

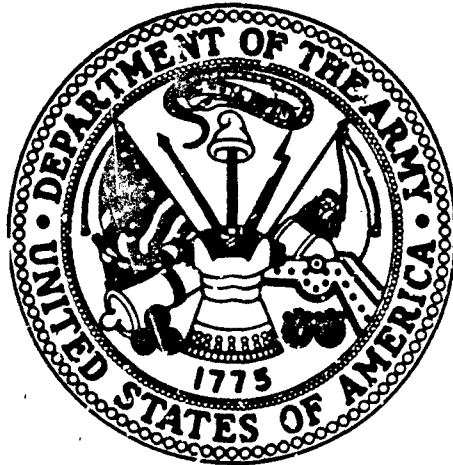
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**MODERN TERRORISM:
THE POTENTIAL FOR
INCREASED LETHALITY**

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**Army - Air Force Center for Low Intensity Conflict
Langley Air Force Base, Virginia**

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**MODERN TERRORISM:
THE POTENTIAL FOR INCREASED LETHALITY**

by

**WILLIAM H. THORNTON
MAJ (P), MSC**

**Army-Air Force Center for Low Intensity Conflict
Langley Air Force Base, Virginia 23665-5000**

November 1987

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PREFACE

This paper examines the practice of terrorism from an historical perspective and in particular the changes in revolutionary theory which have in part resulted from the availability of mass media means. The author posits a correlation exists in the media attention garnered through violent terrorist acts and the increasingly lethal and seemingly random incidents of these acts. A deadly spiral of violence has developed in which, to attract media attention, ever higher levels of violence are required. Toxic chemical agents may be used by terrorist to achieve a new and even higher level.

Although a firm consensus does not exist on the potential for the employment of chemical weapons by terrorist groups, the easy availability of the technology needed to produce such weapons and the resolve to inflict large numbers of casualties indicates a willingness to explore new avenues of violence. Toxic chemical agents could well be that new avenue.

**MODERN TERRORISM:
THE POTENTIAL FOR INCREASED LETHALITY**

Introduction

We, the heads of state or government of seven major democracies and the representatives of the European Community, assembled here in Tokyo, strongly reaffirm our condemnation of international terrorism in all its forms, of its accomplices and of those, including governments, who sponsor or support it. We abhor the increase in the level of such terrorism since our last meeting, and in particular its blatant, and cynical use as an instrument of government policy. Terrorism has no justification. It spreads only by the use of contemptible means, ignoring the values of human life, freedom, and dignity. It must be fought relentlessly and without compromise.(1)

With this Declaration on Terrorism issued on May 5, 1986, by the participants in the Tokyo Economic Summit, the growing international concern over the specter of terrorism reached a zenith. For the first time, the seven major powers of the West acted in concert formally to recognize the dangers posed by institutionalized acts of violence outside the arena of declared warfare. Indeed, the summit meeting itself was a target for a terrorist attack. Although the attack failed, it did so because of poor aim on the part of the terrorists themselves and not because of the massive Japanese police security effort.

The effect of international terrorism on the direction and conduct of American foreign policy has become greatly magnified in recent years. The Reagan administration has opted to raise the issue of international and state supported terrorism to a position of eminence in its conduct of foreign affairs.

The April 15, 1986, US air attack on Libyan terrorist training and logistical facilities underscored the direct and irrevocable interests of this nation in stemming the perceived "tidal wave" of growing world-wide terrorism. As US diplomatic, military, and civilian personnel or interests have increasingly become the targets in this pandemic spread of violence, the diplomatic, military, and intelligence communities have increased their efforts to counteract terrorism and to punish its practitioners.

Heightened awareness and sensitivity to terrorism, in particular state-supported terrorism, has become a focal point of international preoccupation for the US. The new "active" approach to countering terrorism has become a source of concern and fear with many of the nation's more staunch allies as well as

with the members of the non-aligned states of the Third World. These nations fear the spread of terrorist attacks on US interests and personnel within their borders, or a disruption within their areas of economic or geopolitical interest. Most of all, these nations are concerned that an overreaction on the part of the US to a terrorist provocation could seriously jeopardize the stability of the Western alliance. They even foresee a threat to the premier position of the US as a leader and champion of world political morality and democracy. For these reasons, the fear of an active US anti-terrorist policy has a very real impact on the conduct of American foreign policy.

