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Brian Michael Jenkins

December 1980

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TERRORISM IN THE 1980s*

Brian Michael Jenkins

The Rand Corporation, Santa Monica, California

December 1980

Historians almost certainly will label the 1970s the decade of the terrorist. There were wars: guerrilla wars, civil wars, and full-scale military contests. There were mad bombers, mass murderers, and mass suicides. It was, however, the political terrorist who dominated the headlines of the era.

The ten years brought us the Lod Airport massacre, the murder of Olympic athletes at Munich, the takeover of the OPEC headquarters in Vienna, the daring rescues of hostages at Entebbe and Mogadishu, the kidnapping and murder of Aldo Moro, the assassination of Lord Mountbatten, and, almost at the end of the decade, the frustrating and continuing crisis that began with the seizure of our embassy in Teheran. Terrorists kidnapped or assassinated nearly a hundred diplomats. Embassies and consulates were seized on almost 50 occasions. Corporate executives and business facilities were the target of hundreds of attacks. "Letter bomb" and "kneecapping" were added to our political vocabulary.

Events of the last few years have demonstrated repeatedly that by using terrorist tactics, political extremists with a limited capacity for violence can attract worldwide attention to themselves and their causes. They can arouse worldwide alarm and create international incidents that national governments are compelled to deal with. To protect against terrorist attacks or to respond to terrorist-caused crisis situations, governments and corporations must expend resources out of all proportion to the actual threat posed.

In this paper I would like to review the broad trends in terrorism during the last ten years and try to identify some of the developments

* Text of an address to the 26th Annual Seminar of the American Society for Industrial Security, Miami Beach, Florida, September 25, 1980.

we may look for in the 1980s, especially what we have experienced here in the United States and what America may expect in the coming decade.

One Man's Terrorist is Everyone's Terrorist

However, we must first deal with the problem of definition. The word "terrorism" lacks precise definition. It is an inherently dramatic word which the news media use promiscuously to describe violent crimes that are not, strictly speaking, terrorism. Political differences make the problem more difficult. At the turn of the century, assassins in Russia were proud to call themselves terrorists. They hoped to terrorize the ruling class. Since then, the term has become a pejorative and it has remained so.

Many governments label as terrorism any violent dissent. For those on the other side, it is the government or the economic system that is inherently terrorist. Thus, terrorism tends to be defined according to political point of view. This has led to the cliché that one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter, which implies that there can be no objective definition of terrorism, that there are no universal standards of conduct in peace or war. That is not true.

Most civilized nations have identified through law modes of conduct that are criminal: among them homicide, kidnapping, threats to life, the willful destruction of property. Such laws may be violated in war, but even in war there are rules that outlaw the use of certain weapons and tactics. One man's terrorist is everyone's terrorist.

For our purposes, a simple descriptive definition should suffice: Terrorism is the use of actual or threatened violence to create fear and alarm. Its purpose may be to cause people to exaggerate the strength of the terrorists and the importance of their cause, to discourage dissent, or to enforce compliance.

Terrorism is defined by the nature of the act, not by the identity of the perpetrators or the nature of their cause. All terrorist acts are crimes: murder, kidnapping, arson, bombings. All involve violence or the threat of violence, often coupled with specific demands. Many would also be violations of the rules of war, if a state of war existed. The targets are mainly civilian. The motives are political.

The actions generally are carried out in a way that will receive maximum publicity. The perpetrators are usually members of an organized group, and unlike other criminals, they often claim credit for the act. And finally, the act is intended to produce effects beyond the immediate physical damage.

Terrorism is not new. Indeed, terrorist tactics have been used for centuries. But the kind of terrorism we see today, particularly international terrorism, is qualitatively different. Progress has enhanced terrorist tactics. Modern jet air travel provides terrorists with worldwide mobility. Modern mass communications--radio, television, communications satellites--provide terrorists with almost instantaneous access to a worldwide audience. New vulnerabilities in our society--civil aviation, for example--provide new targets. And finally, modern weapons and explosives have improved the terrorist's arsenal.

