U.S. Countermeasures Against International Terrorism

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PREFACE

The research reported here was sponsored by the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Command, Control, Communications and Intelligence. It was carried out under the Countermeasures Against Terrorism project within the International Security and Defense Policy Research Program of RAND's National Defense Research Institute, a federally funded research and development center sponsored by the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The project was undertaken to identify and assess antiterrorist countermeasures that have been used by governments and to determine which of these measures have succeeded or failed and for what apparent reasons.

This report examines U.S. efforts against international terrorism. An executive summary of the experiences of Great Britain, France, Israel, Italy, South Africa, Turkey, and West Germany in combatting terrorism is forthcoming.

SUMMARY

Combatting international terrorism has been a major concern for the United States for the past two decades. A critical task facing U.S. policymakers in the 1990s will be that of determining where U.S. counterterrorist efforts should be focused and how to conduct them. The United States will not be able to implement every possible antiterrorist response because of resource limitations and foreign policy implications. Moreover, some responses might jeopardize important relations with key allies or neutral parties or escalate tensions with adversaries. Practical decisions will therefore have to be made among the wide variety of responses that are available to governments in the campaign against terrorism. This report presents an overview and evaluation of the major antiterrorist measures that have been used and considered by the United States. The purpose is to uncover lessons from past experience that may help guide future counterterrorist efforts.

A major part of the U.S. effort to combat international terrorism has been the implementation of physical security measures at facilities both at home and abroad. Airports and embassies have received particular attention, with early programs using psychological profiles of potential hijackers and the placement of sky marshals aboard selected flights. These measures were later augmented by the use of metal detectors and X-ray machines. However, security measures have not been totally effective in preventing terrorist incidents, as the numerous hijackings and midair bombings of recent years illustrate. Plastic explosives that cannot be detected by most existing security systems have created special problems, leading to the increased testing of thermal neutron detection devices.

The most important—and least publicized—component of the U.S. effort to combat international terrorism has been intelligence gathering and analysis. Other governments have cooperated in this area, and the sharing of information has resulted in the capture of several terrorists and the prevention of potential incidents. Governments are more willing to cooperate in information-sharing than in other counterterrorist measures, since counterterrorist intelligence can be done "quietly," without fanfare and without the risks involved in other types of joint antiterrorist ventures.

The United States has benefited from the work of other nations' counterterrorist organizations on several occasions. A 1984 West German police raid on a hideout of the Red Army Faction uncovered a list

of U.S. targets in West Germany that the terrorist group was planning to attack. In 1985, actions taken by Swiss and Italian police prevented a group of Lebanese Shi'ites from blowing up the American Embassy in Rome. The United States has also obtained counterterrorist intelligence through the International Criminal Police Operation (INTERPOL), and bilateral agreements have been reached with other countries concerning the sharing of intelligence on terrorist groups.

The United States has been less successful in gaining international cooperation for economic sanctions against state sponsors of terrorism, primarily because many of our allies have substantial economic ties with some of the countries the United States has tried to isolate, e.g., Libya. Another factor that makes U.S. economic counterterrorist efforts ineffective is the absence of any substantial economic relationship between Washington and known state sponsors of terrorism, such as Libya, Iran, and Syria. The economic weapon is therefore basically a symbolic one, serving as a "flexible response" to terrorism. It is stronger than verbal warnings, yet weaker than military retaliation. The U.S. air raid on Libya in 1986 was an acknowledgment that prior economic measures against Tripoli had failed.

The United States has also relied on diplomatic and legal means to fight international terrorism. Several multilateral conventions have been signed on different types of terrorist incidents, including airplane hijackings and sabotage and violence against diplomats. However, there is no guarantee that countries will adhere to the agreements that include the extradition or punishment of hijackers. Also, U.S. diplomatic and legal efforts against terrorism have been impeded by the tendency of other nations to seek their own solutions to terrorist incidents. Thus, West Germany did not extradite one of the 1985 TWA hijackers wanted for the murder of an American Navy diver—Bonn was fearful that extradition might jeopardize the lives of West German hostages in Lebanon.

The most dramatic U.S. countermeasures against terrorism have been three military operations: The attempt in 1980 to free the hostages being held at the American Embassy in Iran; the 1985 midair interception of an Egyptian airliner carrying the hijackers of the *Achille Lauro* cruise ship; and the 1986 bombing of Libya. The least successful was the rescue mission in Iran, which had to be aborted when two helicopters experienced mechanical problems and a third had to turn back due to a sandstorm. The most successful military operation was the interception of the Egyptian airliner, which was carried out without a flaw. While the U.S. air raid on Libya succeeded in striking several targets in Tripoli and Benghazi, one U.S. fighter-bomber was lost and several did not participate because of on-board

technical problems. Also, one of the "smart bombs" went astray and struck the French Embassy in Tripoli.

The interception of the Egyptian airliner and the bombing of Libya were more successful than the hostage rescue mission, partly because they were both the types of operation the military is best trained for, i.e., conventional operations. While both missions required careful planning and skillful use of assets, intercepting a plane and bombing a target are basically straightforward military operations. Rescuing hostages on foreign enemy soil is a much more difficult operation. The logistics are complicated, as aircraft and troops have to be transported secretly to within striking distance of the target. All the participants in the operation also need practice runs, since success depends upon perfect timing and mutual familiarity.

The U.S. experience with military countermeasures also reveals the problems that can arise when military personnel and assets have to travel a long distance to strike their intended target. Most U.S. military assets are not permanently stationed within close range of terrorist targets. This distinguishes the U.S. task in combatting terrorism from that of other countries that have utilized military countermeasures, such as Israel. Both the hostage rescue mission and the raid on Libya were impeded by the long distance U.S. aircraft had to travel to reach their target.

The hostage rescue attempt and the Libya raid also reveal the technological risks of counterterrorist military operations. Incidents such as helicopters and fighter-bombers malfunctioning and "smart bombs" going astray illustrate that while technology has enabled important advancements in combatting terrorism, such as improved physical security devices and better intelligence, technology cannot always be relied upon to ensure the success of a military counterterrorist mission.

The most questionable element of U.S. counterterrorist strategy has been official government statements and threats. The temptation for policymakers to make bold statements about terrorism is strong, since terrorism is a highly emotional issue. Tough talk on terrorism, however, has little deterrent value, and it raises unrealistic expectations among the public about what can be achieved. It also gives terrorists additional publicity, and U.S. counterterrorist strategy should emphasize taking that away from them, rather than enhancing it.

Anti-U.S. terrorism can never be completely eliminated. The presence of U.S. assets and citizens in all parts of the world and the multitude of terrorist groups that are active guarantee that the United States will continue to be targeted. Therefore, U.S. countermeasures should not be expected to "defeat" international terrorism. They may, however, be effective in reducing the terrorist threat.