There have been a number of changes in revolutionary theory and its associated practice of terrorism which have contributed to the development of a "New Era of Terrorism." These changes have come largely from the European and Middle Eastern post-World War II experiences and form the basis of so-called "Modern Terrorism."

Terrorism and its violent acts have become both more deadly and apparently more random in execution. A very real potential exists for the future use of more lethal weaponry, including toxic chemical agents. To date, US diplomatic efforts have not been particularly successful in halting the export of either raw materials necessary for chemical weapon production, or indeed, of entire chemical agent production facilities by Western nations.

The use of chemical agents by terrorists is a definite possibility, and from the terrorist standpoint, it is a virtual necessity. The use of such agents may prove to be the very catalyst that terrorists have been seeking to provoke the US into an overreaction that our international friends and allies so fear.

Historical Background

Terrorism, that is, politically inspired violence, has played a major role in revolutionary political change throughout history. Assassination of major political figures has at times in Europe appeared to approach the level of national sport. The ruling Hapsburg family of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, in particular, faced assassination attempts with a degree of fatalism brought about by generations of bomb and pistol wielding anarchists, nationalists, and nihilists. The Russian Romanov dynasty faced similar historic perils.

In both these countries, the terrorists (this title borne by anyone using violence without governmental authority) were successful in achieving their goal of political change. The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife was largely responsible for triggering the outbreak of World War I, which led subsequently to the breakup of the Empire. Earlier, in Russia the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881, after

seven previous attempts, resulted in an increase in the use of repression by the Tsarist regime of Alexander III. This led to further estrangement of the people and the alienation of the intelligentsia, conditions leading inexorably to the Revolutions of 1905 and 1917.(2)

Thus, use of the politically inspired violence now known as terrorism is not a new phenomenon. Rather, it has an established historical basis, and it has often brought about the desired change in government; though, in truth, the change has often not been in the expected or desired direction (for example, the establishment of a Soviet dictatorship to replace a Tsarist regime). Some authorities have referred to terrorism as the "policy of the weak," that is, as the means of the socially or politically disfranchised to exert an influence on their society.

Modern terrorism has many of its roots in the bitterness and frustrations experienced by the Arab peoples, particularly the Palestinians, following the Arab-Israeli Six Days' War of June, 1967. The total defeat of the Arab states after Israel's preemptive strike brought discredit upon the ability of the Arab leadership to achieve a military resolution to the "Palestinian Problem" and a new determination by the Palestinians to exert an influence of their own making.(3) Up to this time, the Palestinians had directed military operations regionally at Israel or Arab "collaborationists." The first Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) skyjacking occurred in July, 1968, marking an internationalization of their cause, which quite naturally attracted a great deal of attention.

Western European involvement in terrorism grew out of the left-wing student proclivities of the 1960's, social dissatisfaction, and the appeal of the martyr/freedom fighter image of the PLO and associated groups. Rightists also played a role in terrorist development in both Germany and Italy.

Revolutionary-terrorist training camps throughout the Middle East attracted both the dilettante and dedicated revolutionary from around the world to participate in extensive programs of paramilitary operations and Marxist-Leninism. The Soviets had come out in full support of Wars of National Liberation as early as 1955,(4) with the 1966 "Tri-Continental Conference" in Havana formalizing international ties between Marxist revolutionary (terrorist) groups. This internationalization of terrorism through cooperative ties, training, and support is a major change to terrorism in the historical context, involving as it does, transnational terrorists, with state support, functioning to achieve largely Marxist goals.

