RAND'S RESEARCH ON TERRORISM

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PREFACE

Since 1973, The Rand Corporation has been engaged in research on international terrorism. This paper was prepared in response to requests for a brief overview of this research. It will appear in the first issue of *Terrorism: An International Journal*.

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> Repeatedly, during the last few years, small groups of extremists have demonstrated that by using terrorist tactics they can achieve disproportionate effects. They attract worldwide attention to themselves and their causes; they arouse worldwide alarm, and can create international incidents that national governments are compelled to deal with, often before a worldwide audience. To protect against their attacks or to respond to crisis situations they create, they force governments to expend resources -- manpower, money, the attention of senior officials -- vastly out of scale with the magnitude of the actual threat they pose.[1]

For the past five years, The Rand Corporation has been engaged in research on international terrorism. Rand is a California corporation, independent and nonprofit, headquartered in Santa Monica. It conducts research on matters affecting the public interest -- questions involving U.S. strategic and foreign policy, military manpower, urban development, communications, education, health, housing, energy, and other areas. Rand's work is supported entirely by government agencies and private institutions concerned with public problems.

Rand began its research on terrorism in 1973, in part on its own initiative, in part because dramatic events led the U.S. government to devote serious attention to the threat posed by terrorists. Rand suggested that international terrorism was likely to become an increasing problem.

> Contemporary technology has provided terrorists with new targets and new capabilities. Jet air travel gives them both dramatic targets and unprecedented mobility that allows them to strike anywhere in the world. Television, radio, and the press afford terrorists almost instantaneous worldwide exposure. The vulnerabilities arising from modern society's increasing dependence on technology afford terrorists opportunities to create greater disruption. At the same time, new weapons are increasing their capacity for violence.[2]

The problem, it was thought, was likely to be overlooked for a variety of reasons. Organizationally, it was difficult to determine who was, or should be, in charge. "There is no single department,

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agency or office in the government charged with overall responsibility for combatting terrorism that also has the authority and means for doing so."[3] That is still very much the case. At the same time, everybody seemed to have part of the responsibility: the FBI for domestic incidents (although it cannot merely assume jurisdiction in all local cases); the Department of State, and possibly the Department of Defense, for incidents abroad, except for airline hijackings which are in the exclusive jurisdiction of the Federal Aviation Administration; the Energy Research and Development Administration and possibly the Nuclear Regulatory Commission for threats to nuclear facilities or threats involving nuclear material; the Secret Service and Executive Protective Service for protecting U.S. officials and foreign dignitaries, and so on. A problem that cuts across so many bureaucratic jurisdictions makes governmental coordination difficult. Unless there are pressing reasons, the problem may be put aside.

Two particularly shocking terrorist incidents occurred in 1972 that provoked many governments to undertake serious measures to deter or prevent such acts and to deal effectively with them if they did occur. In May, three Japanese gunmen with machine guns and hand grenades attacked passengers at Tel Aviv's Lod Airport, killing 25 people and wounding 76. The gunmen were members of the United Red Army of Japan and had been recruited for the assault by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. The intended victims were to be passengers arriving on an El Al Airlines flight who were therefore assumed to be Israelis or people with direct loyalties to Israel. Ironically, it turned out that many of the passengers killed were Christians from Puerto Rico on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. How is it, people asked, that Japanese terrorists came to Israel to kill Puerto Ricans on behalf of Palestinians? This was truly international terrorism. In September, eight Palestinian guerrillas broke into the Israeli quarters at the Olympic Games in Munich, killed two, and held nine others hostage. All of the hostages were subsequently killed during a gunfight between the terrorists and West German police.

Soon after the Munich incident, President Nixon created the Cabinet Committee to Combat Terrorism. The Committee, chaired by the Secretary of State, includes the Secretaries of Defense, Transportation, and the Treasury, the Attorney General, the heads of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Central Intelligence Agency, the National Security Council, the U.S. Mission to the United Nations, and the President's domestic counselor. At the same time, the President established the working group of the Cabinet Committee, which now represents 26 departments, agencies, and bureaus. Ordinarily it meets every other week. The Cabinet Committee and its working group provide a focal point in government for dealing with the problem.

Shortly after the creation of this group, Rand was contracted to conduct research on the problem of international terrorism. This research was sponsored jointly by the Department of State and the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency. Initially, it was directed at providing government officials with a broad understanding of the origins, theory, strategy and tactics of modern terrorism, and at identifying and exploring specific problem areas.