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I. INTRODUCTION

International terrorism poses a continuing problem for the United States. American diplomatic, military, and civilian personnel and facilities throughout the world are potential targets of terrorists. A critical task facing U.S. policymakers in the 1990s will be that of determining where American efforts to combat terrorism should be focused. The United States will not be able to implement every possible antiterrorist response because of resource limitations and foreign policy implications. Moreover, some responses might jeopardize important relations with key allies or neutral parties or escalate tensions with adversaries. The diverse nature of the terrorist threat—multitudes of groups, varying tactics and objectives, endless potential targets—also makes it extremely difficult to design a consistent and comprehensive counterterrorist policy.

With each new terrorist incident, pressure grows for some type of response. A midair bombing of a jetliner results in immediate calls for upgraded security at airports worldwide; a hijacking or bombing that kills Americans elicits public and congressional calls for retaliation; and linkage of a state sponsor of terrorism to an anti-American incident leads to pressure for action at the highest levels of government.

Terrorism, though, cannot be eliminated, and even "progress" against terrorists can be easily reversed by a single individual with a single bomb. Since there are costs—monetary, political, and personal—involved in any action against terrorism, decisions on counterterrorist policies will have to be weighed in terms of their likely benefits.

Practical decisions will need to be made on a wide variety of responses, including measures to increase physical security at facilities at home and abroad; efforts to obtain intelligence about planned terrorist incidents; diplomatic and economic sanctions against state sponsors of terrorism; special laws aimed at deterring terrorist acts and punishing those responsible for such incidents; military preemptive and retaliatory raids; and threats and official policy statements aimed at the "terrorists." In addition, governments will have to seek international cooperation in their efforts to combat terrorism.

This report presents an overview and evaluation of the major antiterrorist measures that have been used or considered by the United States. The list is not exhaustive; rather, our intent is to uncover

lessons from past experience that may help guide us in our future efforts to combat terrorism.

II. PROTECTING AMERICANS AGAINST TERRORISM: PHYSICAL SECURITY MEASURES

Of all the possible countermeasures to terrorism, enhancing physical security would seem to be the least controversial. Unlike political, economic, and military measures, which can become entangled in complex policy debates, protecting facilities and airlines from terrorist attacks should be straightforward: erect more barriers around buildings, increase security at airports, develop state-of-the-art technology to prevent terrorist incidents. But physical security has become increasingly difficult in recent years. The technological race against terrorists is never-ending; as new devices are designed and installed to detect weapons or protect against attack, the terrorists change tactics or use more sophisticated weapons to defeat them.

With each new terrorist incident, governments are taken to task for not being able to prevent attacks. The Irish Republican Army (IRA) summed up the dilemma governments face in trying to prevent terrorist incidents in 1984, following their failed attempt to assassinate Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, when they issued a statement saying, "Today we were unlucky, but remember, we only have to be lucky once. You will have to be lucky always."[1] But governments cannot always be "lucky," and terrorists will sometimes be able to penetrate security.

The evolution of physical security countermeasures in the United States illustrates the critical role technology has played in the battle against terrorism. During the 1960s and 1970s, U.S. efforts to increase airport security focused on preventing the hijacking of airplanes. Psychological profiles of potential hijackers were created, and federal sky marshals were placed aboard certain flights. But because these programs were selective, they were not foolproof.

The installation of sophisticated metal detectors and X-ray machines to screen all passengers and luggage significantly decreased the probability of hijackings,[2] and the sky marshal program was phased

[1] *Washington Post*, October 13, 1984.

[2] It is difficult to measure the effect of a particular security measure on the incidence of terrorist attacks. One study, however, indicated that after metal detectors were introduced in 1973, the probability of a flight being hijacked was reduced from approximately 3.5 chances in 100,000 to just over 1 chance in 100,000. See W. M. Landes, "An Economic Study of U.S. Aircraft Hijackings, 1961–1976," *Journal of Law and Economics*,

out in 1973. After several planes were hijacked to Cuba in August 1980 and May 1983, however, the program was reinstated. Again, after the 1985 hijacking of a Trans World Airlines flight in Lebanon, President Reagan requested an immediate expansion of the sky marshal program for international flights.[3]

The United States has tended to increase physical security following major incidents. Several hijackings and midair explosions occurred in 1985 and 1986, and in response, curbside check-in of luggage for international flights was eliminated at many U.S. airports. In the aftermath of the suicide truck bombing of the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut in 1983, concrete barriers were erected around U.S. embassies and other government and military facilities throughout the world. After it was revealed that the 1988 bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, was caused by a plastic explosive hidden inside a radio-cassette player that was placed in a suitcase, the U.S. government announced that advanced bomb detection equipment would be installed at airports and that older X-ray and metal detectors would be replaced with newer ones. The U.S. government also ordered a full review of each airline's security program, and the Federal Aviation Agerncy (FAA) stated that it would increase its overseas security staff.[4]

As noted earlier, a major problem in physical security is the difficulty of keeping ahead of the terrorists. In September 1984, physical security work at the new U.S. Embassy in East Beirut was still in progress when a suicide bomber drove a van loaded with explosives onto the grounds. A steel gate that was to control the entry of vehicles past a roadblock had not yet been installed.[5]

After the Advisory Panel on Overseas Security, also known as the Inman Commission, emphasized the importance of upgrading the physical security of American embassies and consulates worldwide, the State Department embarked upon a multi-million dollar effort to improve security at American embassies.[6] The measures taken included the installation of "15-minute doors" at many U.S. diplomatic facilities. These doors, designed to withstand 50 hits with a sledgehammer, five shots from a high-powered rifle, and attacks with axes

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Vol. 21, 1978, pp. 1–31, cited in Todd Sandler and John L. Scott, "Terrorist Success in Hostage-Taking Incidents: An Empirical Study," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, March 1987, pp. 35–36.

[3]*Washington Post*, June 19, 1985.

[4]*New York Times*, April 4, 1989, p. 7.

[5]*Washington Post*, September 27, 1984.

[6]See, for example, National Research Council, *The Embassy of the Future: Recommendations for the Design of Future U.S. Embassy Buildings* Washington, D.C., National Academy Press, 1986.

and crowbars,[7] would allow U.S. embassy officials under siege by a mob to find safe haven inside the embassy and to destroy sensitive files. Other measures included the construction and renovation of buildings to meet new physical security standards, perimeter security programs, and Foreign Service security training.[8]

Terrorists continue to find innovative ways to penetrate the tighter security that governments impose. In Karachi, Pakistan, Palestinian terrorists posed as airport security guards and used an airport vehicle to drive onto the tarmac and seize a Pan American Airways jet in September 1986. The 1984 IRA attempt to assassinate Prime Minister Thatcher involved the placing of a bomb with a sophisticated timer in the hotel where the Conservative party was holding its annual convention. The device allowed the IRA to extend the time period before the bomb would explode, thereby enabling them to plant the device several days—perhaps even weeks—before the convention security was in place. In another incident, the Red Army Faction (RAF) detonated a car bomb at Rhein-Main Air Base in Frankfurt, West Germany, in 1985 despite increased security measures at U.S. military bases in Europe. The terrorists had killed an American serviceman the previous night and used his identity papers to gain access to the base.