Characteristics of Modern Terrorism

Terrorist acts, as a part of revolutionary political change, are meticulously planned, carefully executed exercises in stagecraft. That is, they are "theatrical." (5) Characteristically, they are also violent in nature, and the threat of death or destruction is always present. Marighella stated that violence and terror are necessary for social change in a restricted society. (6)

This violence serves to achieve several goals. The goal of the terrorist in attacking a particular target, be it an aircraft hijacking or an assassination, is not simply the immediate seizure of the aircraft or killing of an opponent. Prime among the desires of the terrorist is the gaining of an audience through the news media -- television, radio, and newspapers. This access to the media ensures that the ultimate goals of the terrorist groups are widely disseminated and publicly discussed and that the merits of "the cause" are clearly stated. This ideally would gain sympathy and increased support. The publicity is very often the real goal of the particular terrorist action. Frequently, the news value of the act heavily outweighs the actual damage done, or the importance of the act itself. In the case of the hijacking of the cruise ship, SS Achille Lauro, for example, only one passenger was killed. However, this act led to round-the-clock news coverage of the event and a diplomatic flap between the US, Egypt, and Italy. Clearly, the act achieved several results totally beyond its real importance.

There are also collateral benefits which a terrorist seeks to gain from a particular act. These include discrediting the central government's ability to protect its citizenry and the physical elimination of the opposition. In addition, in the case of increasingly stringent reaction by the government's police and military forces, an alienation of the leadership and intelligentsia may be a result.

An additional characteristic of "modern terrorism" that contrasts with the "traditional terrorism" of the 19th Century is its increased levels of lethality. Modern terrorism, as practiced by contemporaneous terrorist action groups, nationalistic and ethnic societies, and quasi-religious fanatic fringe organizations, poses an extreme threat to worldwide societal stability. At no time in history have so many highly motivated, well-armed groupings of private citizens, some with a degree of governmental backing, focused solely on the total disruption of government as an end unto itself. According to Yonah Alexander, over 28,000 people have died since 1970 as a direct result of terrorist acts and concomitant losses to property have been in excess of 937 million dollars. (7) These figures reflect of course, Alexander's definition of terrorist acts and therefore his analysis and differ significantly from the data of other scholars in the field. This disparity simply

reflects the difficulty in agreeing exactly what is a terrorist act and who is a terrorist.

There exists a significant body of data showing a clearcut pattern of an increasingly deadly "spiral of violence" in terrorism. Terrorist attacks, including those directed solely against civilian targets versus such "hardened" targets as military personnel or high government officials, have grown in both scope and ferocity.

Traditional terrorism techniques were relatively limited in scope, emphasizing use of the bomb and the pistol to attack selected governmental officials who represented the evils of the society and the government. The general populace was relatively secure; the effects of such attacks were geographically confined to the immediate environs of target.

The modern terrorist has greatly changed this equation. No longer does the terrorist aim his act only at the target, but he takes under fire the general populace as well. Disrupt, demoralize, terrorize, and publicize; these are the watchwords of the current terrorist's network. The terrorist holds society as a whole hostage.

Examples of the increase in lethality of the modern terrorist's attacks are evidenced in the Bologna Train Station bombing, the Munich Oktoberfest bombing, the suicide truck bombings of the US Marine and French Barracks in Lebanon, and the Air India 747 downing. These five incidents reflect the bloodiest attacks by terrorists to date. It is important to note that they all occurred in the past five years, and that indeed, the pace of such attacks has picked up. These five bombings accounted for 738 dead and 660 wounded. With the exception of the barracks bombings, the incidents were neither predictable, nor rationally explainable, except as a means to garner massive publicity for the perpetrators. The barracks bombings were notable for the advent of a new technique which has given rise to worldwide imitation. It is important to note that suicide bombings are still, in the main, a function of Islamic fundamentalist groups.

With these acts, the upper levels of damage and death which can be achieved through the use of conventional explosives and weaponry, in a single act, has been reached. Over 400 civilians died at the hands of the terrorist in these attacks. The sole reason for their murder was simply that they were in the wrong place at the wrong time. By their deaths, they became a media event for the killers, the terrorists. Public outrage at such incidents has been intense, particularly in the non-Islamic world. Such outrage, of course, has spurred the public examination and debate about the reasons for terrorism and the validity of its causes.

The publicity which has accompanied terrorist acts over the years has been directed toward the new or sensational, that is to say, "good copy." Hijackings of aircraft have become so totally routine, over 90 between 1968 and 1977 alone, that editors often relegate hijacking coverage to the back pages of newspapers, unless the hijackers kill passengers. Only the death of passengers assures publicity; thus, the hijackers will kill passengers.

