

INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM: CHALLENGE FOR THE 1980s

Remarks Prepared for Use by DDCI

Washington Insight Briefing April 23, 1986

Ladies and Gentlemen. Let me first express my appreciation to you for being invited to address this gathering on a subject that is much on our minds, the spread of international terrorism. This evening I will share with you how we assess this new war without borders conducted against an enemy that is hard to find and harder still to defend against.

Terrorism is a cancer that is spreading. In 1983 we recorded about 500 international terrorist incidents; last year the number rose to about 800. The United States and its friends and allies continue to be the primary targets. The number of persons killed or injured in 1985 exceeded 2,200 -- more than any other year, more even than the terrible toll in 1983 when the US and French contingents of the peacekeeping force in Lebanon were bombed. The rising casualty rate reflects the increased use of large bombs by terrorists as well as greater willingness to harm innocent bystanders through indiscriminate attacks.

What the terrorist does is kill, maim, kidnap, torture. His victims may be children in the schoolroom, innocent travelers on airplanes, businessmen returning home from work, political leaders, diplomats, soldiers, civilians anywhere. The terrorist's victims may have no particular political identity; or they may be political symbols, like Aldo Moro or -- perhaps -- Pope John Paul II. They may be kidnapped and held for ransom, maimed or simply blown to bits. One defining characteristic of the terrorist is his choice of method: the terrorist chooses violence as the instrument of first resort.

It is terrorism of Middle Eastern origin that accounts for much of the increase in international terrorism over the past two years. In 1983, Middle Eastern groups accounted for about one-fourth of all international terrorist incidents. In 1985 their share had reached almost one-half. The majority of US casualties occur in incidents involving Middle Easterners. Middle Eastern terrorist bombs tend to be larger, more sophisticated, and use higher grade explosives. Terrorists from the Middle East are generally more professional and proficient in clandestine operations and thus are more difficult to detect and stop than other terrorists.

The high level of international terrorism by Middle Eastern groups owes much to state sponsorship -- particularly by Syria, Iran, and Libya. These states use terrorism and support to international terrorist groups as instruments of domestic and foreign policy. These states train, finance, and arm numerous dissident and terrorist groups. They send agents and surrogates on missions around the world using terror to attack opponents and the personnel and installations of the US and proWestern Arab states. They use diplomatic and cultural missions to support terrorists. We know, for example, that several senior officials of the Iranian Government are directly involved in terrorist activity. Libya provides aid and comfort to the notorious Palestinian terrorist Abu Nidal whose followers were responsible for the massacres in Rome and Vienna airports.

You have heard the President's statement outlining the evidence for Libyan complicity in the Berlin nightclub bombing earlier this month. We also have compelling evidence of Libyan involvement in other recently planned attacks against the United States, several of which were designed to cause maximum casualties similar to the Berlin bombing.

- France expelled two members of the Libyan People's Bureau in Paris for their involvement in a planned attack on visa applicants waiting in line at the US Embassy.
  
- France subsequently expelled two disgruntled Fatah Force 17 members recruited by Libya to conduct another operation against the United States in Paris.
  
- In early April a Libyan-inspired plot to attack the US Embassy in Beirut was aborted when the 107 mm rocket exploded on launch.
  
- Turkish police in late March arrested two Tunisians in Istanbul who claimed they were planning on behalf of the Libyans to use explosives against a US target in Turkey; the operation was planned to inflict heavy casualties.
  
- We have reports of well over 35 Libyan-associated threats, including surveillance or planned attacks, against US personnel and facilities in Europe, Africa, and Asia thus far this year. We note Libyan-sponsored surveillance of US Embassy personnel in Khartoum, where a State Department officer was shot last week.

Nor is the United States alone as a victim of Qadhafi's terrorist program. British Foreign Secretary Howe last Friday publicly charged that his government had proof of Libyan complicity in the death of the two British hostages in Beirut the previous day.