Penetrating security at a major international event sometimes becomes an end in itself for a terrorist group. Even an unsuccessful attack can demonstrate the ability of terrorists to strike at will. The leftist Japanese group Middle Core Faction planned an incident for the 1986 Tokyo economic summit. In anticipation of the summit, Japanese authorities had substantially increased security in Tokyo, but the Middle Core Faction let it be known that it was not intimidated by tight surveillance. The group launched simultaneous rocket attacks against the U.S. Embassy and the Imperial Palace two months before the May summit. Then, while the visiting dignitaries were meeting at the state house, the group fired five homemade rockets from an apartment house 1.7 miles away. The rockets were set off by a timing device, which was also used to open the window of the apartment, enabling the terrorists to ready the rockets for launch without raising any suspicion by having the window open for a long time. Although the rockets missed their intended target, the incident demonstrated that no matter how much security a government provides, terrorists can always extend the boundaries by increasing the distance from which they launch an attack.

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[7]*Christian Science Monitor*, June 26, 1985.

[8]Robert B. Oakley, "Terrorism: Overview and Developments," U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, Current Policy No. 744, October 1985.

Rockets are not the only form of air-launched attack. Terrorists themselves may choose to enter a target from above if security on the ground is perceived to be too tight. In November 1987, a Palestinian terrorist crossed Israel's fortified border with Lebanon by using a motorized hang-glider. He then proceeded to kill several Israeli soldiers on a military base before being shot himself.

No facility can ever be totally secure. The need for new security measures to counter anticipated innovations in terrorist tactics is best illustrated by the measures being considered by the airline industry. There has been a dramatic increase in the amount of money being spent in the United States on airport security. The FAA has sought at least $12 million annually since 1986 for technological research. In the preceding years, the average was only $1.7 million, and in 1983 it was below $1 million.[9]

A major challenge confronting airport security officials is the increased use of plastic explosives, such as the American C-4, British P.E., Czechoslovakian Semtex-H, and Soviet MP10.[10] Semtex was used in the 1988 Pan Am bombing, and a plastic explosive was also detonated on a TWA flight in 1985; they are believed to have caused the crash of an Air India jetliner in 1985. Plastic explosives are putty-like substances that have a high shattering effect, are environmentally stable, and cannot be prematurely detonated by bumps or jolts. They can also be molded into any shape or form.

Since plastic explosives cannot be detected by metal detectors and may produce too little fluoroscopic image to be detected by X-ray machines, the FAA has experimented with other technologies, including thermal neutron detectors that cost approximately $1 million each. These machines bombard pieces of luggage with neutrons which emit gamma radiation when they interact with nitrogen atoms. Since most explosives contain nitrogen, the gamma radiation can alert security officials to their presence.[11] One of the new detection machines began operation at Kennedy Airport in New York City in September 1989, and several more are being purchased for installation at selected airports. Over the next decade, the FAA may require installation of at least 400 new detectors in international airports.[12] Experiments have also been performed with less sophisticated measures, such as the use of gerbils (small rodents) to sniff out explosives.[13]

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[9]*Los Angeles Times*, April 3, 1986.

[10]Edith Kermit Roosevelt, "Terrorism: High-Tech Counterattack," *International Combat Arms*, September 1987, p. 42.

[11]*Washington Post*, December 24, 1988, p. 11.

[12]*Los Angeles Times*, September 1, 1989.

[13]*New York Times*, April 3, 1986.

The Pan Am bombing also highlighted the threat from weapons that use sophisticated barometric timing devices. The bomb on that flight used a two-stage detonating system that included a timer and an altimeter (a barometric device that measures changes in a plane's altitude). Such systems create special problems for airport detection systems because they cannot be detected by low-pressure chambers that will detonate bombs designed to explode at high altitudes.[14] Security and intelligence officials are becoming increasingly interested in the use of "taggants," which involve the insertion of chemical materials into explosives during the manufacturing stage, to aid in tracing bombs after an explosion or in predetonation detection through various vapors.

The United States has also put pressure on foreign governments to increase security at their international airports. After the 1985 TWA hijacking, the Reagan administration issued a travel advisory warning Americans that they risked potential terrorist attacks if they used the Athens international airport.[15] Concern for physical security at foreign airports also led to the Foreign Airport Security Act of 1985, which requires the FAA to conduct periodic security assessments of foreign international airports that are used by U.S. airlines. However, the Air Transport Association has complained that the stringent security measures required for U.S. airliners are not applied to foreign airlines serving the United States.[16] The FAA is expected to require foreign airlines that fly to American cities to submit security plans for approval.[17]

Providing complete physical security for the many potential American targets at home and abroad is obviously impossible. Countermeasures are affected by budget constraints, by the priority given different assets, and by the identification of high-risk areas. State-of-the-art technological devices are usually expensive, and even these cannot prevent all attempts to place bombs aboard planes or all assaults on facilities. Nevertheless, U.S. efforts to enhance physical security have been among the most successful counterterrorist strategies. Although several tragic incidents have occurred, the number would have been much higher without the security measures currently in place.[18]

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[14]*The Times of London*, December 30, 1988.

[15]*Washington Post*, June 19, 1986.

[16]*New York Times*, January 25, 1989.

[17]Ibid.

[18]Between 1973 and 1987, more than 120 hijackings were prevented and thousands of weapons were confiscated through the passenger screening measures at U.S. airports (see Richard F. Lally, "Passenger Safety and Aviation Security," *Terrorism*, Vol. 10, p. 239). The deterrent effect of physical security measures has also very likely prevented terrorists from attacking particularly risky targets.

III. COUNTERTERRORIST INTELLIGENCE

The most important—and least publicized—component of the U.S. effort to combat terrorism is intelligence gathering and analysis. The United States has relied on both its own intelligence and that of other countries. Indeed, more international cooperation has been achieved in this area of counterterrorist policy than in any other.

Governments are more willing to share information on terrorist group activity than they are to support counterterrorist measures such as military, diplomatic, economic, or legal actions, for several reasons. First, cooperation in counterterrorist intelligence does not involve the fanfare or the risks of other types of joint antiterrorist ventures. A government that supports a military raid by another government, joins an economic boycott of a state sponsor of terrorism, expels diplomats, or extradites terrorists becomes susceptible to a wide range of repercussions. But intelligence cooperation is not likely to result in terrorist retaliation or economic losses.