It is apparent, therefore, that "terrorism as theater" requires an audience in the form of television and readers of the written news media. The viewers become easily bored with the same fare (re-run terrorism, perhaps?) and only watch the newer, even more brutal displays of the terrorists' power over helpless, or in the case of Leon Klinghoffer, crippled hostages. This does call into play serious questions as to the role of the media in terrorism, from both the ethical and moral standpoints. The symbiotic relationship plays to a mutual benefit, but against the interests of society.

The airing of an interview conducted between a correspondent of the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) and the noted terrorist Abu Abbas underscores this point. State Department spokesman Charles E. Redman, as well as many other government officials, were vocal in condemning published or televised interviews with such personalities on the grounds it is counterproductive to internationally recognized efforts to neutralize Abbas and provides a legitimacy to his organization which is not warranted by the actions of said organization and its sponsors. (8)

Weapons of Mass Lethality

It is precisely because of the need for an ever increasing threat of violence on the part of the terrorist seeking publicity that weapons with increased lethality capability pose a new hazard to society. Three types of weaponry are generally placed in this category: chemical, biological, and nuclear. Each of these systems offers certain benefits in ease of employment, destructive capability and shock value. However, theft or production of a nuclear device is exceptionally difficult and biologicals are inherently unpredictable; therefore, chemical weapons present the terrorist with the best range of possible options. Additionally, chemical weapons, by virtue of their use in World War I and elsewhere, enjoy a fearsome reputation. Any hint, threat, or minor use of chemicals is absolutely certain to create a huge public outcry and an immediate government reaction.

If the standard equation for threat/terrorism is applied, namely, Intentions + Capabilities = Threat ($I + C = T$), then the question of employment of chemical weapons would only depend upon the C factor, capabilities. In this case, the ability to manufacture chemical weapons is practically a given. Rudimentary

chlorine gas, of sufficient toxicity to kill, can be produced in virtually any household from cleaning solutions. Such chlorine products do, in fact, cause a number of accidental deaths in the home in this country. This same type of solution introduced into the air filtration system of an office building or military command post could have disastrous results.

The production techniques for our most advanced nerve agents have been a matter of public knowledge for at least the past 10 years. Both the US and British governments published and sold literally thousands of copies of the formula for VX, the main nerve agent of the US military. Using this information, any competent graduate student with access to a moderately equipped laboratory can produce VX.(9) Further, possession of such agents is not in itself a crime. Because of these considerations, chemical weapons pose a more realistic threat than does a nuclear device in the hands of terrorists.

Terrorists do not need a sophisticated delivery system to use this new type of weapon.(10) Military testing of chemical agents is normally guided by the idea that the agents will be used against military personnel, who are trained and equipped to withstand the attack and fight in a heavily chemically contaminated environment. A multiple LD50 concentration is deemed necessary when considering the use of chemicals for a military attack to be effective. An LD50 is the lethal dose required to kill 50 percent of the exposed and unprotected personnel in the area of the chemical concentration. Such rigorous standards are not needed by the terrorist. Simply dropping a container of agent from an aircraft over a city, or even throwing the container into an embassy compound from a speeding car assures the attack will immediately take on historic proportions.

Is such a scenario realistic? Reportedly, Palestinian groups have been stockpiling nerve agents for several years. In 1976, an Austrian chemist was arrested in Vienna for attempting to supply DFP (a relatively weak nerve agent) on the black market.(11) The use of both nerve and mustard agents in the ongoing Iran-Iraq War has resulted in the Iranians' importing production facilities for chemical agents from both Swiss and German sources, although the US has objected strenuously to these two countries about such sales. Iran has been providing major support to Lebanese Shiite Muslims; chemical weapons are a distinct possibility as a part of its anti-US and anti-West crusade.

