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The Impact of International Terrorism

October 29, 1981



United States Department of State
Bureau of Public Affairs
Washington, D.C.

Following is an address by Frank H. Perez, Acting Director of the Office for Combatting Terrorism, before the "Conference on Violence and Extremism: A Leadership Response" in Baltimore, Maryland, October 29, 1981.

The decade of the 1970s has been described as the terror decade. Since we began keeping statistics in 1968, there were 6,700 international terrorist incidents through 1980 in which 3,700 people were killed and about 7,500 wounded. This violence continues to escalate annually, and this trend exhibits no signs of abating. During 1980 there were 760 international terrorist incidents, which resulted in more casualties than in any year since we began keeping statistics. Last year 642 people were killed in international terrorist attacks; 1,078 were wounded. The statistics last year reflect the trend over the past few years toward increasing death and injury from terrorist attacks. American citizens and U.S. interests remain a primary target—of the 760 acts, 278, or 38%, were directed against Americans or American property.

Terrorism is an ever-growing menace to the civilized community of nations. It is an assault on civilization itself and threatens our vital national interests as well of those of our closest allies and friends. The terrorist believes that by murder, bombing, and kidnapping he can damage or destroy established institutions and bring about the radical changes he seeks. Terrorism is abnormal

because it frequently chooses as its targets and its weapons innocent non-combatants: passengers on airplanes; children in a school or on a bus; worshippers in a church, synagogue, or mosque; businessmen kidnapped for ransom; and so often the indiscriminate killing and injury of people who happen to be at the scene of a terrorist incident. The victims are cynically used as tools to gain resources to support the terrorists' infrastructure, to create fear and apprehension in the population, to blackmail governments, and to promote the terrorists' cause by the publicity which always accompanies spectacular terrorist acts.

Terrorism is a threat to the social and political fabric of Western democratic societies, as well as a clear violation of the human rights of the individual. By attempting to destabilize or destroy established institutions, the terrorist is seeking to bring down the very structures within society which foster and nurture human rights. A contemporary example is Spain where the actions of Basque terrorists threaten to bring down the still fragile democracy won by the Spanish people after so many years of dictatorship. The replacement of the civilian constitutional government by a military regime in Turkey last year was due in large measure to the inability of the civilian government to cope with the serious terrorism problems confronting Turkey.

Attacks on diplomats and diplomatic facilities have been increasing steadily over the past decade, and this trend has adversely affected the conduct of diplomacy. Since 1968 there have been more than 3,000 attacks on diplomats worldwide, with more than 300 diplomats killed and more than 800 wounded; 20 ambassadors from 12 countries have been assassinated, including 5 American ambassadors. Whereas there were 200 attacks worldwide against diplomats in 1970, in 1980 there were twice as many. Last year alone witnessed over 100 attacks against U.S. diplomats and facilities. There were some 70 forcible incursions into diplomatic facilities around the world between 1970 and 1980. Interestingly enough, more than half of them occurred since 1979 when our embassy in Tehran was seized, suggesting that successful terrorist act created a model for other terrorists to emulate.

A recent phenomenon has been the resurgence of right-wing terrorism after a period of relative inactivity. Right-wing terrorism is usually perpetrated anonymously by groups with few or no articulated goals. These groups tend to be motivated by a desire to terrorize or destroy specific targets. Ring-wing terrorists were responsible for last year's bombings at the *Oktoberfest* in Munich and at the Bologna train station, both of which caused mass casualties and attracted much international attention.

There has also been an increase in terrorism directed against religious figures and facilities. The attack on Pope John Paul II; bombings at churches and mosques in the Philippines and in Egypt; attacks on synagogues in Paris, Vienna, and most recently Antwerp; and the assassination attempt on the Greek Catholic patriarch in Lebanon in February are all examples of this trend.

Terrorism is a global phenomenon, although interestingly enough it does not seem to be a problem in the Soviet Union or in the countries of East European allies. Western Europe, on the other hand, remains a battleground for international and domestic terrorists. Recently we have witnessed the re-emergence of terrorist activity directed against U.S. officials in Western Europe with the bombing at Ramstein Air Base, the assassination attempt on the U.S. Army European Commander in Heidelberg, and the attack on the residence of our consul general in Frankfurt. The

level of violence has escalated to unprecedented levels in Central America and has resulted in the death and injury of a number of American citizens this year. Terrorism in the Middle East also continues at exceedingly high levels, especially in Lebanon, where a recent series of car bombs resulted in the deaths of many innocent people. Armenian terrorists have increased their attacks on Turkish diplomats, as evidenced by the recent takeover of the Turkish consulate in Paris. To date, some 20 Turkish diplomats and members of their families have been killed by Armenian terrorists. The savage attack on President Sadat by Muslim extremists saddened the civilized world. These are but a few examples of recent terrorist acts which unfortunately are likely to continue.

The United States is not immune from terrorism, although the level of terrorist violence is relatively low in comparison to the threat faced abroad. The major domestic terrorist group is the FALN—the Puerto Rican National Liberation Group which has been active in bombings and assassinations. The principal cause of current U.S. domestic terrorism, however, stems from terrorist attacks against foreign government establishments by dissident elements. For example, anti-Yugoslav Croatian separatists have engaged in terrorism in this country, and earlier this year eight members of the Croatian National Resistance were arrested on charges of arson, murder, and extortion. Some 21 Croats and a lesser number of Serbs are now incarcerated in U.S. jails because of their terrorist activities. Armenian terrorists were responsible for the recent bombing of the Turkish mission to the United Nations. Anti-Castro Cuban exiles have carried out terrorist attacks in the United States, including the murder of a Cuban U.N. diplomat in New York last year as well as the bombings of the Soviet and Cuban missions to the United Nations.