Terrorist Activity Has Increased

The use of terrorist tactics has increased during the last 12 years. Of that, there is no doubt. Although the overall level of terrorist activity oscillates from year to year, the trend is unmistakably upward. Quantitative analysis shows the increase to be genuine; it is not due simply to chance distribution of the numbers. And it is not simply the result of better reporting.

Improved reporting in this case is likely to be reflected in an increase in minor incidents of terrorism, the token acts of violence that may have been overlooked in earlier collection efforts. Such incidents do increase sharply in the chronologies over time but so do incidents with fatalities and incidents with multiple fatalities. These more serious incidents are less likely to have been overlooked in early collection efforts. Thus, their increase probably reflects a genuine increase in the level of terrorist activity.

Terrorism also appears to have increased in lethality. The percentage of incidents with fatalities and multiple fatalities has gone up during the last decade. This rise suggests that terrorists are more willing to kill and perhaps also more willing to risk being killed.

We have noted in our studies of political violence that terrorist activity affects the world unequally. A handful of countries experience a disproportionate share of the world's terrorism. Twenty countries account for between 75 and 89 percent of all reported incidents. Ten countries account for between 58 and 72 percent of all incidents. Over half the incidents of terrorism occur in Western Europe and North America.

The countries that have suffered high levels of terrorism share a number of common political, historical, economic and social attributes. Most of them are genuine democracies or have authoritarian as opposed to totalitarian regimes. Most would be regarded as aligned with the west. They are modern. They have industrialized economies, highly urbanized societies, comparatively high per capita incomes and large university populations. Many have unresolved ethnic or ideological conflicts. Some have long traditions of political violence.

Modern terrorism thus appears to be an attribute of modern, non-totalitarian, and comparatively affluent societies. What a dilemma this poses for political theorists who have long held--or hoped--that political violence declines with economic and political progress!

Terrorism is likely to persist in the 1980s as a mode of political expression, of gaining international attention, and of achieving limited political goals. Political violence in some form or other has been a common feature of western civilization for nearly two centuries and there is no reason to forecast its demise now. Although few terrorist groups can claim to have attained their long-range goals, their use of terrorist tactics has won them publicity, sometimes gained them concessions, and in some cases has even brought them political status in the world.

Most of the currently active terrorist groups, although under considerable pressure from the authorities, show no signs of abandoning their struggle. Some of them have been on the scene for a decade or more, replacing their losses, preparing for new attacks, turning into a semi-permanent subculture, whose members may find their violent activities intrinsically rewarding: dedicated to terrorism for the sake of terrorism. Their demonstrated capacity for regeneration also suggests persistence. Intelligence specialists in Germany,

Italy, and the United Kingdom anticipate new actions and, at least in the United Kingdom and Italy, forecast struggles of 5, 10, or 15 more years.

There will be no shortage of causes for future terrorism. Ideological conflicts will continue and may become more severe as shortages of critical resources like oil constrain economic growth. With the growth of ethnic nationalism, additional claimants will increase already existing pressures for separation or autonomy. Religious fanaticism has emerged as a possible source of future terrorism. Concern over specific issues--nuclear energy, pollution, abortion--conceivably could lead to the use of terrorist tactics. Even reactions against high technology have provoked violence.

Once violence gains legitimacy or is even partially successful as a form of political action, individuals and groups may use terrorist tactics to focus attention even on isolated or transient issues. The terrorists of the 1970s have provided a model of behavior for the terrorists of the 80s--whatever their cause.

One thing for certain. A shortage of weapons will not be an obstacle to political violence. A major long-term development we often overlook is the enormous increase in the production and availability of weapons, from machineguns to sophisticated shoulder-fired surface-to-air missiles. All it takes is money, and that is provided by patron states, sympathetic support groups, or obtained from the private sector through robberies and kidnappings. This ready availability of arms, in my view, contributes enormously to the persistence of political violence.

Terrorists Are at a Critical Juncture

Terrorists for the most part have so far avoided killing large numbers of people. This cannot be entirely explained by technical constraints since most of the larger terrorist groups now have the capacity to kill on a large scale if they choose to. It suggests that there are self-imposed moral or political constraints.