While intelligence agencies would understandably be reluctant to divulge their information-gathering techniques to other governments, there does not appear to be a perception that sharing counterterrorist intelligence will compromise national security secrets as would sharing certain military intelligence. Whether or not the gradual improvement in U.S.-Soviet cooperation in efforts against terrorism—ranging from U.S.-Soviet conferences to Secretary of State James Baker's announced plans to put cooperation in counterterrorism on the agenda of issues to be discussed with Moscow—will lead to meaningful exchanges of information on terrorist group movements remains to be seen. There are likely to be limits on the extent to which traditional adversaries can share intelligence, even in the realm of terrorism. CIA director William Webster has voiced reservations about moving the counterterrorist effort to an "intelligence-agency-to-intelligence-agency" relationship with the Soviets.[1]

Nevertheless, cooperation with friendly governments has resulted in the capture of several terrorists and the prevention of potential terrorist incidents. For example, a West German terrorist, Kristinal Berster, was arrested by U.S. border officials as she attempted to enter northern Vermont from Canada. The officials became suspicious when she produced an Iranian passport without a U.S. visa. Her fingerprints

[1]*New York Times*, April 21, 1989.

were then found to match those in a description of fugitive terrorists that West Germany had made available to the United States and other countries.

International cooperation also led to the discovery of a plot to blow up the U.S. Embassy in Rome in November 1984. Swiss police arrested a Lebanese man, Hussein Atat Hani, at the Zurich airport after finding two pounds of explosives in his possession, along with a ticket to Rome and an address there. Two more pounds of explosives were found in a locker at the Zurich railroad station. The Italian authorities were alerted, and they arrested seven Lebanese students with ties to Islamic Jihad. A search of the students' apartments produced a detailed map of the U.S. Embassy, with notes on vulnerable access points. Arrows pointed to the positions of guards, television cameras, and concrete blocks. The entrance to an underground garage below the Marine guards' residence was also shown on the map, leading police to believe that the terrorists planned to attempt a suicide truck bombing there.[2]

Foreign government intelligence has also been instrumental in sparing American military personnel from terrorist attacks. In 1984, West German police raided an RAF hideout in Frankfurt and confiscated papers that listed clubs for American troops, barracks, mess halls, and the residences and offices of commanders as targets for attacks. A sketch indicating how to reach the office of the U.S. Army's 5th Corps commanding general was also found.[3]

The International Criminal Police Operation (INTERPOL) has played a vital role in counterterrorist intelligence. INTERPOL maintains its own radio communications network, computerized files, and offices, and it has agents throughout the world. Warnings of planned terrorist attacks are sent over the radio network directly to the International Air Transport Association (IATA) flight security officers. In one case, INTERPOL-Beirut alerted INTERPOL-Nicosia about a time-bomb aboard a Rome-bound airliner. INTERPOL-Nicosia informed the pilot, who returned the plane to ground, where the bomb was removed.[4]

A major limitation on INTERPOL's activities was eliminated in 1984 when member countries adopted a resolution that defined international acts of terrorism as criminal acts. Prior to passage of the resolution, terrorist acts were viewed as "political," and Article 3 of the INTERPOL constitution prohibits member nations from intervention

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[2]*New York Times*, November 28, 1984; *Christian Science Monitor*, November 29, 1984.

[3]*Los Angeles Times*, July 12, 1984.

[4]*International Herald Tribune*, October 21-22, 1978.

and investigation of military, political, religious, or racial incidents. The redefinition of international terrorism as a criminal act has allowed the National Central Bureaus of member nations to respond to requests for information and to cooperate in counterterrorist intelligence.[5]

The United States and Spain signed an antiterrorist cooperation agreement in 1983, under which Washington will collaborate with Madrid on intelligence regarding the international links of the Basque separatist group ETA, and on the financing and tactics of European terrorist organizations.[6] Moreover, the United States has not limited its intelligence-sharing to its allies. According to the State Department, during the 1970s the United States gave Cuba information "on possible terrorist acts,"[7] most notably a planned invasion of Cuba by Cuban exiles living in Miami.

One terrorist group is sometimes used to obtain information about another. Prior to the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, in which the Israelis drove out the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the CIA reportedly had built a network of sources among the PLO leadership and guerrillas. These sources provided information on extremist Islamic Shi'ite groups and other terrorist organizations in the country. After the PLO was driven out of Lebanon, the United States had to rely more heavily upon electronic surveillance to monitor communications in the area.[8]

Surrogates are also used in intelligence operations against terrorists. Surrogates who are situated in the country where the terrorists are based have the advantage of familiarity with the terrain and possibly with the movement and location of the terrorist groups. However, there is always a risk that surrogates might launch an unauthorized operation, as reportedly happened in 1985, when Lebanese Shi'ite Moslem leader Sheik Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah was killed in a car bombing. There is also the danger of being drawn into local conflicts.

If governments could place infiltrators within terrorist groups, they could obtain information about planned attacks, disrupt operations, and feed false information to the groups. However, it is very difficult to infiltrate a terrorist group. Unlike government organizations, most of which are large bureaucratic entities that can be penetrated at various points, terrorist groups may consist of only a few members. Furthermore, some extremist groups, such as those in Lebanon, are tied

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[5]*Security Systems Digest*, December 3, 1984.

[6]Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), February 15, 1983.

[7]*Los Angeles Times*, August 4, 1977.

[8]*New York Times*, December 6, 1983.

together by family relationships. However, it is possible to penetrate the groups' support networks—e.g., the people who make false passports, manufacture weapons, and provide logistical support.

Computer technology has also greatly enhanced U.S. counterterrorist intelligence. One early U.S. program that used computer technology was "Operation Boulder," created in 1972 after the massacre of Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympic games by the Palestinian group Black September. Concerned that Arab terrorists might try to enter the United States to carry out further attacks, the State Department established a computer network to screen applicants for visas. Names of applicants were checked against files of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the CIA, the Secret Service, and other federal agencies. During the first year of the program, more than 65,000 names were cross-checked, resulting in the rejection of 17 visa applicants. Approximately 300 others withdrew their applications. The program, however, was eventually disbanded because it was not considered cost-effective.[9]

Computers and other communication devices have been used to accelerate and systematize the processing and dissemination of information on terrorism. In 1984, the Navy established the Anti-Terrorist Indication and Warning Alert Center, which relies on domestic and foreign intelligence to generate hundreds of terrorist-threat analyses daily for Navy and Marine commanders.[10] The center attempts to limit the information it processes to items that will be of immediate use to the commanders. Information overload is a problem in any intelligence analysis effort, and intelligence data on terrorism can include hundreds of pieces of information daily, from rumors of meetings of suspected groups to findings of weapons. Sorting out the "relevant" information is sometimes very difficult.

An important part of the U.S. attempt to rescue the American hostages in Iran in 1980 was the placement of U.S. agents in Tehran to coordinate the rescuers' assault on the American Embassy. Intelligence for rescue missions can become outdated as quickly as hostages can be moved to a new location. (This is one reason no attempts have been made to rescue the American hostages held in Lebanon.) Therefore, the plan for the rescue attempt in Iran allowed time for the commandos to search the compound, in case the hostages had been moved around.

Finally, the efficiency of a nation's counterterrorist intelligence effort is critical. Because terrorism is a multifaceted threat, mini-bureaucracies have evolved for dealing with it. While having its own

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[9]*Washington Star*, April 24, 1975.

