are to apprehend those responsible, we must know several things:

- Which groups are we dealing with? What are their immediate and longer term operational plans? Their political goals? How violence prone are they? Do they carry out their threats? Where are their bases of operation?

- Who are the members? How and why were they recruited? What are their nationalities, ages, motivations? Are they prone to suicide attacks? How well armed and trained are they?

Putting this information together is slow, expensive, frustrating, and difficult. Groups secretive by nature change their names, rearrange their internal loyalties and groupings, and change bases with frustrating frequency. This makes terrorist groups extremely difficult to penetrate.

The information which comes to us is almost invariably fragmentary. In bits and pieces we pick up the gist of a meeting, a name, a pseudonym, a photograph, a sample of a bomb. Intelligence analysts, the unsung heros of counter-terrorism, work with these fragments to convert them into the information we need.

Today we are gathering and sharing more data on terrorists with allies and other friendly countries. We and our allies have developed a number of practical measures in this field. For example, our government has drawn up a list of known and suspected terrorists and circulated these lookout lists among friendly governments. Every day I read dozens of cables indicating that intelligence about terrorists has been passed to us, that we are passing information to other countries, and that our friends are sharing with each other.

While we can never know enough, the effects of these measures are gratifying. Frequently, the understanding which emerges from pooled intelligence is greater than the sum of its parts. This synergistic effect makes the world safer for all of us.

Second, once identified, a terrorist must be located and tracked. At international borders terrorists may be required to produce identification and subject themselves and their baggage to search. Border crosses are thus a weak spot for terrorists and an opportunity for us. Just last week, Mohammed Hamadei, who is suspected of involvement in the TWA Flight 847 hijacking, was arrested as he attempted to enter West Germany through Frankfurt airport. At almost the same time, another man was captured by Italian authorities while attempting to smuggle explosives into Milan.

To exploit this terrorist vulnerability, we must also combat the fraudulent use of travel documents by terrorists. The passports of many countries are often easy for a sophisticated forger to duplicate or alter. The terrorists who attacked the Rome and Vienna airports in 1985 used passports Libya confiscated from Tunisian guest workers. The problem becomes even more difficult when governments issue authentic travel documents to terrorists, as Syrian authorities did in the case of Nizar Hindawi, the man convicted of trying to bomb an El Al 747 in London last year. The U.S. Government is working now to make the travel documents we issue more secure, and we are cooperating with other countries to share information about false travel documents.

Third, we and our allies must resolve to act forcefully on the information we have obtained by apprehending terrorists. Apprehending terrorists is inherently more dangerous than capturing common criminals. Terrorists are frequently better armed and usually more prepared to shoot than either common criminals or civilian police. The infamous terrorist Carlos managed to kill two French policemen because they thought they were dealing with a common criminal.

Capturing terrorists, therefore, requires not only well-coordinated intelligence but policemen armed more like soldiers--or soldiers fulfilling functions more like those of police. Crisis management experts and specially equipped and trained forces are needed. Here, too, we have developed practical means of cooperation. Our government provides training and equipment to nations which are trying to deal with terrorism. Since 1984, more than 4,000 people from over 40 countries have participated in our counter-terrorism assistance programs.

This training pays off. On one recent occasion, airport personnel in an Asian country became suspicious of some travelers because of their age, nationality, itinerary, and spending habits. When the suspicions were brought to our attention, we moved quickly to work with the airline and the security forces of three foreign countries to monitor this group's movements throughout their travels.

The fourth practical measure is prosecution of captured terrorists, a seemingly obvious step too often not taken. Prosecuting terrorists in the face of terrorist threats tests political will. Recently, we have been encouraged by the action many countries have taken to prosecute terrorists in spite of these threats.

In prosecution, too, we have a program for cooperating with friendly countries. The United States provides forensic and other technical experts to assist other countries in their pretrial investigations. Through mutual legal assistance treaties, we make witnesses or other evidence available. At the same time, we are working with other countries to strengthen our extradition treaties.

Even so, problems remain. We still see too many tacit agreements whereby terrorists are permitted free transit of or residence in a country in return for not attacking the host country's interests.

Bringing terrorists to justice--punishing them--is the final step in the process of fighting terrorists. Merely thwarting them is not enough, for if the guilty can know no fear, then the innocent can know no rest. Happily, the rule of law is asserting itself more and more. We see fewer terrorists released without trial. The Italians last year tried and convicted the *Achille Lauro* hijackers. In October and November, the British and West German Governments tried and convicted terrorists for the attempted El Al bombing and the actual bombing of the German-Arab Friendship Society in Berlin. Other important terrorist trials are coming up in Madrid, Ankara, Paris, Rome, and Vienna.