> Terrorism is often described as mindless violence, senseless violence, or irrational violence. If we put aside the actions of a few authentic lunatics, terrorism is seldom mindless or irrational. There is a theory of terrorism, and it often works.[4]

> Terrorism can be described as the use of actual or threatened violence to gain attention and to create fear and alarm, which in turn will cause people to exaggerate the strength of the terrorists and the importance of their cause. Since groups that use terrorist tactics are typically small and weak, the violence they practice must be deliberately shocking.[5]

> Terrorist attacks are often carefully choreographed to attract the attention of the electronic media and the international press. Taking and holding hostages increases the drama. The hostages themselves often mean nothing to the terrorists. Terrorism is aimed at the people watching, not at the actual victims. Terrorism is theater.[6]

As it applies to Rand's current research, the term "terrorism" is used generically to describe research on a wide range of related topics, including: the theory and tactics of terrorism; the organization of

the U.S. government for combatting terrorism, the analysis of intelligence on terrorist threats; heuristic modeling and the use of remote access computers in the management of low-level crises; the policy and tactics of dealing with political kidnapping and hostage situations; the effects of being held hostage; U.S. military capabilities for subconventional missions (the extrication or rescue of U.S. nationals abroad, the recovery of facilities seized by terrorists); new vulnerabilities in a society increasingly dependent on technology; trends and potentialities in terrorism, nuclear safeguards and security; subnational nuclear capabilities; and the assessment of nuclear threat messages.

Rand has taken a multidisciplinary approach to the study of terrorism. The director of this research is Brian Jenkins, an historian and associate head of Rand's Social Science Department. The other staff members and consultants who have participated in various aspects of the research represent a broad range of academic credentials and specialized skills, including psychology, psychiatry, political science, military operations, psychological operations, intelligence, weapons technology, computer science and mathematics.

Approximately one-fifth of all incidents of international terrorism involve taking hostages (one-third if we count the diversion of airliners). Terrorists seize hostages -- diplomats, corporate executives, tourists, sometimes just anybody handy -- to deliberately heighten the drama of the episode, thus guaranteeing widespread publicity and to increase their leverage by placing human life in jeopardy. In the first half of 1973, just as Rand was beginning its research, there were three hostage incidents involving American diplomats. In Haiti, the American ambassador and consul general were kidnapped and held for the release of thirty prisoners. In March, the American ambassador and deputy chief of mission in Khartoum were seized and subsequently murdered by Palestinian terrorists. In May, Mexican terrorists kidnapped the American consul general in Guadalajara.

Rand was asked to devote its initial attention to the problem of political kidnapping, specifically the policy and tactics of bargaining with terrorists holding hostages. Rand researchers made an overall

examination of the tactics of hostage-taking, looked at trends in a number of countries where the kidnapping problem was most serious, and conducted a series of detailed case studies of actual hostage incidents. While many of the conclusions are understandably classified for security reasons, portions of the work have been made public.

A review of 77 international hostage incidents that occurred between 1968 and 1975 showed that American diplomats and representatives abroad had been the most frequent target of kidnappers, figuring in more than one third of all the incidents during the six-year period. It also showed that kidnapping was a preferred tactic where the terrorists were operating on their own territory and had an underground organization to support them, but that seizures of embassies or other buildings -- what police generally call barricade and hostage situations -- were more likely when the terrorists were operating abroad, or at home in countries where they lacked an underground organization. The most startling findings related to the payoffs and risks to the terrorists in seizing hostages. The low risk of capture or death, the high probability that the kidnappers' demands will be at least partially satisfied, and even if they are rejected, the still high probability that the kidnappers will escape capture or punishment revealed the terrorist tactic of seizing hostages to be effective and not necessarily perilous.[7]

> Surprisingly, few hostages bear any grudge against their captors for turning them into human pawns. Indeed, they frequently develop positive relationships with them. They chat and share sandwiches inside embassies surrounded by soldiers and policemen. Upon release, they often part company amiably, wish each other well. Some former kidnap victims recall their "hosts" almost fondly -- "They were exceptionally polite -- especially for terrorists." . . . some develop something close to affection for their captors. A few fall in love.[8]

Concurrently with its study of hostage situations, Rand was asked to examine the experience of the hostages themselves: Might they have avoided capture? Is there anything they could do in captivity to increase their chances of not being murdered? How might they deal with the physical strain and mental anxiety of captivity? How should they be treated upon their release? To answer these questions, Rand

researchers interviewed a large number of former hostages -- American and foreign government officials, diplomats, and businessmen. Rand's reported findings from these interviews contributed to an increased understanding of this fascinating area of human behavior.