[10]*New Orleans Times-Picayune*, April 19, 1984.

antiterrorist unit may serve the short-term interests of a department or agency, the proliferation of such units could hamper the overall U.S. effort. The Vice President's Task Force on Combatting Terrorism noted:

> While several federal departments and agencies process intelligence within their own facilities, there is no consolidated center that collects and analyzes all-source information for those agencies participating in antiterrorist activities.[11]

Therefore, coordinating and reducing the counterterrorist bureaucracy to increase its efficiency in intelligence gathering, dissemination, and analysis should be a top priority for U.S. counterterrorist policy. Emphasis should be placed on avoiding the duplication of efforts by different agencies in collecting and assessing information; coordinating strategies among different U.S. government organizations; and determining when intelligence on potential terrorist incidents should be made available to the public.

The dilemma of what to do about informing the public is perhaps the most difficult problem for policymakers to resolve, from both a practical and a moral standpoint. Arguments against publicizing each terrorist threat or plot discovery include the potential for terrorists to disrupt international travel by flooding the airlines with threats, the desire to avoid disclosure of intelligence findings that might cause fear and anxiety among travelers, and the need to avoid releasing secret information on terrorists' plans or whereabouts.

But in the aftermath of the Pan Am bombing, several questions were raised concerning the public's right to know they may be taking added risk in boarding a specific flight. In early December, an anonymous caller warned the American Embassy in Finland that a Pan American flight from Frankfurt to the United States would be the target of a bombing within a few weeks. Although authorities in both the United States and Finland have determined that the call was a hoax, warnings were sent to U.S. embassies in Europe and to Pan Am. Several State Department employees were reported to have changed their travel plans after learning about the bomb threat. Clearly, if some potential travelers are warned, everybody should be warned.[12]

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[11] *Public Report of the Vice President's Task Force on Combatting Terrorism*, Washington, D.C., February 1986, p. 25.

[12] Another controversy related to the Lockerbie tragedy concerns the British Department of Transport. On December 19, two days before the bombing, the department prepared a detailed warning—derived from information provided by West German authorities—about terrorists placing bombs in portable radio-cassette recorders. The warning was sent out by mail after Christmas, arriving at Pan Am's London office on January 17 (*New York Times*, March 21, 1989).

A balance needs to be struck between publicizing every threat and warning travelers when there is credible evidence of a specific terrorist plot that could affect them. Allowing passengers to unwittingly board a plane when a credible bombing or hijacking threat is known to exist would be very difficult to defend if security officials failed to prevent an incident.

IV. ECONOMIC COUNTERMEASURES

The United States has attempted to use both the threat and the implementation of economic sanctions to combat terrorism. Gaining international cooperation for economic countermeasures, however, has proven extremely difficult.

Like diplomatic countermeasures, economic countermeasures deal with only one aspect of international terrorism, i.e., state-sponsored terrorism. They obviously cannot be applied to the multitude of independent terrorist groups that operate worldwide. Thus, a large part of the terrorist activity directed against the United States cannot be countered by economic means.

Although several countries, including Syria and Iran, have sponsored anti-U.S. terrorism, Libya has been the main target of U.S. economic retaliatory measures. In 1978, during the Carter administration, Washington held up sales of approximately $400 million in trucks, aircraft, and spare parts to Libya, in an effort to put pressure on Moammar Qaddafi to cease harboring international terrorists.[1] In 1982, the Reagan administration imposed an embargo on Libyan oil imports, as well as a ban on the sale of American high-technology materials, including oil drilling equipment, to Libya. However, these sanctions had little effect, because U.S. trade with Libya was not significant at the time: Libya was supplying only 2 percent of U.S. imports of oil.[2] The United States acknowledged that the economic measures "may have only limited economic impact upon Libya," but they were nevertheless seen by Washington as an important part of the U.S. effort to isolate Qaddafi.[3] The early sanctions were also ineffective because of a loophole that allowed American oil companies, which accounted for the bulk of Libya's oil output, to continue their operations in Libya until 1986.

European allies have been hesitant to join the United States in economic sanctions because of their own economic (as well as political) ties with countries being boycotted. Italy and West Germany, for example, are Libya's major trading partners. The United States, therefore, has had to rely upon unilateral economic sanctions. Since such

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[1]*New York Times*, June 24, 1978.

[2]Ibid., March 10, 1982; *Washington Post*, January 1, 1986.

[3]*New York Times*, March 10, 1982.

actions have little impact, they are primarily symbolic.[4] They can also be self-damaging, as they create an opening for competitors in foreign markets, which then adversely affects the sale of American products abroad. The Vice President's Task Force on Combatting Terrorism acknowledged the limitations of economic weapons:

> Multilateral sanctions are difficult to organize and even then may not be effective. Further, they could unify the country against the United States, since sanctions often harm the general populace more than terrorists. In every case the advantages of sanctions must be weighed against other foreign policy objectives.[5]

Despite their limitations, unilateral economic sanctions are a key component of U.S. counterterrorism strategy. In 1986, the economic sanctions against Libya were increased to include a ban on all trade, and hundreds of millions of dollars in Libyan assets were frozen in U.S. banks. President Reagan also ordered all Americans to leave Libya. These actions raised the question of whether the United States was planning to impose trade sanctions on Syria, another known state sponsor of terrorism.[6] However, Secretary of State George Shultz stated that there were no plans to target Syria for economic retaliation, since "Syria's behavior toward [terrorism] is rather different from Libya's."[7]

However, new evidence of Damascus' involvement in sponsoring terrorist incidents—including an attempt to place a bomb on an Israeli El Al jetliner at London's Heathrow Airport in April 1986—led the United States to impose economic sanctions against Syria in November 1986. These included a ban on the sale of high-technology equipment, such as computers, aircraft, and spare parts; an end to the financing of exports to Damascus by the Export-Import Bank; cancellation of U.S.-Syrian air transport agreements; and pressure on American oil companies to end their operations in Syria. The U.S. Embassy staff was also reduced. However, U.S.-Syrian trade was minimal, Damascus had not purchased any U.S. aircraft since 1981, and Syria did not have

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[4]South Africa is an exception, having successfully pressured its neighboring states during the 1980s to stop supporting the African National Congress; it has initiated border slowdowns, withdrawn economic aid, and in other ways exploited the neighboring countries' economic dependence on South Africa.

[5]*Public Report of the Vice President's Task Force on Combatting Terrorism*, p. 14.

[6]Sanctions against Iran, which were imposed during the Carter administration and renewed by Reagan in November 1982, included a prohibition on the sale of military equipment, which was subsequently violated by the arms-for-hostages debacle.

[7]*Los Angeles Times*, January 13, 1986.

commercial flights to the United States, so the sanctions had little effect.[8]

Economic countermeasures have thus merely provided a way to demonstrate Washington's concern with the threat of international terrorism. The economic arsenal may play the role of a "flexible response" to state-sponsored terrorism—a countermeasure somewhat stronger than verbal protests, but weaker than military retaliation. Sanctions can serve as a warning that unless a state sponsor changes its behavior, more substantial responses may be forthcoming. However, the friction these measures generate in alliance relations, the damage they cause to U.S. economic interests, and the low probability that they will have any effect on the terrorist threat cast doubts on their feasibility.

