

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE AINEW YORK TIMES
30 December 1985

Terror in 1985: Brutal Attacks, Tough Response

By ROBERT D. McFADDEN

As a year of hijackings, kidnappings, car bombings and murder draws to a close, reports from correspondents of The New York Times around the world indicate that governments have hardened their attitudes and toughened their security measures against a growing plague of terrorism.

Across Europe and the Middle East, where terrorists in 1985 struck more often and more brutally than in years past, governments have adopted new laws, ordered tighter defenses and forged new links of international cooperation to exchange information, catch and prosecute terrorists, and isolate nations that support them.

Even Italy and Austria, which have long been sympathetic to Palestinian and Arab causes, found their airports the targets of men with links to Palestinians on Friday, and officials' responses showed they were embarrassed.

Britain's Tough Measures

Britain, which uses tough measures to suppress Northern Ireland violence that have led to more violence, agreed last fall to give the Irish Republic a voice in the affairs of Northern Ireland.

France, where violence by leftist radicals has sharply increased in the past year, has made little progress in trying to track terrorists and is considering a range of tougher measures — including more police powers to infiltrate terrorist groups, even if these encroach upon traditional freedoms.

Israel, which has heavy antiterrorist security, found it harder in 1985 to retaliate against Palestinian terrorists. Some experts say Israel, which scattered the Palestinians when it destroyed their sanctuary in Lebanon several years ago, may have to resume using its tactics of the 1970's, when Mossad hit teams sought Palestinian terrorists.

Though many American citizens abroad have been attacked by terrorists in the last year, the United States has been spared from major violence, partly because of its own security measures and partly because targets overseas have presumably been seen by terrorists as easier marks.

After years of relative immunity, the Soviet Union, which has long backed Palestinian aspirations and countries that aid terrorists, found itself a victim in 1985 when terrorists kidnapped four Soviet Embassy workers in Beirut and

killed one of them. Moscow and other Soviet-bloc countries, in response, seemed to edge away from their past tolerance toward terrorist groups, calling for severe punishment for them.

Though the Soviet Union has not backed away from Libya and Syria, which support terrorists, or from the Palestine Liberation Organization, there have been reports that Soviet and American officials have begun to share information about terrorism in an effort to combat attacks.

Further evidence of the hardening Soviet-bloc attitudes toward terrorism came at the United Nations on Dec. 9, when the General Assembly, which has 159 members, unanimously adopted a resolution condemning all international terrorism as criminal.

Cuba Joins in Vote

"It is an important resolution — we support it all the way and wholeheartedly," said Oleg A. Troyanovsky, the chief Soviet delegate. Even Cuba, which had cast the sole vote against the resolution in the Assembly's legal committee, switched at the last minute in the full Assembly vote.

Though the United Nations vote was no more than a moral commitment, it ended more than 13 years of bitter debate over the issue and underscored a growing attitude of revulsion against terrorism in a year in which, according to State Department figures, there were more than 690 major terrorist attacks around the world.

While there is no easy way to quantify terrorism and compare it with that in years past, interviews with government officials and terrorism experts in a score of countries around the world over the weekend indicated that 1985 was one of the most active, lethal and brutal times of terrorism in years.

Children were killed. An elderly New York City man in a wheelchair was shot and hurled into the Mediterranean. There were murders without demands by some terrorists, and some bombings for which no group took responsibility.

Many Faces of Terror

There were acts of terrorism in Europe, the Middle East, Central and South America and other parts of the world in the name of various Palestinian factions, the Irish Republican Army, anti-Sandinista rebels in Nicaragua, Sikhs in India, Islamic fundamentalists, Basque separatists and others.

In March, 80 people were killed in a car bomb in Beirut. In June, an American Navy diver was slain and hostages were held for two weeks by hijackers of a Trans World Airlines jet that had just left the Athens airport, and gunmen in San Salvador killed 13 people in a cafe.

In August, a car bomb killed 50 people in Beirut. In September, 39 people were wounded in a grenade attack on a cafe in Rome. In October, gunmen seized an Italian cruise ship, the Achille Lauro, and shot Leon Klinghoffer, the New York man in a wheelchair.

In November, rebels in Bogotá, Colombia, seized a court building and 95 people, including 11 Supreme Court Justices, were killed; later that month, an Egyptair plane was hijacked and 60 of the 98 people on the jet were killed during the hijacking and the storming of the plane.

Death Toll in Hundreds

The year's toll of hundreds killed and thousands wounded was capped last Friday by attacks on crowds near El Al Israel Airlines check-in counters at airports in Rome and Vienna. The attacks seemed to symbolize much of the year's terrorism: shocking, brutal, with innocent people slain.

They also reflected the difficulties of providing effective security at public places like airports, which can hardly prevent incursions by trained, determined terrorists willing to die for a cause.