These indications that European and Middle Eastern terrorists alike have access to chemical weapons are serious developments with grave implications. Terrorist intentions are clear, and this new capability definitely poses a potential threat. There is now little hesitation for these groups to stage incidents which could result in major numbers of civilian casualties,

particularly if the casualties were Americans or mainly Americans. The advent of "state support" to radical goals on the part of such countries as Iran, Syria, and Libya, not to mention the communist bloc nations, has skewed the risk vs gain equation heavily in the terrorists' favor.

Conclusion

The modern terrorist is no longer bound by the limits of the "unofficial rules" which had been in effect during the classical terrorism period. All of society is now a target, rather than specific individuals of the political leadership or elite. The total "destruction of imperialism" is an agreed upon goal of the transnational terrorists operating under a loose Marxist coalition.(12) This concept justifies the most brutal attacks upon society as a necessary act in the "total war." Terrorists will use any and all means at their disposal to make their impact felt; massive death tolls, rather than being avoided, are now considered acceptable (perhaps desirable) as a means to generate publicity that will further "the cause."(13)

The terrorism issue has become a major force in the conduct of American foreign policy. Few issues have received so much attention from the President, the Secretary of State, and the Congress during the past year. "Irangate" (itself a terrorism based issue) has occupied much time on the president's schedule. His desire to contain international terrorism is best reflected in his comments to the press following the Tokyo Summit on May 6, 1986:

And this was the sense of the agreement that we arrived at, that we are going to act together with regard to opposing terrorism - to isolate those states that provide support for terrorism, to isolate them and make them pariahs on the world scene and even, if possible, to isolate them from their own people.(14)

In this direction, the US government has interpreted Article 51 of the United Nations Charter to authorize the use of force in cases of national self-defense, i.e., in case of attack by external forces. The US government has now expanded this article to include acts of state supported and directed terrorism, as well as acts of open belligerence. Utilizing the intelligence gathering and interpretation capabilities of national-level agencies, the US government has placed itself squarely in the "pointman" position of the international counter-terrorism business. To this end, this administration has initiated diplomatic measures to garner increased international support for recognition of terrorists as criminals, rather than as mere "political activists." This particular point has been the most difficult to sell, because the old adage "one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter" holds a great deal of attraction on the international political scene.

United States diplomatic efforts are beginning to have a positive political payoff, as is evident in the Declaration on Terrorism of the Tokyo Economic Summit meeting. However, a display of increased international resolve is required to deal with the menace of transnational terrorism. The danger of state support to terrorism lies in the ability of the terrorist to hide in a safe haven, free from fear, while he plans further attacks. With the potential for the employment of mass destruction weaponry in sight, international support is needed more than ever. Government reaction to such an attack could easily include attacks such as the US raid on Libya in April, 1986, against those nations giving support to radical or terrorist group; however, they could assume a much greater scale.

In addition to such actions in the arena of international affairs, the US must make preparations for the eventuality of chemical agent attacks by terrorist groups; the government must make contingency plans and undertake studies on damage limitation. The heated period following such an attack is neither conducive to diplomatic and military constraint, nor to the sound management of the situation itself.

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ENDNOTES

1. "Declaration on Terrorism," Tokyo Economic Summit Meeting, Washington Post, 6 May 1986.
2. Stanley Rothman and George W. Breslaur, Soviet Politics and Society (St. Paul, Minnesota: West Publishing Company, 1978), pp. 23-24.
3. Abdallah Frangi, The PLO and Palestine (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1982), pp. 104-108.
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5. Robert H. Kupperman and Darrell Trent, Terrorism (Stanford, California: Hoover Institute Press, 1979), p. 4.
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7. Yonah Alexander, "Terrorism: Future Threats and Responses," Terrorism, Volume 7, Number 4 (1985), p. 368.
8. Eleanor Randolph, "U.S. Officials Denounce NBC Talk with Terrorist," Washington Post, 7 May 1986.
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10. Richard C. Clark, Technological Terrorism (Old Greenwich, Connecticut: Devin Adair Company, 1980), p. 110.
11. Becket, p. 149.
12. Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, Speech, Second Conference on International Terrorism, Harpers Bazaar, October, 1984.
13. Don Podesta, "Terror for Terror's Sake," Washington Post, 1 December 1985.
14. "Transcript of President Reagan's News Conference in Tokyo," Washington Post, 7 May 1986.

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