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[8]*Washington Post*, November 15, 1986.

V. LEGAL AND DIPLOMATIC COUNTERMEASURES

The U.S. counterterrorist strategy has included a variety of unilateral, bilateral, and multilateral legal and diplomatic measures, ranging from Congressional acts that provide rewards for informants to international conventions and agreements on hijackings and other terrorist activities. Not surprisingly, the multilateral efforts have proven the most difficult to design and implement.

One of the earliest attempts to attain international cooperation in combatting terrorism was the 1963 Tokyo Convention on Offenses and Certain Other Acts Committed On Board Aircraft. This agreement required countries to establish jurisdiction over offenses that jeopardize the safety of aircraft or persons on board that occur outside their own territory. Although this convention was an important first step in trying to create international mechanisms to curtail hijackings and other air-travel terrorism, it did not oblige signatories to prosecute or extradite hijackers or other terrorists.

The 1970 Hague Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Seizure of Aircraft and the 1971 Montreal Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts against the Safety of Civil Aviation provided stricter provisions for punishing perpetrators of terrorist acts. The Hague Convention requires parties to either prosecute or extradite aircraft hijackers, and it mandates severe punishment for those who are convicted. The Montreal Convention applies the same criteria to persons who commit acts of violence, including the placing of bombs, aboard aircraft. The following article of both conventions illustrates the desire of the participating nations to make it clear that hijackers and other terrorists will be brought to justice:

> The Contracting State in the territory of which the alleged offender is found shall, if it does not extradite him, be obliged, without exception whatsoever and whether or not the offense was committed in its territory, to submit the case to its competent authorities for the purposes of prosecution.[1]

The 1973 Annex 17 to the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Convention on International Civil Aviation (the Chicago Convention) established standards and recommendations for airport

[1]Frank Benchley, "Living with Terrorism: The Problem of Air Piracy," *Conflict Studies*, No. 184, p. 11.

security. The New York (United Nations) Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Crimes Against Internationally Protected Persons, Including Diplomatic Agents, adopted in 1973, required governments to make violent acts against diplomats and other "internationally protected persons" and their property criminal offenses and to extradite or prosecute any perpetrators of such acts found within their territory.

The New York Convention brought to light serious differences among nations in their approach to terrorism. A number of Third World nations feared that the convention could be used to suppress the activities of national liberation movements and therefore proposed an article to exclude the convention from applying to "peoples struggling against colonialism, alien domination, foreign occupation, racial discrimination and apartheid."[2] Although the proposed article was defeated, the United States had to accept a resolution stating that the New York Convention did not interfere with the right to self-determination and independence of revolutionary movements. Similarly, in 1972, an effort by Western nations to have the United Nations take strong legal action to combat terrorism resulted in the passage of a resolution that called for a study of the "causes" of terrorism.

Other U.N. efforts were also complicated by political divisions. A 1979 Convention Against the Taking of Hostages, which required states to prosecute or extradite the perpetrators of such acts, was compromised by a provision precluding extradition when the perpetrator is likely to be "unfairly" treated.[3] Finally, all multilateral conventions are limited by the exclusion of such frequent terrorist acts as bombings and assassinations.[4]

Thus, the United States has had to rely primarily on unilateral and bilateral legal and diplomatic counterterrorist measures. President Eisenhower signed a bill in 1956 legalizing the death penality for anyone convicted of causing loss of life by damaging an airplane or any other commercial vehicle (including buses) transporting passengers in interstate or foreign commerce. This bill, which was known as the "airplane sabotage" bill, stemmed from a 1955 incident in which a young man placed a bomb aboard a domestic flight, killing his mother and 43 other people. The perpetrator had taken out a life insurance policy on his mother before planting the bomb. He was executed in January 1957. Although the incident was more a "criminal" than a

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[2]Abraham D. Sofaer, "Terrorism and the Law," *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1986, p. 918.

[3]Ibid.

[4]*State Department Bulletin*, September 25, 1980. In 1985, the Security Council adopted a resolution condemning all acts of hostage-taking and abduction and calling for the release of all kidnap victims.

"terrorist" act, it marked the first time legal penalties were imposed in a case of airline sabotage.[5]

Almost twenty years later, in 1976, President Gerald Ford signed a law that made threats and attempted murder, manslaughter, or kidnapping of diplomats on U.S. territory federal felonies. President Nixon had signed an earlier bill that made demonstrating within 100 feet of a foreign mission in order to coerce, harass, intimidate, threaten, or obstruct the performance of duty a federal offense.[6]

Unilateral legal countermeasures enacted during the 1980s included the 1984 Act to Combat International Terrorism, which made it a federal crime to commit a hijacking if Americans were victims and also provided for payment of up to $500,000 to informants who help bring terrorists to justice, and the 1986 Omnibus Antiterrorism Act, which also made the killing or assault of Americans in an overseas terrorist incident a federal crime.[7] The 1984 law provided the basis for the apprehension of Fawaz Younis, a Lebanese terrorist, who, along with several accomplices, hijacked a Royal Jordanian airliner in 1985. The terrorists blew up the plane on the ground in Beirut after releasing the passengers, two of whom were Americans. The FBI captured Younis by means of a "sting" operation, in which he was lured onto a yacht in international waters off Cyprus, believing he was participating in a drug deal. Instead, he was arrested and flown to the United States, where he was subsequently convicted in March 1989 of air piracy and seizure of hostages.

The Younis case holds mixed lessons for U.S. counterterrorist legal efforts. While Younis' apprehension and conviction showed that the United States could successfully prosecute those who commit terrorist acts, such action is more the exception than the rule. An elaborate sting operation was needed to catch a very minor player in the international terrorist arena. And compared with the magnitude of other anti-U.S. terrorist incidents (e.g., the bombing of the Marine barracks in Lebanon or the midair explosion of Pan Am Flight 103), the anti-U.S. aspect of the Air Jordanian hijacking was practically nonexistent. There were only two Americans aboard the flight, and the hijackers' objective was not to attack Americans, but to bring about the withdrawal of Palestinian militias from Lebanon. Despite the capture of Younis, international terrorists have for the most part been able to defy President Reagan's 1985 warning that "you can run, but you can't

[5]The 1955 airliner bombing also led to the first serious consideration by the airline industry of physical security measures to find explosives (*New York Times*, November 15, 1955).

[6]Ibid., October 31, 1972.

[7]Ibid., March 5, 1989, p. 3; *Washington Post*, July 20, 1985.

hide." The terrorists responsible for major anti-U.S. attacks have continued to elude the grasp of U.S. officials.