Nonetheless, governments around the world have toughened security measures and, according to experts, terrorists have responded in the past year with new tactics and strategies. Instead of directly attacking security-minded foes like Israel, for example, Palestinians have attacked softer Israeli targets in Italy, Austria and elsewhere.

Terrorists also appear to have found new ways to elude metal detectors and slip onto aircraft with weapons. And when airline security has been strengthened they have struck at more vulnerable targets, like the Achille Lauro and airport lounges.

A Year of Growing Terror

Moreover, in 1985 terrorists also made more lethal bombs, struck more frequently and tried to kill larger numbers of people in the belief that these tactics would more forcefully express their own grievances and inflict greater psychological shocks on a public that seems to be growing inured to minor acts of terrorism.

"With one or two people being killed by terrorist bombs every week," said Ariel Merari, a terrorism expert at Tel Aviv University, "terrorists feel they need to kill more people to get the same amount of attention. The public is not so easily shocked as before. Today, you have to kill a lot of people to shock the public."

Claus Walter Herberth, one of West Germany's leading academic authorities on terrorism, also said he has observed a growing quiescence of public opinion in response to the rising level of violence, as if people were becoming hardened to the horrors of terrorism.

"I believe it is a new normality," Mr. Herberth said. "It is cruel and abnormal, but it is normality. The German public is very strongly used to it."

Continued

Israel

Israeli officials said 1985 marked the re-emergence of the P.L.O., which had been destroyed as a conventional military force and crippled as a guerrilla movement when it was ousted from Lebanon and scattered throughout the Middle East in August 1982.

In the last year, at least 12 Israelis were killed by Palestinian attackers. Palestinian guerrillas were involved in 38 attacks in Israel or on Israelis in Europe in the first nine months of 1985, more than double the 1984 total for the same period, Israeli officials said.

Israeli officials say that, despite his disavowals, Yasir Arafat, the P.L.O. chairman, sanctioned many of these attacks, while rival and dissident Palestinian groups were responsible for others, seeking to embarrass him or destroy peace initiatives.

The policy of blaming Mr. Arafat appears to be based partly on the belief that he is behind many of the attacks. It is also the result of a general effort to discredit him at a critical time in the Middle East peace process.

Meanwhile, the Israelis have found it increasingly difficult to retaliate for Palestinian attacks. Experts on terrorism said the Israeli bombing of the P.L.O. headquarters near Tunis last fall was an act of desperation that had little effect on Palestinian violence and provoked an outcry by other nations.

Mr. Merari, the Tel Aviv University specialist, said Israel, with no more easy-to-reach targets, might have to return to the "underground" tactics used a decade ago, when Israeli agents went after individual Palestinians.

And with nations like Syria, Libya and Iran accused of clandestinely providing terrorists with weapons, training and sanctuary, Israeli officials feel they will have to make it clear that such nations will be held responsible for their clients' actions.

Egypt

It was an Egyptian jetliner flying out of Athens that was hijacked to Malta on Nov. 23. The next day, after Egyptian commandos stormed the plane, 60 of the 98 people who had been on the plane were dead. It was also an Egyptian plane, carrying the four Palestinians accused of hijacking the Achille Lauro, that was forced by American fighter jets to land in Italy in October.

The Egyptian Government has clearly been embarrassed by its ties to Palestinians. The semi-official Egyptian newspaper Al Gomhouriya, after the shootings in Rome and Vienna on Friday, reflected Egypt's quandary by referring to Egyptian opposition to terrorism, then criticizing Israel for blaming the P.L.O.

"Naturally, we condemn every terrorist action that victimizes innocent civilians," the paper said Saturday, "but what is remarkable is Israel's rush to put the blame for yesterday's events on the P.L.O., although the organization's attitude to this kind of operation has been clear for years."

Britain

The Government of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher has taken a hard line on terrorism, warning that no prisoners would be released, no statements made, no hijacked airliners allowed to take off and no other concessions made in response to terrorists' demands.

The Prime Minister has also appealed to news organizations to "deprive terrorists of the oxygen of publicity," but beyond appeals for restraint, the Government has not tried to invoke censorship or employ coercion.

The Irish Republican Army is the Government's main worry. The organization says it has killed 23 policemen this year; there have been bomb and mortar attacks on six police stations since Dec. 5.

Britain's decision last fall to give the Irish Republic a voice in Northern Ireland's affairs is partly an effort to starve the I.R.A. of local support and to improve security in a region where harsh measures have angered many nationalists.

Tough Measures Criticized

The measures include the use of plastic bullets and undercover units, trial without jury, the use of uncorroborated testimony of paid informers, and the Emergency Powers Act and the Prevention of Terrorism Act, under which suspects can be held for a week without charges. All have been criticized by the Irish Government, British civil liberties groups and a range of groups in Northern Ireland.

