

TERRORISM WORKS -- SOMETIMES

Brian M. Jenkins

April 1974

The Rand Paper Series

Papers are issued by The Rand Corporation as a service to its professional staff. Their purpose is to facilitate the exchange of ideas among those who share the author's research interests; Papers are not reports prepared in fulfillment of Rand's contracts or grants. Views expressed in a Paper are the author's own, and are not necessarily shared by Rand or its research sponsors.

The Rand Corporation
Santa Monica, California 90406

TERRORISM WORKS -- SOMETIMES

Brian M. Jenkins

The Rand Corporation, Santa Monica, California

Terrorism appears to have increased markedly in the past few years. New incidents are reported almost weekly. In the past few months Arab terrorists killed 31 people at the Rome airport. London's airport was surrounded by troops because government officials feared that terrorists there might attempt to shoot down a commercial airliner with portable, Soviet-made anti-aircraft missiles. Several planes were hijacked by political extremists; so was a Greek freighter and a ferryboat in Singapore. Another American diplomat was kidnapped in Mexico; and another in Argentina. Terrorists in Argentina kidnapped several more businessmen and a record ransom of \$14.2 million was paid for the release of an executive of the EXXON Corporation. He has not been released yet. Terrorists in Kuwait seized the Japanese Embassy and held its occupants hostage. A Middle Eastern terrorist group was discovered to have confederates in Santa Barbara; and the United States has experienced its first political kidnapping.

When we talk about terrorism, what are we talking about? There is no precise or widely accepted definition of terrorism. Terrorism has been variously described as acts of wanton violence, inhuman violence, irrational or senseless violence. Not all of these descriptions are accurate and none of them are terribly useful. Everybody has a feeling about what terrorism is; the reaction usually is negative. Terrorism is a perjorative term. Some governments are prone to labeling all violent acts by their political

opponents as terrorism. Rebels rarely call themselves terrorists but frequently claim to be the victims of government terror. Terrorism is thus what the "bad guys" do.

But does the definition of terrorism depend entirely on point of view? Can we not distinguish terrorism from other forms of warfare and from other forms of criminal violence without sliding into one-sided interpretations? Let us try.

Terrorism is, first of all, violence devoted toward political ends. That, at least, draws a line between terrorism and regular crime, although the two may overlap. It is somewhat more difficult to distinguish terrorism from other forms of warfare, and the distinction is *not* that one is waged by government and the other by gangs. Terrorism may be carried out by rebels, by secret police, by soldiers. But most forms of warfare, at least in theory, recognize a category of civilians who are not directly engaged in the struggle -- women and children, for example -- and who therefore are not targets of violence. Terrorism recognizes fewer "civilians." To terrorists, one may be considered an enemy, and therefore a target, solely on the basis of nationality, ethnicity, or religion. Or one can become a target by mere happenstance -- by watching a movie in a theater when a bomb goes off, or by passing through an airport waiting room when passengers are machine-gunned.

This is not to say that people we call terrorists are always indiscriminate killers, or that groups we call armies are always terrible discriminate. But the fact that they aren't doesn't invalidate our definition. It simply compels us to recognize the fact that soldiers -- even our soldiers -- may sometimes be terrorists.

International terrorism includes incidents that have international implications. This may take several forms. A band of guerrillas operating against a local government may seize a foreign diplomat and hold him hostage. A group of terrorists may carry out an operation overseas, the Munich incident, for example. Or groups of terrorists may form alliances with terrorists in other parts of the world, thus becoming international.

Terrorism is not *mindless* violence. Terrorists may not see things the same way you or I would see them, but their actions are deliberate. Terrorism is a means to an end, and not an end in itself. Terrorism has objectives. These are sometimes obscured by the fact that terrorist attacks often seem random and directed toward targets whose death or destruction cannot possibly directly benefit the terrorists. The specific objectives of terrorism may be to advertise the existence or the cause of a certain group, to extort a ransom payoff, to gain the release of prisoners, or to discourage any kind of political dissent -- the primary goal of government terror.

