

Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century: Threats and Responses

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Terrorism: the calculated employment or the threat of violence by subnational and state actors to attain political, social, and economic objectives in the violation of law, intended to create an overwhelming fear in a target area larger than the victims attacked or threatened, is as old as civilization itself. Yet unlike their historical counterparts, present-day terrorists have introduced into contemporary life a new scale of violence in terms of both threats and responses. The internationalization and brutalization of modern violence make it clear that we have entered into an Age of Terrorism with all of its serious implications to national, regional, and global security concerns.

Perhaps the most significant dangers are those relating to the safety, welfare, and rights of ordinary

people; the stability of the state system; the health of economic development; the expansion of democracy; and perhaps even the survival of civilization itself.

Thus, despite the end of the Cold War and evolving era of the New World Order, terrorism remains as threatening as ever. Undoubtedly, the conflicts emerging from ideological, religious, and national animosities will continue to make terrorism a global problem well into the twenty-first century. Ensuring the safety of its citizens at home and abroad will therefore continue to be every government's paramount responsibility in the coming months and years.

The Historical Record: Modus Operandi and Targets

Terrorist groups have utilized a wide range of tactics during the past three decades. These operations have included arson, bombings, kidnappings, hijackings, facility attacks, and assassinations. The terrorist arsenal comprises not only explosives and arms, such as guns, but also includes more sophisticated weapons such as antitank rockets and ground-to-air missiles.

The modus operandi of terrorist groups vary considerably depending on the motivation and capabilities. During the 1970s, for example, the Palestinian Fatah Group destroyed fuel tanks at Rotterdam oil docks, murdered 11 Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics, and attempted a missile attack against an El Al aircraft in Rome. Also, the Japanese Red Army carried out activities such as a machine-gun and grenade attack at Lod Airport, killing 26 people; an attack on a Shell Oil refinery tanks; a seizure of a ferry-boat crew and hostages in Singapore; and a hijacking of a Japan Airlines plane in Bombay.

In the 1980s sub-national groups continued on two paths: targets were specifically selected or

victims were attacked indiscriminately. The Iranian-backed Hizballah's activities included: bombing US and French peace-keeping forces and their buildings in Lebanon, kidnapping Western citizens in Beirut, and hijacking Kuwait Airways Flight 422. In Columbia, M-19's activities included kidnapping and murdering a US citizen; staging simultaneous attacks on military and police installations and banks; and taking around 500 hostages, including many members of the Supreme Court (who were later killed) and the Council of State during a seizure of Columbia's Palace of Justice.

During the 1990s both domestic and international terrorist groups continued to conduct their operations with similar tactics, such as an incident in which Kazem Rajavi, brother of the leader of the anti-Teheran Iranian Mujaheddin, Massoud Rajavi, was assassinated in Geneva by Iranian agents. Also, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam bombed a Colombo parking garage, which left 100 people dead and nearly 1,400 wounded.

Current Cost and Future Prospects

Since the 1960s our modern society has suffered from the global disease of terrorism, a reality which grows in scope and brutality with every passing year. For example, in 1970, a total of around 300 terrorist attacks, both domestic and international, were recorded worldwide. By 1998, the yearly count reached over 4,500 incidents. The numbers of fatalities and persons injured have increased steadily as the value of resulting property damage reached the billions of dollars.

An analysis of global trends in 1998 concluded that victimization of sporadic and relentless subnational and government-sponsored terrorism in the name of "higher principles" was the most intensive in three decades. The costly figures in 1997 (221 dead and 690 wounded in international terrorist incidents) was surpassed on a single day on August 7, 1998 when the nearly simultaneous car bombs at the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania killed 260 people and injured 5,000 others.

Similarly in the same year, at Omagh, Northern Ireland, a powerful bomb killed and wounded 250 people in the single worst attack of Ulster's sectarian violence. In Israel (as well as the territories and the "security" zone in Lebanon) the casualty cost of civilians and soldiers killed and wounded reached over 500. And scores of other countries around the world, such as Algeria, Columbia, India, Spain, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Turkey, have also continued to be plagued by deadly terrorist attacks.

This bloody record underscores once again that terrorism is a permanent fixture of international life,

epitomizing the state of anarchy of modern societies which is increasingly becoming a universal nightmare. It is safe to assume, therefore, that terrorism will continue into the twenty-first century. This prognosis is based on the fact that many of the causes which motivate terrorists will remain unresolved. Moreover, new issues will develop into expanded political confrontations of tomorrow.