Britain has tight controls on Irish flights at airports. Travelers to and from Ireland and Northern Ireland must file information about the purpose and duration of their trips and where they will stay; all passengers, even children, undergo body searches; and luggage is hand-searched as well as X-rayed.

Douglas Hurd, the former Northern Ireland Secretary who is now Home Secretary, recently proposed a 10-point program to combat terrorism, stressing international cooperation. "Terrorism knows no frontiers," he said, "and those who fight terrorism must learn to work together across frontiers."

He called for all countries to refuse substantive concessions to terrorist demands, for exchanges of information on terrorists, for cooperation in apprehending and prosecuting terrorists, and for a variety of legal, diplomatic and other efforts to make it difficult for terrorists to get money, arms and help.

France

Direct Action, a radical leftist group, says it has conducted 20 terrorist attacks this year, including the bombing of the Marks & Spencer department store in Paris. Yet not a single suspect has been arrested. There also has been no progress in private and Government efforts to free four French hostages held for many months, apparently by pro-Iranian extremists in Lebanon.

There is a widespread sense of anger and frustration, and a belief that the standard security methods are no longer effective against terrorists.

"Is there ever among these fanatics who fire without shame on innocent people — on women, on children — someone who asks himself if the struggle to which he is devoted can justify in any way this madness?" Le Monde asked over the weekend.

And Le Figaro, in a front-page editorial, called for tough new measures, including greater powers for the police to infiltrate terrorist groups, even if these measures encroached on traditional freedoms. Apparently the government was already considering such steps.

François le Mouel, head of the French Antiterrorist Coordination Unit, in a confidential memo to the Interior Ministry that found its way into the press recently, complained that the police had virtually no informers or other sources to infiltrate terrorist groups.

"For more than a year," he declared, "the special services have lacked sufficiently reliable and well-placed sources."

He proposed greater use of telephone wiretaps, the reintroduction of hotel security cards for security checks, new procedures for admitting visitors from the Middle East, detention of suspects for up to four days for questioning without filing charges and more use of technology to process information on suspected terrorists.

"We will certainly have to find a difficult balance," he wrote, "between our principles of liberty and certain security measures which could impinge on them."

Italy

Defense Minister Giovanni Spadolini said he believed Italy was faced with a new generation of Mediterranean terrorists, whose goal is "to strike at the heart of countries favorable to negotiations in the Middle East."

Though no stranger to terrorism — the Red Brigades and other radical groups created chaos for years — Italy has long been relatively free from Arab violence, in part because of its friendliness to the P.L.O. and its understanding for the Palestinian cause.

But the Government of Prime Minister Bettino Craxi has, with Western allies, tried to involve the Palestinians, through the P.L.O., in a new process of trying to negotiate peace in the Middle East.

Italy, however, has become a virtual playground for Arab terrorists. A Palestinian was charged in connection with a bombing on the Via Veneto in September. Jordanian and British airline offices in Italy were attacked by terrorist, and Palestinians have been accused of the hijacking of the Achille Lauro. One gunman who survived the attack at Leonardo da Vinci Airport carried a note indicating he was a member of a renegade Palestinian group.

Continued

A lively debate has developed within the Government over what to do about it all. Abrupt changes, at least in security, appear to be in the wind, but beyond that it remains to be seen what policy changes might be wrought.

Italian officials complain that their intelligence services are lax about terrorists, and some critics contend that in Italy there is a certain tolerance toward terrorists. Italy does not harbor terrorists, though Interior Minister Luigi Scalfaro conceded that there are hundreds of thousands of Arab nationals in Italy whose movements the Government does not monitor.

Mr. Craxi and other Italian officials say the battle against terrorism needs more involvement by the Soviet Union, which might be able to moderate terrorist groups and Soviet allies that support them.

West Germany

West Germany, which was shaken in the late 1970's by acts of terrorism carried out by the Red Army Faction, has had fewer such incidents in recent years. West German officials say this is partly because terrorists have not been well organized and partly because the West Germany, with its efficient tracking of all citizens, makes life difficult for terrorists on the run.

Mr. Herberz, a leading authority on terrorism, said the West German public, like much of the world, had become more used to terrorism.

Experts and public officials cannot even agree on definitions of terrorism and terrorists, he said, saying that one man's terrorist was another man's freedom fighter.

Despite the best West German efforts, terrorism continues, including the slaying of a prominent industrialist in Munich in February and a bombing at the Rhein-Main Air Base in August that killed 2 Americans and wounded 20. The Red Army Faction took responsibility for both attacks. In addition, a bombing last month at a United States Army post in Frankfurt wounded 35 people; the Abu Nidal group, a renegade Palestinian faction, is suspected of involvement in that attack.