My remarks thus far have dwelt on Middle Eastern terrorism and certainly that is uppermost in our minds these past few days. But I would be remiss if I were to leave you with the impression that international terrorism wears only a Middle Eastern garment. West European terrorist groups were also active in 1985, and many of their favorite targets are US or NATO-related facilities.

In West Germany, for example, sympathizers and hardcore members of the Red Army Faction carried out more than a dozen attacks against US and NATO targets last year, including the carbombing at the Rhein-Main Airbase in August. West German security officials have made major inroads against this organization but it is still capable of conducting another major attack. A Belgian group calling itself the Communist Combatant Cells, which first came to our attention in late 1984 when it conducted a series of attacks against NATO and defense

related targets, conducted some 30 attacks last year. It has been quiet since December however when Belgian security officials arrested several of its key members. Greek terrorists were also busy in 1985 with many of their attacks taking the form of arson and bombings of vehicles belonging to US military personnel in Athens. The French terrorist group Action Directe and the Italian terrorist Red Brigades were active last year but most of their attention was focused on domestic targets. Nevertheless, their propaganda and political orientation is strongly anti-American and at any time they could resume targeting US interests either singly or in cooperation with other likeminded groups.

Latin America also continues to be the scene of terrorist violence. Although the overwhelming problem is domestic political terrorism, we recorded over 75 incidents that were directed against US interests. Most of the attacks were bombings against property, but we also noted a large number of armed attacks and kidnappings. The threat to US facilities, personnel, and interests was particularly high in Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru where strongly anti-US terrorist groups are active.

Asia remains on the periphery of international terrorism but the activities of two groups merit our attention. Sikh terrorism in 1985 was international in scope. Sikh extremists were probably responsible for the worst single incident ever recorded -- the Air India crash last June in which over 300 persons died. Japan's radical Chookakoo Ha made the headlines in 1985 with a rocket attack on the US Consulate General in Kobe in January and again in late November when it sabotaged a large section of Japan's commuter rail system. In recent weeks one of their crudely made rockets was fired at the US Embassy and another at the Emperor's Palace. They did no serious damage. And only last week they attempted a rocket attack against a US air base but it detonated prematurely destroying the truck used to launch it.

Let me now turn to the Soviet connection. It may seem snadowy to some, but it seems very close to me. Iran, Libya, and the Soviet Union are hardly allies, but they share a fundamental hostility to the West. The Soviets, who hold no moral objections to the use of terrorism and see much of the unrest it creates as ultimately beneficial to their foreign policy objectives, do not participate in any international efforts to block terrorism or to join in multilateral efforts

to combat it. In backing revolutionary causes against established governments, it is largely a matter of indifference to the Soviets whether terrorist tactics are used as long as the groups that commit these acts attack non-Soviet or non-Bloc targets. The Soviets contribute to international terrorism in a number of ways:

- The Soviets provide political backing, funding, and in some cases arms and military training to groups or states such as Libya that participate in or are linked to terrorists.
  
- The Soviets have at least indirectly given material support to groups that have committed terrorist acts in the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America.
  
- The Soviets have trained a number of personnel linked to or belonging to national liberation groups, and they openly supply arms to numerous governments and groups that conduct terrorist activities. Libya is a leading example.



- The Soviets support certain Palestinian groups, East European states, South Yemen, and Cuba, all of whom support terrorist groups or groups that commit terrorist acts. Bulgaria's state trading organization KINTEX -- which is essentially a state smuggling operation -- and Czechoslovakia's comparable organization OMNIPOL are among the most prominent companies whose weapons eventually have appeared in terrorist hands.
  
- The East Europeans, almost certainly with Soviet knowledge and support, provide safehaven, transit privileges and movement of weapons and bombs for terrorists.