What might these be? Mass murder or indiscriminate violence is contrary to the principle of terrorism; terrorists want a lot of people watching, not a lot of people dead, and killing a few often will suffice. It is immoral to kill "little people" who are not the terrorists'

enemies. Terrorists regard themselves as governments; they want to appear legal and therefore must justify killing. Indiscriminate killing would undermine terrorists' claims of legality. Terrorists fear alienating perceived constituents. Terrorists fear provoking widespread revulsion. Terrorists fear unleashing harsh crackdowns that will have popular support from a directly threatened population. Some terrorists fear retribution by intelligence organizations which they view as powerful and unhindered by the same legal constraints that normally limit police actions. Terrorists may fear that such extreme operations for the preceding reasons will provoke dissension and debate within the terrorists' organization and, as a result, expose the operation and the organization to betrayal.

Neither have terrorists threatened large numbers of people. Indiscriminate threats such as threats involving chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons usually have been the product of adolescent pranksters, extortionists or mentally disturbed persons, not terrorist groups. This suggests that while terrorists may recognize the enormous coercive power that possession of a nuclear weapon or other weapon of mass destruction might give them, they also recognize the enormous political risks of making such threats.

At the same time, there is some agreement among those who study terrorism that terrorists--if we can talk about them generically--are presently at a critical juncture. They have achieved just about all they can expect to achieve with the tactics they have used to date: bombings, assassinations, kidnappings, and hijackings. Terrorists now face a problem of diminishing returns. Their coercive capability has been declining since the mid-1970s. Governments no longer give in even to terrorists threatening large numbers of hostages and have demonstrated their willingness to order an assault whenever possible despite the risk to the hostages.

Terrorism also seems to be on the downhill slope of publicity. The news value of another kidnapping, another assassination, another hijacking diminishes as such things become almost routine. Ironically, while extensive media coverage tends to magnify individual terrorist episodes, continuing media coverage ultimately deflates their effect by making them commonplace.

It is possible, of course, that terrorists do not see themselves at any threshold. They may delude themselves that they are achieving significant results. They may see themselves as arousing the masses, wearing down the state, bringing the revolution, autonomy, independence, or whatever, closer; in other words, achieving success. If so, they may believe their current repertoire will suffice.

If, however, terrorists perceive their stock to be declining, they might alter their tactics or their targets. One direction might be toward exploiting modern society's vulnerabilities to create greater disruption but not necessarily greater casualties. Alternatively, terrorists might move toward the higher orders of violence they have thus far avoided.

The supposed self-imposed constraints within terrorist groups against large-scale indiscriminate violence could erode as the struggle continues to brutalize the terrorists and numb the public, the capabilities of the terrorists increase, the composition of the terrorist group changes as it attracts thugs and psychopaths--those more dedicated to violence--or the terrorists should come to foresee defeat unless they take extreme measures.

The re-emergence of right-wing terrorism carries with it the potential for large-scale indiscriminate violence such as we saw in the recent bombing of the train station in Bologna, Italy that left at least 85 dead and 160 injured. Seeking no constituents but rather only to cause alarm, right-wing terrorists have been less constrained in their violence than their counterparts on the left. Religious fanaticism, which also seems to be on the upswing, lowers the thresholds against large-scale violence. So long as the intended victims can be labelled as infidels or heathens, or the voice of God heard through mad mullahs or a psychotic preacher, mass murder is easier.

Extraordinary Extortion

If terrorist groups themselves are reluctant to threaten mass murder or widespread destruction, criminals and lunatics might do so. In the 1980s, we can expect to see more extraordinary extortion plots in which large-scale casualties, large-scale destruction, or other

actions designed to cause public alarm are threatened. Although not, strictly speaking, within the domain of political terrorism, these are worth mentioning.

In the past ten years, there have been approximately fifty threats involving the use of nuclear weapons against American cities. The vast majority of them were judged as amateurish, probably written by adolescent pranksters or emotionally disturbed persons seeking attention. A few caused some alarm. One, a threat to mail small quantities of stolen low-enriched uranium to foes of nuclear energy unless the author's demand for \$100,000 was met, proved to be genuine, but the extortionist was apprehended before he could carry out his threat.