These prosecutions must continue. There is nothing, no case study, no example, to suggest that there is any permanent advantage to treating terrorists as other than criminals.

We may be seeing the results of these measures. Our preliminary figures show that international terrorism incidents in 1986 were at about the same level as 1985--a considerable change from previous years which saw annual increases of 30 to 40 percent. Moreover, terrorist incidents of Middle Eastern origin in Europe dropped almost 70 percent last year.

STATE SUPPORT OF TERRORISM

While our activities with allies to identify, track, apprehend, prosecute, and punish terrorists show progress, that progress is more difficult and slower against one particular class of terrorists: those enjoying the support of a sovereign nation. With the help of a friendly state, a terrorist has capacities he lacks if he has to act on his own. Especially as a fugitive.

- When a terrorist obtains travel and identification documents from a country, it becomes harder to identify and track him. When Nizer Hindawi went to London to blow up the El Al flight, he carried an authentic Syrian service passport issued to him.

- A terrorist who enjoys the patronage of a state has a ready source of weapons and a means to transport them. Diplomatic pouches are exempt from search by international convention, and the baggage handlers at state-owned airlines don't interfere when told not to examine a particular parcel. Nizer Hindawi's bomb was brought into England by Syria's official airline.

- Countries like Libya, Syria, and Iran make a terrorist's work easier by providing a place to train. It is not easy for a terrorist operating alone, especially if he is a fugitive, to find an isolated location where he can learn to fire automatic weapons, assemble and detonate explosives.

- Financial support from state sponsors allows terrorists to spend more time on operations because they need not rob banks or traffic in drugs to raise money.

- States can provide terrorists with refuge, an important support. Safe houses allow terrorists a rest from extraordinary strains of life underground. Being able to live and to plan future actions without fear of immediate arrest and punishment is of enormous psychological value to a terrorist.

The state giving these benefits to terrorists receives value in return.

- A group of state-supported terrorists costs less per year than a company of regular soldiers. But the terrorist can do much more to intimidate another state.

- Using surrogates makes it easier for the sponsoring state to deny responsibility for actions which, if undertaken overtly, could lead to war.

- Through terrorism a small state or leader can attract the attention, if not the respect, of the world. We know Qadhafi's name not because of the "wisdom" in his "Green Book," but because of his support of terrorism.

FIGHTING TERRORISM TOGETHER

It is important that we complement our practical measures against terrorists with actions against the states which sponsor them. We must work with friendly states to make it clear that we will not conduct business as usual with states supporting terrorism.

Simply put, the community of nations must increase the political, economic, and yes, perhaps even the military costs of helping terrorists until the sponsoring state cannot afford to pay them any longer.

Here, too, we are beginning to see progress. Over the past year, there has been a growing political consensus among European governments that more has to be done. The Europeans have made nearly a dozen major statements or agreements concerning measures against countries supporting terrorism. These include reducing the size of diplomatic missions from countries supporting terrorism and declarations that terrorists' attacks can never be justified and are a disservice to any political cause.

Specifically, in the last 60 days, Britain broke diplomatic relations with Syria, the United States withdrew its ambassador to Damascus, and the Federal Republic of Germany announced that it would stop its development aid to Syria. Additionally, the European Community announced a series of economic, political, diplomatic, and security-related measures against Syria. Why? Clear sponsorship of terrorists, proven in open court.

We have also seen increasing cooperation in our effort to drive home this message to Colonel Qadhafi. Last summer West European governments expelled more than 100 so-called Libyan diplomats and businessmen. This heavy blow to Libya's terrorist infrastructure in Europe, combined with the tightened security measures at airports and elsewhere, undoubtedly played a role in sharply reducing Libyan-related terrorist incidents after May. Indeed, preliminary figures for 1986 show a substantial decline in the number of terrorist incidents which we can identify as being conducted on behalf of a state.

CONCLUSION

Looking to the future, I cannot assure you a world free of terrorism any more than I can offer a world free of crime or poverty. I can assure you that your government is working internally, bilaterally, and multilaterally to reduce terrorism to the absolute minimum. There is reason to be optimistic. If the terrorists have not gone away, neither have we left the field to them.

- Cooperation with friendly governments on practical measures to combat terrorism is growing.
- There have been significant displays of coordinated multilateral actions against states sponsoring terrorism in recent months.
- The rule of law is at work. In London and Berlin, public trials have resulted in stiff sentences for terrorists. And more trials are coming up.

Suppressing terrorism will be neither quick nor easy. But I know our strategies of coordination on the police, intelligence, and diplomatic levels are working and showing results. We will have setbacks. But I am convinced that we, the people of the world's democracies, will prevail over those who would, through terror, take from us the fruits of two centuries of political progress.