Another important problem area identified in Rand's research on terrorism is the potential for nuclear action by political extremists or criminal groups. Indeed, about 40 percent of its total research on terrorism has dealt with the question: Will terrorists go nuclear?

> The possibility that criminals, political extremists, or individual lunatics might steal a nuclear weapon from a weapons storage site, fabricate a crude nuclear explosive device using stolen nuclear material, or create alarming nuclear hoaxes, has become a topic of increasing public attention and concern. Even a relatively crude improvised explosive device, if successfully detonated, could have the destructive force of several hundred tons of conventional explosives, which is thousands of times the power of the largest bombs yet detonated by terrorists. It cannot be assumed that these possibilities have been ignored by existing or potential terrorists, or that they will not be considered in the future.[9]

The feasibility and plausibility of a terrorist-posed nuclear threat, currently an issue of heated debate, are central to the current national debate on nuclear energy. Many opponents of expansion of the nuclear industry argue that criminals and political extremists constitute a real threat to nuclear facilities, that there have been grave breaches of security in this country and abroad, and that considerable amounts of strategic nuclear material, the stuff bombs are made of, are unaccounted for. Adequate security, they argue, cannot be provided without controls that would seriously threaten a democratic society. Critics of these arguments say that such concerns are exaggerated; that the nuclear industry has functioned for more than two decades in the United States without terrorist attacks; that no breach of security has endangered the public; and, as for the missing material, that it is still in the system. Most agree that better security is needed.

At the international level, the spread of nuclear reactors and reprocessing facilities will greatly increase plutonium production worldwide. This will increase the opportunities for theft or diversion and, some fear, may eventually generate an international black market

in nuclear material and increase the possibility of acquisition of a nuclear capability by a terrorist or criminal group. There is consensus that current international safeguards are totally inadequate to prevent diversion or theft.

In 1975, Rand was contracted by Sandia Laboratories in New Mexico to undertake a study of the potential malevolent threat to U.S. nuclear programs. This study, which is still in progress, focuses on the attributes of potential adversaries, including their possible motivations, resources, knowledge, technical expertise, dedication, and armament. The results of this study will contribute to the design and operation of security systems and measures to protect nuclear materials from theft and to prevent sabotage of nuclear facilities. Unlike the case with hostage situations, there have been fortunately few serious incidents involving nuclear facilities or material to examine as a basis for drawing conclusions regarding possible future incidents. Therefore, a different research strategy was developed. Using a data base of analogous nonnuclear incidents -- armed robberies and burglaries carried out by carefully selected and well organized teams of thieves with specialized skills and equipment, terrorist seizures of buildings, small commando raids on defended targets, industrial sabotage, symbolic bombings -- would allow the researchers to draw inferences about the kinds of skills and resources that various other categories of adversaries have been able to assemble. These would provide reference points for the designers of the nuclear security systems. Such a study would also provide insights into the techniques employed in penetrating or taking over protected facilities.

The question of motivations is far more difficult. Here researchers are examining the decisionmaking process and behavior patterns of violent extremist groups and individuals responsible for major acts of violence. This work is still in progress. Some time before the research on this question began, the leader of the project speculated that "the primary attraction to terrorists in going nuclear is not necessarily the fact that nuclear weapons would enable terrorists to cause mass casualties, but rather the fact that almost any terrorist action associated with the words 'atomic' or 'nuclear' automatically generates fear in the mind of the public."[10]

> Nuclear power, whether in the form of peaceful energy or weapons is the most potent and, to many people, the most sinister force known to mankind. Any sort of action by terrorists would be assured of widespread publicity. It would instill fear and create alarm.[11]

> Incidents in which terrorists have deliberately tried to kill large numbers of people or cause widespread damage are relatively rare. Terrorists want a lot of people watching, not a lot of people dead -- which may explain why, apart from the technical difficulties involved, they have not already used chemical or bacteriological weapons, or conventional explosives in ways that would produce mass casualties.[12]