We have also seen a number of extortion plots involving threats to urban water supplies--in Philadelphia, Munich, and Italy--or use of chemical or biological substances in other ways. One man in California threatened to poison jars of pickles at Safeway Stores unless paid a large sum.

A recent case occurred in Stateline, Nevada where extortionists placed a bomb in Harvey's Casino and demanded \$3 million in return for instructions to remove it safely. Bomb experts, who examined the device, called it the most sophisticated amateur bomb they had ever seen. As we know, when it could not be dismantled, the bomb was detonated causing--ironically--an estimated \$3 million damage.

This sort of crime will continue and perhaps become more sophisticated. Governments may be faced with situations in which they must weigh the credibility of the threat against the problems of evacuation or social and economic disruption. And if the tactic proves successful, political terrorists could adopt it as they adopted airline hijackings and kidnappings in the 1970s.

Between a quarter and a third of all terrorist attacks are aimed at business facilities and executives: more than any other category of target. Corporations may symbolize certain countries, economic and political relationships, or economic systems opposed by the terrorists. Businesses and businessmen are also ubiquitous, and as the record of ransom payoffs suggests, lucrative targets as well. The private sector is the principal target and the unwilling financier of terrorism. This is another major terrorist innovation of the 1970s.

Trends in Security

The growing threat of terrorism has resulted in four major security developments:

First, governments and the private sector have had to devote increasing attention and resources to internal security. Although national defense budgets still are two to three orders of magnitude greater than the total amount spent on internal security by both government and the private sector, that amount has grown more rapidly because of provisions for counter-terrorist measures. Governments have established new anti-terrorist intelligence and police organizations, machinery at the national level to manage terrorist-created crises and specially trained tactical units to deal with hostage situations. In addition, they have increased security surrounding likely terrorist targets. We also see the increasing use of military forces to temporarily support or augment regular law enforcement in providing internal security against terrorists. In some countries, notably in South America and most recently in Turkey, the military has almost entirely taken over the task of combatting terrorism.

Because terrorists' potential targets are virtually unlimited, governments cannot provide total protection. As a result, the private security industry has grown tremendously. This is the second major development. Finding themselves in the frontline, businesses have invested increasing amounts of money in security hardware and services. No one knows exactly how much is spent on private security. According to one recent estimate, expenditures for private security services and hardware will reach \$33 billion annually worldwide by the end of the decade. Further, no one knows how much of this is directed against ordinary crime, and how much has been driven by the added problem of political terrorism.

A third major change is the shifting of financial responsibilities for security. Once the almost exclusive domain of government, the costs of security against terrorism appear to be increasingly borne by the private sector and individual citizen. Attitudes may vary from country to country between security as a "public good"--thus a cost to

be borne by the government--and as a "private good"--thus a cost to be borne by the private sector. Often the government directly bears the economic burden of increased security. In other cases, governments have mandated minimum security measures which the private sector must pay for. In still other cases, government has encouraged increased security in the private sector through government subsidies.

A fourth major development is the proliferation of "Inner Perimeters": the rings of surveillance and physical security that now encircle airports, government buildings, and corporate headquarters; the steel plate and bulletproof glass that line executive suites; armored limousines and bodyguards that now surround most public figures; privately patrolled communities and security apartment buildings. If this trend continues, we will ultimately find ourselves returning to an almost medieval environment when cities were walled, residential structures were built with an eye to defense, and officials and merchants traveled with armed retainers. These are already realities for many corporate executives and public figures.

Terrorism in the United States

There is a general perception that the United States has suffered very little terrorism. This is not quite so. In terms of the number of terrorist incidents, the United States places third on the list of countries experiencing the most terrorism, right after Italy and Spain. Part of this is due to biases inherent in such statistics. Terrorist violence in the United States has also been less lethal. Most of the bombings--the primary form of terrorist activity in the United States--are directed against property, not persons. Still, the United States with 72 deaths resulting from terrorist attacks in the 1970s ranks roughly with the United Kingdom with 68 deaths (not counting those in Northern Ireland, of course), ahead of Germany with 44 deaths, and behind Italy, which had 108 deaths during the same period.