A travel advisory was issued to Americans following the 1985 TWA hijacking. The United States also took unilateral action against Lebanon, suspending the right of U.S. airlines to fly directly or indirectly to Lebanon and prohibiting any Lebanese airlines from flying to the United States. In 1973, United States and Cuba signed the bilateral Memorandum of Understanding on Hijacking of Aircraft and Vessels and Other Offenses, which requires each country to either extradite or prosecute hijackers of aircraft or vessels belonging to the other country. Although Premier Fidel Castro denounced the Memorandum in 1976, following the placing of a bomb aboard a Cuban civilian aircraft by anti-Catro Cuban exiles, Cuba has continued to adhere to it.[8] The United States also signed a 1986 Supplemental Extradition Treaty with Great Britain, which is aimed at facilitating the extradition to London of IRA members accused of committing terrorist acts in Great Britain. Prior to that time, IRA fugitives had been successful in avoiding extradition by claiming that the acts of which they were accused were "political crimes" and therefore excluded from extradition treaties. The Supplemental Treaty prohibits judges from evoking the political exemption clause to block extradition.[9]

The annual summit meetings of the leaders of the industrialized nations have provided an important forum for the United States in its efforts to gain cooperation from Western nations in combatting terrorism. At the 1978 summit meeting in Bonn, the United States, Great Britain, France, West Germany, Italy, Canada, and Japan adopted a resolution to suspend air service between their countries and other countries that do not extradite or prosecute hijackers. As a result of the resolution, after the 1981 hijacking of a Pakistani airliner to Afghanistan, Great Britain, France, and West Germany—the only nations of the Bonn summit that had bilateral air service with Afghanistan—gave notice that they were terminating that service because of Afghanistan's conduct during and after the incident.[10] A declaration opposing international terrorism was produced at the 1984 London summit. However, a British proposal to exchange intelligence and technical information about terrorists, establish new legislation to

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[8]John F. Murphy, *Testimony Before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations and Senate Judiciary Committee*, May 15, 1985.

[9]*New York Times*, July 20, 1986.

[10]*State Department Bulletin*, August 1982.

deal with international terrorism, and expel known terrorists did not pass because of objections from France.[11]

The 1986 Tokyo summit resulted in an official statement condemning international terrorism and naming Libya as a major state sponsor of terrorism. Several years earlier, the United States had broken diplomatic ties with Tripoli and imposed economic sanctions, and only a few weeks before the summit, the United States had launched an air strike against Libya. Attaining Western unity in the fight against terrorism was thus a top priority for Washington. The countermeasures adopted at the Tokyo summit included the following:

- Limits on the size of diplomatic missions of state sponsors of terrorism.
- Improved extradition procedures for bringing to justice perpetrators of international terrorism.
- Stricter immigration and visa requirements for nationals of states that sponsor terrorism.
- Improved international cooperation among police and security organizations to combat terrorism.

At the top of the list of proposed countermeasures was the "refusal to export arms to states which sponsor or support terrorism." Yet, even as the United States was pushing its allies for a declaration of unity against terrorism, Washington was secretly selling arms to Iran in hopes of gaining the release of American hostages held by pro-Khomeini extremists in Lebanon. This violation of its own rules by the country that had taken the lead in trying to gain international cooperation in the fight against terrorism emphasizes the reality that countries will ultimately pursue their own interests in their attempts to resolve terrorist incidents.

This was also evident in the controversy surrounding West Germany's refusal to extradite Mohammed Ali Hamadei, the terrorist wanted in the United States for the murder of an American Navy diver during the 1985 TWA hijacking. West Germany, which arrested Hamadei as he tried to enter the country with explosives in his luggage, was fearful that extraditing him to the United States might endanger the lives of West German hostages in Lebanon.[12] The desire

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[11] *Washington Post*, June 10, 1984.

[12] This illustrates the tendency for new risks to arise for a government after a terrorist is captured. The government or its allies become the targets for potential retaliatory attacks by the captured terrorist's supporters. The Israeli kidnapping of a Hezbollah leader in southern Lebanon, Sheik Abdul Karim Obeid, and Hezbollah's announcement that they had killed Lieut. Col. William Higgins in retaliation, is another example of this cycle of violence.

to attain the safe release of hostages in Lebanon also caused France to continue negotiations with Syria even after Great Britain broke relations with Damascus over Syria's role in the attempted El Al bombing at Heathrow Airport.

Thus, multilateral and international legal and diplomatic efforts to combat terrorism are complicated by the need for countries to seek their own "solutions" to terrorist incidents. The political nature of terrorism and definitional problems also complicate legal and diplomatic efforts. The U.S. decision not to ratify Protocol 1 of the 1949 Geneva Convention on the treatment of combatants and war victims (signed in 1977) was based on the fact that the protocol would in effect legitimize insurgent movements and terrorist groups by granting them the status of combatants and prisoners of war.[13]

International legal and diplomatic measures are not powerful deterrents to nations or individuals who commit terrorist acts, and they do not guarantee that perpetrators of terrorist acts will be brought to justice. Nevertheless, progress in establishing multilateral conventions and bilateral agreements on terrorism over several decades demonstrates a willingness on the part of the international community to address this issue.

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[13]*New York Times*, February 16, 1987. Article 1 of Protocol 1 states that the provisions of the Geneva Convention would apply to "armed conflicts in which peoples are fighting against colonial domination and alien occupation and against racist regimes in the exercise of the right of self-determination." For further discussion, see Sofaer, "Terrorism and the Law," pp. 912–915.

VI. MILITARY COUNTERMEASURES

On April 15, 1986, the United States launched an air raid on Libya, following years of threats by the United States to engage in military retaliation for anti-U.S. terrorism. Prior to the Libya raid, the only major U.S. military responses to terrorism were the 1980 attempt to rescue the American hostages in Iran and the 1985 interception of the Egyptian airliner carrying the hijackers of the cruise ship *Achille Lauro*. All three U.S. military responses illustrate the complexities involved in counterterrorist military operations.

THE HOSTAGE-RESCUE ATTEMPT IN IRAN (APRIL 1980)

After more than five months of frustration and anger at the inability to gain the release of the 52 American hostages in Iran, President Carter ordered a military rescue mission in April 1980. Rescue plans had actually begun as soon as the hostages were taken in November 1979, but the administration's strategy was to first pursue negotiations and try to end the incident peacefully. When negotiations failed, the military rescue option was implemented. The plan was an intricate one, involving every branch of the U.S. armed services, as well as U.S. agents in Iran. For several months, American agents, including Special Forces troops, entered Iran posing as European businessmen. These agents were to lay the groundwork for a commando assault on the American Embassy. According to the plan, eight Air Force C-130 Hercules transport planes carrying 93 Army commandos, weapons, helicopter fuel, and communications-jamming devices would take off from Egypt and fly to "Desert One," an area in the Iranian desert approximately 200 miles southeast of Tehran. They were to arrive under the cover of darkness and rendezvous with eight RH-53D helicopters, which were to have been flown more than 500 miles across the desert from the aircraft carrier Nimitz in the Sea of Oman. The helicopters would refuel and fly the commandos to "Desert Two," an area approximately 50 miles outside Tehran. Since there would not be enough hours of darkness to launch the raid that same evening, the commandos would hide during the day and be driven in trucks to the American Embassy after nightfall. The commandos were then to climb over the walls and look for the American hostages in the different buildings inside the compound. A hole would be blown through the Embassy

wall as a diversion, and during the confusion the hostages would be taken out of the Embassy and loaded into helicopters, which would be flown in from a hiding place in the mountains outside Tehran. The helicopters would land either on the Embassy grounds or, if that was not feasible, at a soccer stadium across the street. The hostages would then be flown to an abandoned airfield south of Tehran, from which everyone would leave on C-141 transport planes that were to arrive from Egypt.[1]