There are several specific reasons why terrorism will grow in the future. First, terrorism has proved very successful in attracting publicity, disrupting the activities of government and business, and causing significant death and destruction. Second, arms, explosives, supplies, financing, and secret communications are readily available. Third, an international support network of groups and states exists which greatly facilitates the undertaking of terrorist activities.

Future attacks are sure to be characterized by both continuity and change. Groups that are small and unsophisticated can be expected to rely mostly on bombings. Those with more skills and state support will probably attempt to carry out more complex operations, such as kidnappings, assassinations, and facility attacks. Moreover, technological developments offer new targets and new capabilities for terrorist groups. Consequently, future incidents could be much more costly in terms of human lives and property. For instance, the prospect of the use of mass-destruction weapons (biological, chemical, and nuclear terrorism) could inflict large-scale damage to persons and property.

Super-Terrorism: Twenty-First Century Trends

Terrorists use a variety of methods, including assassination, destruction of property, and the slaughter of innocent people. Terrorism shifts targets readily, thus making security for the enemies of terrorists difficult to achieve.

To be sure, terrorist operations have thus far been characterized by the desire of the perpetrators to demonstrate their tactical capabilities rather than to commit a major violent act for its own sake. However, technological developments create new weapons and offer new targets. It is highly unlikely, therefore, that unconventional terrorism—chemical, biological, and nuclear—will become institutional in the new terrorist arsenal.

After all, we have already seen an example of increased propensity of terrorists to turn to mass casualty operations. One example is a December 1991 aborted attempt to bomb an Air India flight from New Delhi to London with 398 passengers and 18 crew members. Also, barriers against unconventional weapons have been breached, as evidenced by the findings of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors in Iraq as well as by the earlier use of chemical weapons in the Iran-Iraq War.

Although no major destruction incident has occurred, the historical record of the past three decades provides evidence of terrorist groups involved with some type of unconventional

operations. In 1972, members of the Order of the Rising Sun in the United States possessed 30–40 kilograms of typhoid bacteria cultures for use against water supplies in major Midwest cities. Similarly, in 1974, right-wing Italian terrorists planned to poison the country's water supplies with radioactive uranium stolen from a nuclear center. In 1980, police in Paris discovered a biological laboratory with clostridium botulinum culture belonging to the German Baader-Meinhof Gang. In 1986, a typhoid (*salmonella typhi*) was used by the Rajneesh religious cult in Oregon to contaminate salad bars in restaurants, resulting in 750 cases of food poisoning.

But it was not until March 20, 1995 that the first major use of chemical weapons by terrorists took place. Members of the Japanese radical cult Aum Shinrikyo placed containers of the deadly chemical nerve agent, sarin, on five trains of the Tokyo subway systems. The cultists then punctured the containers and released poisonous gas into the trains and subway stations. While the attack resulted in the death of 12 persons, 5,500 others were injured.

In addition to super-terrorism—biological, chemical, nuclear—as we stand at the close of the twentieth century, there is a growing apprehension about cyber-terrorism. More specifically, concern over the vulnerability of computer networks is sending computer security spending well into the billions—and with good reason. Cyber attacks have begun to occur over the last few years and all statistics indicate that they will continue to grow. In 1996, several major financial institutions in London had been paying large sums of money to gangs of “cyber-terrorists,” or hackers, who threatened to destroy computer systems. In 1997, the US Department of Energy had its entire system wiped out by the “Trojan Horse” virus, a product of cyber-terrorism.

Computer security threats can be roughly divided into three general groups: malicious threats, unintentional threats, and physical threats. The first category, malicious threats, covers electronic means for attacking an information system. Hackers, either state-sponsored or working independently, will use malicious software such as computer viruses, worms, “Trojan horses,” “logic bombs,” and “electronic bacterium,” to damage or destroy information.

In short, the advances of science and technology are slowly turning all modern society into a potential victim of terrorism. As such, there is no immunity

for the noncombatant segment nor for nations with no direct connection to political violence motivated by particular conflicts. Super-terrorism, then, is likely to have an unprecedented serious impact on the future quality of life and on orderly, civilized existence.

Two factors suggest the likely development of more destructive forms of terrorism well into the twenty-first century. First, ironically, bringing terrorism under substantial control in the foreseeable future through national and international legislation, increased security and enforcement measures as well as preemptive and punitive military strikes might, in fact, hasten the advent of more daring types of terrorism. As a result of this trend, other vulnerable targets created by technological advances of contemporary society are likely to become more attractive to terrorists.