The *broader* objective of terrorism is to create an atmosphere of fear and alarm -- in other words, to terrorize. The random nature of the attacks makes the violence unpredictable, which adds to the fear, makes it more general, and more difficult to cope with. The atmosphere of fear exaggerates the apparent strength of the terrorists. Thus even "pure terrorism" -- totally indiscriminate violence, has a kind of terrible logic: People will be hurt until the terrorists' demands are heard and satisfied. Does it work? Sometimes. European governments, for example, find it convenient to give in to Arab terrorists, to release prisoners rather than bring them to trial, even though Arab terrorists in the entire world probably number no more than a thousand.

We have the same kinds of definition problem when we talk about terrorists: who are *the* terrorists? The term "terrorist" is a bag that contains a disparate bunch of groups and individuals whom history will judge to be murderers, or patriots, or lunatics. A group of rebels may sometimes resort to terrorist tactics and, thus become terrorists. The label once applied tends to stick. A political organization may have a permanent terrorist wing whose activities it can deny. Or an independent group may come into existence dedicated exclusively to carrying out terrorist acts unhindered by leaders who are not themselves terrorists. We can find all three types. Some terrorists are extremely well-organized, well-financed, well-trained, and well-equipped. They are almost an army. Other groups are small and loosely organized. They are ephemeral, undisciplined -- a street corner gang. Their actions are comparatively spontaneous. Their ultimate political objectives are unclear.

I'm not sure that we can even talk about a common type of individual who is a terrorist. If there is a common terrorist type, he *or she* is likely to be young, fairly intelligent, a fanatic, an action-oriented individual who would want to do the shooting himself rather than have it done by someone else, quite possibly a "gun-freak." A number of people who have been held hostage by terrorists have mentioned the constant assembling and disassembling, oiling and cleaning of automatic weapons. Guns seemed almost to be a fetish. I doubt that most terrorists are insane in a medical sense, and I don't think we can label them suicidal, although they do undertake high-risk operations the same way that bank robbers or army commandos do. Of course, we're talking about the frontline terrorists, the "shooters," and not the political leaders behind them.

Terrorism is not new. Medieval rulers hired assassins to murder political opponents. We could find earlier examples if we took the time to look. But while terrorism is not new, a number of developments have taken place in recent years which make terrorism a more potent, and to groups lacking the conventional means of applying power, a very attractive weapon.

Progress has provided terrorists with new targets and new capabilities. Civilian jet air travel, a fairly recent development, gives unprecedented mobility and with it the ability to strike anywhere in the world. Recent developments in news broadcasting -- radio, television, communications satellites -- are also a boon to publicity-seeking terrorists. The willingness and capability of the news media to report and broadcast dramatic incidents of violence throughout the world enhances and even may encourage terrorism as an effective means of propaganda. Terrorists may now be assured that their actions will receive almost instantaneous worldwide coverage on radio, television, and in the press. The world is now their stage, and the whole world is probably watching. The vulnerabilities inherent in modern society, which is increasingly dependent on its technology, afford terrorists opportunities to create greater disruption than in the past. Finally, new weapons, including powerful explosives and sophisticated timing and detonating devices, are increasing terrorists' capacity for violence, the most ominous recent development being the discovery of Soviet hand-held heat-seeking ground-to-air missiles in the hands of terrorists near the Rome airport.

Incidents of international terrorism really began to pick up in the late 1960s. The first terrorists were for the most part local boys operating on their own territory, urban guerrillas who sought international attention by kidnapping an ambassador or blowing up an embassy. True international

terrorism -- going abroad to strike targets -- really began with the activities of Palestinian terrorists. Unlike Latin American terrorists who operated on their home ground, Palestinian terrorists operated throughout the world, striking targets on almost every continent.

Much of the international terrorism we talk about today is a derivative of the conflict in the Middle East, and in some respects reflects the unique features of that conflict. Palestinian terrorists claim to be the oppressed victims of Zionism; Zionists are their declared enemy. As Palestinians live nowhere and Jews live everywhere, Palestinian terror was bound to be international from the start. And the Israelis have demonstrated their willingness to strike back just about anywhere in the world.