In a report prepared for the Congressional Office of Technology Assessment in May 1977, seven basic conclusions regarding nuclear terrorism were drawn from the numerous studies that had been done thus far. (1) It is no longer implausible that criminals or political extremists might sabotage nuclear facilities, fabricate a nuclear explosive device, or disperse radioactive materials. It can be done. (2) There are political extremists and criminal groups today that possess or could acquire the necessary resources to do it. (3) The historical record, however, provides no evidence that such groups have attempted to acquire nuclear material for illicit use in an explosive or dispersal device, although there have been low-level incidents involving nuclear facilities or material. (4) Nor is there an inexorable progression from the currently identified spectrum of potential nuclear terrorists to actual nuclear terrorists, or from the nuclear incidents that have occurred to actions of greater consequence. (5) Whether any of the current potential nuclear terrorists will actually go nuclear remains an unanswerable question. (6) But there may appear new kinds of adversaries more likely to take nuclear action. (7) The level and nature of the threat may change.[13]

Months before the Entebbe raid, a Rand paper presented at a conference held at the Department of State concluded that "confronted with terrorist violence emanating from abroad, and frustrated by the lack of international cooperation, national governments are more likely to take direct military action . . . against terrorists and the nations that support them. " In a later article, it was argued that:

> We must not peremptorily dismiss military action as a possible option in dealing with terrorism. At any time an incident may occur in which a band of political extremists will seize a large number of American hostages on foreign territory, negotiations have failed, the captors appear on the point of killing the hostages, and the local government is unwilling or unable to protect persons within its borders.
>
> Public pressure would not permit any political leaders to stand by while Americans are being shot. The government would either have to yield to the terrorists' demands or risk the use of military force. At stake will be the lives of the hostages as well as the image of the U.S. government.[14]

Another suggested possibility was that "nations or groups unable or unwilling to mount a serious challenge on the battlefield may employ such [free-lance terrorist] groups or adopt terrorist tactics as a means of surrogate warfare against their opponents." In sum, it is believed that "low-level conflict, including international terrorism, may well be the kind of conflict that will increasingly confront the United States." Responding to a concern shared by many officials in the government that the most likely threat to U.S. security in the decade ahead may not be nuclear or conventional war between the superpowers, but the proliferation of crises and conflicts on a smaller scale and at a lower level of intensity, The Rand Corporation hosted an exploratory discussion of the possible implications. The participants included members of Rand's research staff, representatives of several academic and research institutions, and officials from the Departments of State and Defense. The participants concluded that the United States should take positive steps to develop a capability to respond to low-level conflicts and crises and made a number of specific recommendations.[15]

As for the future, it appears that we are entering a new domain of conflict. Looking at the phenomenon from the latter half of the 1970s, we observe that international terrorism seems to be on the rise. It has increased fitfully during the last decade, and it is likely to persist into the next. Terrorist tactics will continue to be a mode of political expression, a means of attracting worldwide attention and achieving limited political goals.

Although few terrorist groups can claim to have attained their long-range goals, and in that sense have failed, their use of terrorist tactics has won them publicity and often gained them concessions. Typically short-sighted, those who have used or would use terrorist tactics are sufficiently encouraged by such tactical victories to preclude their abandonment of terrorist tactics. One of Rand's tasks has been to examine the trends and potentialities of international terrorism.

> Terrorists appear to be getting more sophisticated in their tactics, their weapons and their exploitation of the media. Some of the new weapons being developed for military arsenals, such as shoulder-fired, surface-to-air missiles, may find their way into their hands. Terrorist groups appear to be strengthening their links with each other. One result is the emergence of multinational free-lance terrorist groups that are willing to carry out attacks on behalf of causes they are sympathetic with, or to undertake specific operations or campaigns of terrorism on commission from client groups or governments.[16]

Other trends being examined include the evolution of politically motivated terrorist groups to profit-motivated criminal organizations and the effect on society of high levels of violent crime and political violence as in Belfast, Buenos Aires, and Beirut.

Rand's research is also concerned with the social and political consequences of terrorism. One immediate effect is a major diversion of resources to internal security functions. The protection of political leaders and diplomats, airports, nuclear facilities, and other vital systems will demand increasing manpower and money. Rand researchers foresee the continuing growth of an "internal defense" budget disbursed among the budgets of other government agencies as well as security expenditures by private business which are passed on to the consumer. This is part of a major shift in society from secure national perimeters maintained by national defense to "inner perimeters" -- guarded facilities, privately patrolled communities, security buildings, alarmed homes -- where the burden of "defense" is increasingly placed upon the private sector and the individual sector. Geographically, modern society may become a series of separated or overlapping perimeters which people

move through to work, travel, or visit. Rand's researchers also see a disturbing trend toward authoritarian regimes. Repression and increased surveillance may become an irresistible temptation to national governments trying to protect their own citizens against violence by a small minority and to preserve domestic and international order.