A second distinct consideration that might encourage escalated terrorism is the fact that ideological and political violence is usually a means to an end: it progresses in proportion to the aims envisioned. If the goals are higher, then the level of terrorism must necessarily be higher.

It is possible, therefore, that certain conditions could provide terrorists with an incentive to escalate their attacks dramatically. A relevant example is the fanaticism which might, in the view of the terrorists, be “sanctioned” by God or “justified” by ideological or political “rationalizations.”

Osama bin Laden, the world's most notorious terrorist, who allegedly masterminded the bombings of the two embassies in East Africa, is attempting, according to intelligence reports, to obtain enriched uranium for the purpose of developing nuclear weapons. Hovering in the wings is the threat of “unconventional terror” by state sponsors like Iraq, Iran, Libya, Sudan, and Syria.

In sum, the vulnerability of modern society and its infrastructure, coupled with the opportunities for the utilization of sophisticated high-level conventional and mass-destruction weaponry, requires nations, both unilaterally and in concert, to develop credible response and capabilities to minimize the future threats. Indeed, enhanced terrorism in 1999 and beyond may be the price for the vision of a “better” and more secure New World Order.

Superpower Victimization: The US Case

The United States is a principal target of terrorism. Not only do domestic extremist groups commit acts of terrorism at home, but international groups carry out attacks against many American targets abroad. However, it should be noted that international acts of terrorism have rarely occurred on US soil.

During the 1970s, indigenous and foreign terrorist campaigns in the United States resulted in 600 attacks against civilians and military targets. The success of the counter-terrorism activities of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and law enforcement agencies, coupled with changes in the global political environment, reduced the frequency of domestic terrorism in the 1980s. During the last decade, the number of terrorist incidents reached 200, a two-thirds decrease from the 1970s.

The 1990s marked an escalation of spectacular incidents of terrorism. One dramatic attack was the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center by Middle-East terrorists (which killed six people and injured more than 1,000) and the aborted plot to destroy New York landmarks. Moreover, in 1995, American perpetrators with ties to para-military militias destroyed a federal building in Oklahoma City, killing 168 and injuring an additional 500 people. The Oklahoma City bombing was the worst terrorist incident ever to take place in the United States. Another noteworthy attack was the 1996 bombing in Atlanta, host of the Olympic Games, in which one person was killed and more than 100 were wounded.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, US cultural, diplomatic, economic, and military interests abroad were major targets of terrorism. In the 1990s a similar threat developed. For instance, in 1996 there were 296 acts of international terrorism; approximately one-fourth of them were directed against US targets. In those incidents 24 US citizens were killed while 250 were wounded.

The United States has been the most popular single target of international terrorism. American citizens, officials, diplomats, and military officers have been victimized by both state-sponsored terrorism (e.g., Libya, Iraq, and Iran) and sub-state groups, including Marxist-oriented (e.g., Germany's Red Army Faction), Islamic fundamentalism (e.g., Hizballah), Palestinian (e.g., Abu Nidal Organiza-

tion), and ideological mercenaries (e.g., Japanese Red Army).

Some of the significant international terrorist incidents directed against the United States or involving Americans during the past three decades include the following attacks: the 1979 takeover of the US Embassy in Tehran during which American diplomats were held hostage for 444 days; the bombing of the US Embassy and the Marine headquarters in Beirut in 1983; the 17-day hijacking of TWA Flight 847 in 1985; the 1988 destruction of Pan Am Flight 103 over Scotland; the truck bomb at the Khobar Towers near Dhahran, Saudi Arabia in 1996; and the nearly simultaneous terrorist car bombs at the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania on August 7, 1998 that killed at least 250 people, including 12 Americans, and injured over 5,000. The twin attacks also caused considerable destruction at both locations. In addition, there have been threats to American embassies in Egypt, Malaysia, and Yemen, to mention a few. A number of US embassies, such as in Kampala, Uganda, have temporarily suspended operations until new security measures have been put into place.

In sum, both domestic and international terrorism have touched the lives and interests of individuals and nations in every region of the world. Terrorism has had a substantial impact on the way Americans live, work, and travel abroad. There is also an effect on the way Americans live at home.

There have been many factors that have contributed to the terrorist threats facing the United States. Among the more prevalent are: the United States maintains an extensive cultural, political, economic, and military presence abroad while a number of foreign groups and governments oppose American values, policies, and actions.