U.S. Strategy

The Reagan Administration has adopted a firm policy to combat international terrorism. We will resist terrorist blackmail and pursue terrorists with the full force of the law. We will not pay ransom, nor release prisoners, and we will not bargain for the release of hostages. To

make concessions to terrorist blackmail only jeopardizes the lives and freedom of additional innocent people. We encourage other governments to take a similarly strong stance on terrorism. When American citizens are taken hostage, we look to the host government to exercise its responsibility under international law to protect them, but at the same time we urge the government not to give in to terrorist blackmail. This Administration has made it clear that the United States will use all political, economic, diplomatic, and military resources at our disposal to respond to state-supported acts of terrorism directed against us such as we recently experienced in Iran. Our recent closing of the Libyan People's Bureau in Washington was a warning to Libya that we will not tolerate their terrorist acts.

The U.S. Government's strategy for combatting international terrorism involves three basic elements:

- Measures to prevent terrorist attacks;
- Measures for effectively reacting to terrorist incidents; and
- Seeking an international consensus against terrorism.

In seeking to prevent acts of terrorism, we have placed great emphasis on improving our intelligence on terrorist groups. If we have warning of an impending terrorist attack, we can take the necessary preventive measures to thwart it. We are, in fact, regularly receiving reports of possible terrorist acts which have allowed us to take appropriate countermeasures.

The U.S. Government is also giving great emphasis to enhancing the security of our personnel and facilities abroad. We have undertaken a security enhancement program for our overseas posts which is designed to reduce their vulnerability. In the decade of the 1970s we stressed protection against small terrorist attacks. However, as a result of our experiences in Tehran, Islamabad, and Tripoli in 1979, we are now also stressing defense against mob attacks. We are constructing safe havens in our embassies and consulates, improving building access controls, installing nonlethal denial systems, and concentrating on other life-saving measures. We have already conducted major surveys at our most threatened posts, and major construction projects are now getting underway. Our plan over the

next few years is to significantly upgrade security at about 125 of our most threatened posts.

We have also instituted a 2-day seminar called "Coping With Violence Abroad." All officials serving abroad are required to attend this course, and the adult dependents over 14 years of age are also invited to attend. This course advises our people on how to reduce their vulnerability to terrorist attacks, how to protect their residences, and also what to expect if they are taken hostage.

Despite our efforts to avoid acts of terrorism, we are still likely to be faced with terrorist violence. It is, therefore, important to have a capability to respond quickly and effectively. All of the Federal Government agencies which may have to react to acts of terrorism have developed response capabilities. All of them have command centers, and these are linked together to manage any particular crisis. These agencies also conduct various contingency exercises to test our response capabilities against a variety of different scenarios.

Another important aspect of our response capability is the ability to respond with force should that be necessary. In the United States, most major cities have SWAT [special weapons and tactics] teams, and each district of the Federal Bureau of Investigations has its own SWAT team. The rescue missions which were conducted at Entebbe, Mogadishu, and the Iranian Embassy in London last year, as well as a number of aircraft incidents, emphasize the need for an effective assault capability should force prove necessary. The United States has dedicated military forces which could be used should the need arise. Late last year the Department of Defense announced the creation of the Joint Counter-Terrorist Task Force. Although we consider the use of force in resolving a terrorist incident a measure of last resort, it is important to have these capabilities should they be needed.

The Need for International Cooperation

No nation can cope with international terrorism by itself. International cooperation is essential if we are to deal effectively with the threat. The international community, through international organizations such as the United Nations, must act together to express its complete and unified condemnation of terrorism, especially those acts which are sponsored by governments themselves. We are working with other nations to establish a consensus under international law that acts of terrorism are equally abhorrent to all nations of the world and that those persons who commit such acts must be brought to justice. The United States has supported existing U.N. conventions outlawing terrorist acts: the Hague convention against hijacking, the Montreal convention against aircraft sabotage, the New York Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of Crimes Against Internationally Protected Persons, the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Materials, and the Convention Against the Taking of Hostages. We have encouraged all nations to become parties to these conventions, which establish an international scheme whose objective is to bring terrorists to justice. We are exploring ways of strengthening these conventions to include consultative and enforcement mechanisms. The United States also favors the drafting of additional U.N. conventions to cover those terrorist acts, such as assassinations, which are not included in existing conventions.

The United States also has been working closely with its economic summit partners: Canada, the United Kingdom, West Germany, Italy, France, and Japan on measures to deal with international terrorism. At the most recent summit in Ottawa last July, a statement on terrorism was issued calling for enhanced cooperation on terrorism. It also proposed the suspension of all

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flights to and from Afghanistan in implementation of the Bonn declaration on hijacking, unless Afghanistan meets its international obligations to bring to justice the hijackers of a Pakistani airliner hijacked last March. The Bonn declaration was adopted by the summit powers in 1978.

Government-condoned and -sponsored acts of terrorism are a particularly egregious form of terrorism. Countries such as the Soviet Union, Cuba, and Libya—which directly or indirectly sponsor, train, finance, or arm terrorists—must be made to understand that their behavior is unacceptable in a world seeking peace, prosperity, and stability.

Conclusion

In conclusion, let me emphasize that the problem of dealing with international terrorism is complex and difficult. There is no single answer or solution to be found. It is clear, however, that the United States must work with other like-minded nations to reduce the cycle of terrorist violence, death, and destruction that now plagues so many parts of the world. If the civilized world fails to deal effectively with this vexing problem, the terrorists will only be encouraged to continue their violent criminal acts in the hope of bringing about the radical political changes which they seek. Above all we would not want to see the terrorism which is plaguing the Middle East, Western Europe, and Latin America spill over to our shores. ■

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