> Nations individually will attempt to impose greater social controls on their citizens. We will see the development of new technologies of social control. Depending on perceptions of the terrorist threat, these controls may be tolerated, even supported by a frightened population.[17]

> The greatest threat posed by terrorists now lies in the atmosphere of alarm they create, which corrodes democracy and breeds repression. . . . If the government appears incompetent, public alarm will increase and so will the clamor for draconian measures.[18]

At the international level, changes may occur that could profoundly alter concepts of national security and political organization.

> The increasing vulnerabilities in our society plus the increasing capacities for violence afforded by new developments in weaponry mean that smaller and smaller groups have a greater and greater capacity for disruption and destruction. Or, put another way, the small bands of extremists and irreconcilables that have always existed may become an increasingly potent force. This could have profound political consequences. Nations maintain their credentials in the last resort by maintaining their monopoly over the means of violence.[19]

As the balance of military (destructive) power shifts away from national armies toward smaller armed groups that do not necessarily represent or confine their activities to any particular nation, national governments may lose their monopoly over the means of large-scale violence and we may see the emergence of permanent subnational and transnational entities.

> The world that emerges is an unstable collection of nations, mini-states, autonomous ethnic substates, governments in exile, national liberation fronts, guerrilla groups aspiring to international recognition and legitimacy via violence, and a collection of ephemeral but disruptive terrorist organizations, some of which are linked together in vague alliances, some perhaps the proteges of foreign states. . . . It is a world of formal peace between nations -- free of open warfare except, perhaps, for brief periods -- but of a higher level of political violence.[20]

Rand will be continuing its research to understand the course of modern political violence and its effects on a free society.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Brian Jenkins, *Combatting International Terrorism: The Role of Congress*, P-5808, The Rand Corporation, Santa Monica, January 1977.

[2]Brian Jenkins and Janera Johnson, *International Terrorism: A Chronology, 1968-1974*, R-1597-DOS/ARPA, The Rand Corporation, Santa Monica, March 1975.

[3]Brian Jenkins, "Upgrading the Fight Against Terrorism," *The Washington Post*, March 27, 1977.

[4]Brian Jenkins, *International Terrorism: A New Mode of Conflict*, Crescent Publications, Los Angeles, 1975.

[5]*Combatting International Terrorism: The Role of Congress*, op. cit.

[6]*International Terrorism: A New Mode of Conflict*, op. cit.

[7]Brian Jenkins, Janera Johnson and David Ronfeldt, *Numbered Lives; Some Statistical Observations from 77 International Hostage Episodes*, P-5905, The Rand Corporation, Santa Monica, July 1977.

[8]Brian Jenkins, *Hostages and Their Captors -- Friends and Lovers*, P-5519, The Rand Corporation, Santa Monica, October 1975. See also *Hostage Survival: Some Preliminary Observations*, P-5627, April 1976.

[9]Brian Jenkins, *The Potential for Nuclear Terrorism*, P-5876, The Rand Corporation, Santa Monica, May 1977.

[10]Brian Jenkins, *Will Terrorists Go Nuclear?* P-5541, The Rand Corporation, Santa Monica, November 1975.

[11]Ibid.

[12]Ibid.

[13]Brian Jenkins and Joseph Krofcheck, "The Potential Nuclear Non-State Adversary," a report prepared for the Congress of the United States, Office of Technology Assessment, May 1977.

[14]*The Washington Post*, op. cit.

[15]Brian Jenkins, George Tanham, Eleanor Wainstein, and Gerald Sullivan, *U.S. Preparation for Future Low-Level Conflict: A Report of a Discussion, October 19-20, 1976, at The Rand Corporation, Washington, D.C.*, P-5830, The Rand Corporation, Santa Monica, July 1977.

[16]Brian Jenkins, "International Terrorism: Trends and Potentialities," paper presented to the Department of State Conference on International Terrorism, March 26, 1976.

[17]Ibid.

[18]"Upgrading the Fight Against Terrorism," op. cit.

[19]Brian Jenkins, *High Technology Terrorism and Surrogate Warfare: The Impact of New Technology on Low-Level Violence*, P-5339, The Rand Corporation, Santa Monica, January 1975.

[20]Ibid.