Let me turn briefly to the murky area of collusion between the big drug dealers and the terrorists and their supporters. While these two groups have radically differing goals, there is cooperation between some terrorist and narcotics groups for tactical reasons. A symbiotic relationship has grown up between the narcotics dealers along the Caribbean Coast and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia who ordinarily would have little to do with one another. The drug merchant needs a secure transit point for his goods to reach markets in the

United States. One such transit point is Cuba. The Cubans funnel arms and money to the guerrilla groups through drug merchant channels. Although Fidel Castro, in interviews with American journalists, roundly denies having dealings with drug merchants, we've caught him red-handed. By helping drug dealers push cocaine and marijuana, Castro gains improved access to the Cuban community in South Florida, contributes to crime and disorder in the United States, and aids his revolutionary offspring in Colombia.

Similarly, we caught the Sandinista government in Nicaragua red-handed in narcotic production and trafficking between Colombia and Miami, apparently looking for money which we have seen deposited in Panama and used to bolster their sagging economy.

Let me now turn to the problems of US intelligence analysts and counterterrorism policymakers as they seek to tackle the problem of international terrorism. In order to prevent terrorist plans or disrupt their activities we need information about them, but the very nature of terrorist groups and their activities makes this task extremely complicated.

Terrorist groups are very small. We estimate that many number fewer than two dozen hard core members. Although such groups may have many more sympathizers and supporters, those persons responsible for the spectacular bombings or assassinations are relatively few and well-concealed. They sometimes use unwitting persons -- such as the woman caught with a bomb in her luggage at the London airport last week. Increasingly we find that people who come together to conduct an attack were not known to each other previously and that only the leader knows all the details of the arrangements and participants. As a result even when we capture one of the perpetrators, he may be unable to tell us much about the group behind the attack.

The central core of terrorist groups is tightly knit and difficult to penetrate. Middle Eastern groups frequently have kinship, village, or tribal links; whereas West European groups tend to represent people with intellectual and personal ties dating from student days. In short, the key members of the terrorist group know each other very well and outsiders would have difficulty establishing their bona fides, making penetration of the core group by police or intelligence agents virtually impossible.

The operating life of any single group of terrorists is often no more than a few years. Likewise the typical terrorist leader has a relatively short business life, although there are exceptions who have been plying their trade for several years. This intensifies the pressure on intelligence collectors and analysts to quickly determine the organization and structure of groups so prompt action can be taken against them.

Terrorist groups are not stationary, that is they seldom operate from fixed facilities. Terrorists may learn weapons handling and bomb building at an insurgent camp or other such facility, but they don't need to. A hotel room, attic, or basement would do equally well for most of the training they need. Thus just because we learn where the "bomb factory" was for the last attack does not mean we have a lead on where it will be for the next one.

Terrorists frequently use rudimentary, but highly secure, operating and communications methods. They depend on couriers and commercial telephones. Terrorist equipment and weapons are often stolen from military and police stores or else purchased on the flourishing gray arms market. Even relatively sophisticated bombs can be manufactured from components easily

purchased from a hardware store or stolen from a commercial construction company. One distinction is worth noting here. European terrorists by and large supply themselves. Middle Eastern terrorists are usually supplied by their friends, including the Soviet Bloc.

Terrorists are opportunists and quick to copy what works politically or technically. This makes it hard to separate copycat attacks from a campaign that is based on cooperation or links between groups.

How do we cope with these small bands of highly trained people, most of them fanatics, some ready to give up life itself to do their increasingly sophisticated evil deeds? First we are obviously acquiring as much information we can about terrorist groups including their modus operandi, organizational structure, personnel, support, financial, and communications arrangements, and their relationships with other groups or state sponsors. Much of this is pure basic research, compiling large databases, and attempting to fill in the gaps. It is not very glamorous and the people who do it do not capture the headlines, but it is the foundation upon which the US counterterrorist effort rests. Continuing collection and analysis enables us to improve our ability to detect trends in

terrorist operations and upgrade security in areas that are most likely at risk. Continuing research allows us to determine the vulnerabilities of terrorist groups and formulate plans for disrupting their activities.