In the aftermath of the take-over of the US embassy in Teheran in 1979 and the bombing of the US Marine barracks in Beirut in 1983, American policymakers have considered terrorism to be a major threat to national security. A case in point is the US congressional action to pass the "long-arm" statute, which makes it a federal crime for a terrorist to threaten, detain, *seize*, injure, or kill an American citizen abroad. Thus, the FBI, in a sting operation in international waters off the coast of Cyprus, arrested

Fawaz Younis. Younis, a Lebanese operative implicated in the 1985 hijacking of a Jordanian airliner which included American hostages, was subsequently convicted and sentenced.

After the Oklahoma City bombing, President William Clinton signed the 1996 anti-terrorism bill into law. This legislation provides law enforcement important new tools to intensify its fight against terrorism. More specifically, this legislation:

- Authorizes \$1 billion in funding for federal anti-terrorism law enforcement efforts;
- Makes it easier for police to trace bombs to the criminals who made them, by requiring chemical taggants in some explosive material;
- Makes it harder for terrorists to raise the money they need to fund their crimes;
- Streamlines exclusion and expulsion procedures for terrorist aliens;
- Allows the president to withhold foreign aid to countries that provide assistance to any country designated as a supporter of terrorism;
- Increases the penalties for conspiracy to commit explosives violations and for specified terrorism-related crimes;
- Allows victims of terrorist acts to sue foreign state sponsors of terrorism; and
- Expands the use of Victims of Crimes Act (VOCA) funds to include terrorism victims.

In 1998, President Clinton used his May 22, 1998 Commencement Address at the US Naval Academy to unveil a number of new initiatives designed to strengthen American responses to terrorism, such as improving the protection of civilians from the threat of germ warfare. That is, the stakes of the coming years are likely to see more nations with biological weapons and greater availability of the materials necessary to manufacture such weapons. The quest by Iraq, Iran, Libya, and North Korea for these weapons only confirms such dangers. Proliferation increases the opportunities for "super-terrorism."

Quite possibly, some of these countries will themselves sponsor terrorism, thus making it possible for acts of super-terrorism to occur.

Preventing or responding to biological terrorism is, therefore, attracting an increasing level of policy attention and funding in US technologies that fight this threat. Aborting a biological terrorist attack—whether by preventing the production of the agent, uncovering preparation for attack, or searching for a device prior to its use—is very difficult. In contrast, much can be done to provide those who must respond to such an event with the tools they need to manage its consequences.

Government teams that must deter such threats will need greater capabilities:

- To detect and identify the biological agents involved;
- To disarm or destroy the device responsible, if it has not yet completed dispersing the agent;
- To protect victims and themselves from further contamination;
- To track the agent cloud or otherwise delimit the contaminated area;
- To decontaminate and treat victims; and
- To decontaminate the affected site.

The US Government, as a case in point, has developed and is working on a number of technologies and systems to meet these needs. In addition, under the Nunn-Lugar-Dominici Amendment to the Fiscal Year 1997 Defense Authorization Act, the US Government is developing a program to help train those who must respond to biological terrorist events. Also, the legislation lends them the expertise and assistance of the Department of Defense. Although we can never eliminate the possibility of a biological terrorist attack, these activities are substantially improving the US Government's ability to respond to such threats.

Implications for Policy

Many governments and people have failed to appreciate the magnitude and implications of the terrorist threat. Some countries tend to regard terrorism as a minor nuisance or irritant. As a result, a large number of countries have not yet developed a strong commitment to deal effectively with the problem of terrorism.

On the other hand, some states such as the United States have taken a variety of effective counter-terrorism measures. Most notably, they have given greater public attention to terrorism; improved intelligence-gathering resources against terrorists; enacted appropriate legislation; apprehended, prosecuted, and punished terrorists; and provided

greater protection to governmental facilities and officials.

The policy implications are three-fold:

First, there are no simplistic or complete solutions to the dangers of terrorism. As the tactics utilized to challenge the authority of the state are and continue to be novel, so too must be the response by the instruments of the state. We must also be cautious to avoid the kinds of overreaction that could lead to repression and the ultimate weakening of the democratic institutions that we seek to protect.

Second, having achieved considerable tactical success during the past three decades, terrorists

sometimes find it politically expedient to restrain the level of political violence. These self-imposed restraints will not persist indefinitely, and future incidents may continue to be costly in terms of human lives and property. Certain conditions, such as religious extremism or perceptions that the "cause" is lost, could provide terrorists with an incentive to escalate their attacks dramatically.

Third, the vulnerability of modern society and its infrastructure, coupled with the opportunities for the utilization of sophisticated high-leverage conventional and unconventional weaponry, requires states, both unilaterally and in concert, to develop credible responses and capabilities to minimize future threats.

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