Austria

In 1979, Austria became the first Western country to recongize the P.L.O. Chancellor Bruno Kreisky sought to play a mediating role in several Middle East peace initiatives, as well as helping to arrange a prisoner exchange between Israel and Syria last summer.

Despite Austria relatively sympathetic position on Arab issues, though, Arab terrorists hijacked a train carrying Jewish immigrants from the Soviet Union in 1973, forcing Austria to cut its role as an immigration transit point. In 1975 terrorists took hostage several oil ministers from Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries nations, and in 1981 Heinz Nittel, president of the Austria-Israel Society, was assassinated in Vienna.

Some diplomats in Vienna believe

Austria's stance on Arab issues makes it particularly vulnerable to terrorist attacks, as Arab factions bent on using violence to sabotage Middle East peace moves find it relatively easy to enter and leave.

Spain

Spain, which has seen nearly 500 people killed since 1968 and 36 killings this year alone in violence related to the Basque separatist movement, has a tough law that allows terrorism suspects to be held for 10 days without a court appearance. Basque terrorism does appear to be declining.

The Socialist Government of Prime Minister Felipe González has sought to rebut charges that it is soft on terrorism. Mr. González has negotiated an agreement with France to deny Basque terrorists safe haven, and during the T.W.A. hijacking last summer, Spain refused to give in to a demand to free two Shiite Moslem militiamen that were being held by Spain.

Mr. Gonzalez has called for a major international conference on fighting terrorism.

The Government does not, however, condemn the P.L.O., and argues that the best way to combat Palestinian terrorism is to bring peace to the Middle East through a negotiated settlement involving the P.L.O., Israel and the United States.

Soviet Union

This year, after years of relative immunity to terrorism, the Soviet Union found itself a target and seemed to edge away from its past tolerance of, if not outright support for, terrorist groups. The turning point was in September, when terrorists kidnapped four Soviet Embassy employees in Beirut and later killed one of them.

On Oct. 9, hundreds of Soviet Foreign Ministry employees left work to attend a memorial for Arkady Katakov, the Beirut embassy secretary who was slain. The three others were released unharmed on Oct. 29 after intervention by Syria.

Further signs of a shift came two days after the memorial service when the Soviet press agency Tass, reporting the killing of Mr. Klinghoffer aboard the Achille Lauro, described American anger as "understandable and just."

"The crimes of terrorists, no matter where they are committed, must be punished most severely, and such severity must be shown unflinchingly to all perpetrators of such crimes," Tass said.

The kidnapping of the Soviet diplomats also was believed to have helped change the Soviet attitude — and that of many of its allies — on the United Nations resolution condemning terrorism.

Whether the change in the Soviet Union's public statements about terrorism will mean a change in its policies remains to be seen. If support for Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi, the Libyan leader, constitutes support for terrorism, as the Reagan Administration contends, then Moscow showed little concern when it welcomed him in October. Nor has the Soviet Union backed away from the P.L.O. or Syria.

Nicaragua

Nicaragua is a center of the global debate over terrorism. Both sides — the Government and the United States-backed rebels — call their enemies terrorists.

Rebel units in Nicaragua have burned down scores of health centers, schools and other public buildings. They have been accused of many kidnappings, rapes and murders, and President Daniel Ortega Saavedra has denounced these at every opportunity, blaming the United States for supporting the rebels.

During its 20-year struggle to gain power, which finally succeeded in 1979, the Sandinista Front staged dozens of robberies, hijacked airplanes, and attacked, seized or killed members of the National Guard who were implicated in incidents of torture. President Ortega himself served seven years in prison for a bank robbery in which a guard was killed.

The Sandinista Government says it never committed random assaults like those at the Rome and Vienna airports Friday. It contends that its operations, as a guerrilla movement before coming to power, were all of an essentially political nature, not terrorism, because they did not victimize innocent civilians.

The Reagan Administration has repeatedly pointed to the solidarity between the Sandinistas and leftist rebels in other countries as proof that Managua has become a haven for terrorists. The Sandinistas say their Government is the victim, not the perpetrator, of terrorism.

Canada

Canada has always sided with the United States in condemning terrorism, but its citizens have long believed themselves immune from, or at least far distant from, terrorist strikes. That changed this year.

In June, an Air-India flight from Toronto crashed in the Irish Sea, killing all 329 people on board. While the cause of the disaster has yet to be officially established, there has been consistent speculation that Sikh extremists planted a bomb on board.

On the same day, a bomb exploded in the luggage of another airliner that had originated in Canada and had just landed at Narita International Airport near Tokyo, killing two baggage handlers.

Since June, the Canadian Government has tightened security at all major airports, and before Christmas it issued a general warning to travelers to look out for suspicious persons and luggage at airports.

The Conservative Government of Prime Minister Brian Mulroney has publicly concluded that such incidents show that no nation or its citizens are immune from terrorism.