Why was terrorism here given so little notice? For one thing, we witnessed few terrorist spectacles here: the kidnapping of Patty Hearst, the 1976 hijacking of a TWA airliner by Croatians, the seizure of the West German consulate in Chicago qualified as national media events but that was about all.

For another thing, the high level of ordinary violent crime in the United States overshadows the comparatively low level of political violence. With nearly 20,000 homicides a year, who notices that 8 or 9 of them are politically motivated?

The real question for a society so heavily armed and apparently so prone to personal violence is why there has not been more political violence. Part of the answer lies in the fact that ideology--the engine behind much of Western Europe's terrorism--has never been a powerful force in American history. It would be extremely difficult to define our major political parties in ideological terms. Frontier society and the individualistic nature of American society did not lend themselves to class consciousness. The United States escaped the great ideological contests that divided countries in Europe and Asia in the twentieth century. Although its adherents spoke in Marxist rhetoric, the New Left of the 1960s was not so much ideologically motivated as it was oriented on a single issue: the war in Vietnam.

Neither have separatist struggles--the other main source of terrorism in Europe--been a feature of American society. America's numerous ethnic minorities generally do not live in geographically discrete regions. There is nothing equivalent to the Basque provinces or the situation in Northern Ireland. The one exception is Puerto Rico, and significantly Puerto Rican separatism has been the basis for persistent political violence going back at least to the 1930s.

Some credit for the low level of political violence in the United States must be given to the enormous capacity of our political system to co-opt grievances and opponents into the democratic process. It is this flexibility which prevents handfuls of bombers from acquiring a constituency. As a result, terrorist groups in the United States, apart from the ethnically based ones, tend to be short-lived, unable to increase their permanent membership beyond a single generation of entrants. Finally, the United States has experienced little terrorism from abroad.

Now, some of that is changing. We have had two political assassinations in the last year and an attempted if poorly planned kidnapping

of Minnesota's governor. These actions, if not carried out by foreign terrorist groups, are related to foreign quarrels. In addition, we have seen an increase in terrorism on behalf of Puerto Rican independence in Puerto Rico as well as on the mainland.

I suspect that most of the political violence in this country will for the near future in some way mirror developments abroad, particularly the political struggles in Central America, the Caribbean and the Middle East. In that sense, terrorism in America will not be indigenous. Violence on behalf of Puerto Rican independence may increase particularly during the period between the election and proposed referendum on statehood. This is our most serious problem right now.

For the longer run, there are some dangers--developments that do not necessarily and inevitably lead to terrorist violence but may contribute to political disaffection, create a pool of people more sympathetic to political violence, or limit the government's capacity to respond:

- o The proliferation of narrow interest groups and single-issue politics that permit no compromise, fragment our political parties, and breed fanatics.

- o A resurgence of religious fanaticism manifested in a proliferation of cults, some of whose attributes include authoritarian leadership, modern methods of mind control, a paranoid view of the world, the acquisition of arms allegedly for self-defense, and the commission of crimes to protect leaders or prevent defections.

- o A rebirth of racism and a growth in Ku Klux Klan membership.

- o An unmeasured decline in police intelligence activities.

- o A growing sense of insecurity as a result of a growing perception that law enforcement cannot effectively protect individual citizens from violent crime.

- o Growing contempt toward a criminal justice system that seems unable to provide justice that is swift or sure, or punishment that is commensurate with the crime.

- o As a result of highly publicized incidents like Three Mile Island, or the recent accident involving a Titan missile in Arkansas, or

as a result of highly publicized issues like the disposal of nuclear or toxic chemical wastes, or the effects of nuclear testing, a growing mistrust of government and corporations as incompetent, negligent, or worse, irresponsible, in protecting public health and safety.

In sum, a lot of people are frustrated, frightened, and angry. And we ought not to be too surprised if their sons and daughters, fed disaffection at dinnertime and stuffed with televised violence, express themselves violently in the 1980s.

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