Terrorism has proved successful in several respects. It is an effective means of propaganda. It has also caused a great deal of disruption and a substantial diversion of resources to security measures against terrorists. The actual amount of violence itself has been small. In the past six years there have been fewer than 500 incidents of international terrorism, that is, where terrorists have attacked foreign diplomats or businessmen, have crossed national boundaries to strike, or have hijacked airliners. Of these, there were a little over 100 politically-motivated hijackings -- not counting those strictly for cash -- about 70 political kidnappings or attempted kidnappings including those of foreign businessmen, and lots of bombs. In all, 268 people are killed, including the terrorists who were killed in action. In addition, 571 people were injured. We should not minimize these casualties, but 200-some dead and 500 injured in six years is small given the world volume of violence. It's roughly equivalent to the homicide rate of Flint, Michigan, and nowhere near the U.S. total of 18,000 criminal homicides a year.

Neither is the total amount of physical damage that great, several hundred million dollars including ransom paid, which is less than the annual loss in this country through shoplifting. Yet look at the effects achieved by the terrorists: the headlines captured, the amount of television time devoted to terrorism, the disruption caused by the alarm terrorists have created. Look also at the diversion of resources caused by the alarm created, the money spent on security, multiplied by all of the countries in the world that have been compelled to take such measures.

Casualties and losses, and the necessary costs of protection are, of course, only one dimension. Terrorism also attacks the existing social and legal order. Here, too, our modern international terrorists have at least partially succeeded. European governments have already abdicated part of their legal role as a state by releasing or now simply avoiding bringing to trial terrorists if they belong to a group with international connections that is likely to strike again. To hold prisoners only makes countries targets of further terrorist attacks.

What has been demonstrated is that little groups with a limited capacity for violence can capture headlines, can cause alarm, can compel governments to abandon their law enforcement function. To terrorists and to potential terrorists, that makes terrorism a success. This is not to say that organizations employing terrorism have been successful in achieving their political goals or that they even have survived. In fact, their record is dismal. We are talking about the success of terrorist tactics, not the success of the terrorists themselves.

What direction will terrorism take in the future? We can discern some trends. While it is incorrect to speak of terrorism in terms of an international conspiracy, as if terrorists in the world were all members of a single organization, it is apparent that links are increasing between terrorists in various parts of the world. A number of terrorist groups share similar ideologies and are willing to cooperate with each other. Alliances have been concluded between terrorist groups, such as that between the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the United Red Army of Japan. It was Japanese terrorists from the Red Army that were brought in by the Palestinians to machinegun passengers at the Lod Airport in Israel two years ago. The better trained, better financed, and better equipped terrorist groups are providing some military assistance and technical advice to less-developed terrorist groups. Groups in one part of the world have shown themselves capable of recruiting confederates in other parts. The growing links between terrorist groups are extremely important. They provide small terrorist organizations with the resources to undertake far more serious operations than they would be capable of otherwise. They make identification more difficult, since the local citizens can be used to carry out attacks; and they could ultimately produce some kind of worldwide terrorist movement directed against a certain group of countries for vague, ideological, political, or economic reasons.

A second possible trend is in the direction of more spectacular, more destructive acts. This will become necessary as the public becomes bored with what terrorists do now. It will also be made possible by the creation of new vulnerabilities and by the acquisition of new weapons. Let me give one example. The probable proliferation in the next few decades of nuclear

power facilities and the amount of traffic in fissionable material and radioactive waste material that will accompany this raises a number of new possibilities for political extortion and mass hostage situations on a scale that we have not yet seen.

At the same time, technological advances are creating a new range of small, portable, cheap, and relatively easy to operate, yet highly accurate and highly destructive weapons which, if produced on a large scale, will undoubtedly find their way into the hands of terrorists. What will the consequences be? What happens when the "Saturday Night Special" is not a revolver but a hand-held, heat-seeking missile. One European government is now manufacturing a rocket launcher without a back blast. It can be fired from inside a room -- an extremely useful weapon for terrorists in urban areas. Within ten years, a new range of small, inexpensive weapons employing precision-guided munitions will be in production. Eventually it will become possible to assassinate someone several kilometers away with a high probability of success.

A third possible trend is that national governments will recognize the achievements of terrorist groups and begin to employ them as a means of surrogate warfare against another nation. Conventional war is becoming impractical. It is too expensive and too destructive. On the other hand, terrorists could be employed to create alarm in an adversary's country, compel it to divert valuable resources to protect itself, destroy its morale, and carry out specific acts of sabotage. It requires only a small investment, certainly far less than to wage a conventional war; it is deniable; and it is debilitating to the enemy. The concept is not new, but the opportunities are, and they are growing.