This is not a problem for the United States alone, but a task in which the civilized nations of the world must cooperate. With increasing tempo and effectiveness we are developing a worldwide counterterrorist network made up of the intelligence, security, and police organizations of the threatened nations. They exchange intelligence, share data banks, work together operationally, provide training and technical capabilities to the less advanced of their number, undertake surveillance and other intelligence assignments for each other, report their findings, transmit alerts and warnings.

On several occasions, our warning and detailed intelligence has directly assisted foreign authorities in capturing terrorists. Through timely intelligence work, for example, two sophisticated suitcase bombs were intercepted and disabled and warnings on the nature of these types of bombs were provided promptly to intended and potential victims worldwide. This warning led to the discovery of two more such devices by cooperating services.

Here in Washington, we have made very good progress in developing a system of very rapid communications to gather assessments, have reports tested by intelligence experts throughout our government and elsewhere, and pass conclusions quickly to the point of the threat -- whether in the United States or overseas.

We obviously need an international effort along the same lines, however, for the United States is only one of an increasing number of targets for terrorists. We also need more vigorous action by the international community in general if we are to contain the terrorist challenge. Western nations have on the whole been weak in applying economic, political, and diplomatic measures to check terrorism. Too often countries are inhibited by fear of losing commercial opportunities or of provoking further terrorism. There is a common, but badly mistaken, belief on the part of some of our allies and friends that appeasement will lead to safety. Past experience with terrorist hijacking shows that the international community can move in concert and that when it does it can be effective.

The terrorist depends upon two factors for success in conducting his war on the mind. The first, and most important

of these, is coverage by the media. In this decade more people can be addressed by newspaper, television, radio, and magazines than ever before in history. What is more, the media is so effective that millions of people may learn of a terrorist attack that has taken place half a world away in a matter of minutes -- or at most, hours. It is no accident that the vast bulk of the most heinous terrorist murders, bombings and hijackings take place -- not in isolated villages in Africa or among remote Asian tribesmen -- but in cities that possess excellent communication links with the rest of the world. The terrorist hopes that his deeds will be bannered on the six o'clock news throughout most of the developed world.

The second factor that aids terrorists in their campaign is the nature of modern urban society. The concentration of population offers anonymity to the terrorist. Weapons and money can be obtained through an infinite number of channels, thus preserving the terrorist's operational security. The variety and efficiency of transportation enhances the terrorist's mobility. Moreover, industrialized societies have more vulnerable high-value targets -- such as computer centers, airlines, factories, shopping arcades, and even apartment complexes. Western democracies by their very nature are particularly vulnerable to terrorist attacks.



I have spoken about preventive, cooperative, protective and investigative measures. What about the terrorist himself? We must take vigorous action to isolate him from his target -- attacking the public mind. That is to say we must defeat the terrorists' strategy of manipulating public perceptions. We must deny the terrorist the fruit of his labors -- namely, the ability to exploit the media to instill in the public feelings of uncertainty and fear. The media itself must play the leading role in this effort by treating news of terrorist incidents in a more reserved fashion, and by providing strong editorials that discredit the terrorists' actions.

In addition we should strive to instill in the terrorist those same pervasive feelings of fear that he seeks to instill in the public -- the feelings of constantly being the hunted, rather than the hunter. The terrorist must at all times have the impression that his movements are known, his plans understood, and his cells penetrated. We can do this, as I mentioned earlier, by improving coordination of intelligence, police and counterterrorist units, and especially by mobilizing media support to sustain the courage of the public and to convince the terrorist that his actions are repudiated by the public.

If we can do this, the terrorist will watch in frustration as his power over the media dries up and, with it, his power to assault the mind. If cut off from his sponsors, the terrorist will watch with growing apprehension as he learns that the costs and risk of his operations skyrocket while the impact of his actions plummets. The futility of terrorism then will at last be made obvious to the terrorist himself, and his devastating war on the mind and on the innocent will slowly come to an end.