The rescue mission, launched on April 24, 1980, failed at an early stage. One of the eight helicopters developed mechanical problems with its rotor blade and was forced to land before reaching Desert One. Another was forced to return to the ship after encountering a sandstorm less than 100 miles from the rendezvous site. At Desert One, a third helicopter was found to have mechanical problems that could not be fixed in time for the rescue mission. Since the plan required a minimum of six helicopters to rescue all the hostages, the mission was aborted at Desert One. As the rescue team was preparing to depart, one of the helicopters crashed into one of the C-130s during refueling, setting off a blaze that killed eight people. The surviving members then took off on the remaining C-130s, leaving behind the helicopters and the dead American troops.

A successful rescue of the hostages would have been a dramatic victory for the United States in the battle against terrorism. It also would have ended, at least until the next incident, the governmental paralysis that the hostage situation was causing in Washington. However, the failure of the mission illustrates some of the logistical, geographical, and technological problems that can arise in rescue missions that take place on hostile foreign soil.

Since the rescue plan involved elements of all the services—Army commandos, Air Force transport planes, Marine helicopter pilots, and Navy ships—there was a need for perfect timing and coordination. But, perhaps because of the need to maintain secrecy, no full dress rehearsal was ever conducted. The various units never became familiar with each other—some mission personnel met for the first time at Desert One[2]—and this increased the chances for confusion and mishaps once the plan was implemented.[3]

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[1]See Phillip Keisling, "Desert One: The Wrong Man and the Wrong Plan," *Washington Monthly*, December 1983; *New York Times*, April 27, 1980; and Gary Sick, *All Fall Down: America's Tragic Encounter with Iran*, New York, Random House, Inc., 1985, p. 335.

[2]Sick, *All Fall Down*, p. 354.

[3]Ibid., pp. 354-355; Bruce Hoffman, "Commando Warfare and Small Raiding Parties as Part of a Counterterrorist Military Policy," *Conflict*, Vol. 7, No. 1, pp. 26-27.

A hostage rescue mission on enemy soil can encounter problems due to the geographical distance the rescue team must travel and also problems associated with difficult terrain. On one's soil or in friendly territory, all the necessary assets can be safely emplaced and made ready in advance. When vehicles and personnel have to travel secretly over great distances, the mission becomes much more complicated. To arrive at the rendezvous site at Desert One, for example, the eight helicopters had to travel more than 500 miles, much of this distance over desert terrain. Also, the helicopters arrived more than an hour late because their pilots mistakenly thought they had to fly at treetop altitude to avoid Iranian radar; the C-130 pilots flew at a higher altitude after learning that Iranian radar was not working that night.[4] The delay placed the operation in jeopardy, since the rescue team would most likely not be able to reach Desert Two before sunrise, when they would be more likely to be seen.

Finally, although technology can be a major aid in combatting terrorism, it can also be a major drawback when critical assets fail during rescue attempts. The rotor blade failure that forced one helicopter down and a hydraulic leak that contaminated the hydraulic system of another helped lead to the decision to abort the mission. The highly complex plan had to be scrapped because of the mechanical failure of the helicopters. Thus, no matter how well planned an operation may be, technological failures can ruin the entire mission at an early stage.

THE INTERCEPTION OF THE EGYPTIAN AIRLINER (OCTOBER 1985)

In a more successful military operation, a civilian airliner carrying the hijackers of the cruise ship *Achille Lauro* was intercepted in October 1985. The terrorists, Palestinians associated with Abu Abbas, killed an elderly wheelchair-bound American citizen on the ship, then gave themselves up to PLO officials in Egypt. When American intelligence learned that an Egyptian civilian airliner was flying the hijackers and Abu Abbas to Tunisia, a decision was made to intercept the plane.

Two E-2C surveillance planes took off from the aircraft carrier U.S.S. *Saratoga* in the eastern Mediterranean to track the Egyptian airliner. Then four F-14 fighter planes, accompanied by two KA-6 refueling tankers, left the Saratoga. The fighter planes circled near the island of Crete, over international waters, waiting for the Egyptian plane to appear, then intercepted it at approximately 34,000 feet. The

[4]Keisling, "Desert One."

Egyptian pilot first requested permission to land at Tunis but was denied by Tunisian authorities. Permission was then sought to land at the Athens airport, but that request was also denied. The plane finally "accepted" the U.S. escort of F-14s and flew to a joint Italian-NATO airbase at Sigonella, Sicily.[5] For several hours, until the terrorists were handed over to Italian authorities, there was a tense standoff between American, Egyptian, and Italian special forces. Several U.S. commandos from the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) and Navy frogmen assigned to the JSOC had landed in two C-141 transport planes right behind the Egyptian airliner and quickly surrounded the plane. The Americans planned to transfer the hijackers to the C-141s and fly them to the United States to stand trial for hijacking and murder, but the Italian base commander ordered his troops to surround the American forces. Meanwhile, Egyptian commandos remained on board with the hijackers. The JSOC commander was thus "facing the prospect of two firefights with supposedly friendly forces—one with the Italians and one with the Egyptians—if he tried to storm the plane and capture the hijackers."[6] The U.S. commandos did not attack the plane, and the Italian authorities eventually took custody of the terrorists, although they subsequently allowed Abu Abbas to leave Italy.

The interception of the plane caused some friction in U.S.-Egyptian relations and led to the collapse of the government of Prime Minister Bettino Craxi of Italy, but it was highly successful as a military operation. There was no loss of life or assets. The operation had a concrete objective, was conducted with precision, and could be considered relatively low-risk. The mission also demonstrated the ability of the U.S. military to carry out a successful counterterrorist operation on relatively short notice. This mission was easier to execute than the hostage-rescue attempt because the logistics were not as complicated, secrecy did not have to be maintained as long, and less "resistance" was expected.

THE AIR STRIKES AGAINST LIBYA (APRIL 1986)

The most dramatic U.S. military operation against terrorism was the April 15, 1986, air raid on Libya. When the Reagan administration took office in January 1981, it promised "swift and effective retaliation" against terrorists; this commitment was reinforced in a March 1984 National Security Decision Directive (NSDD-138) justifying

[5]*New York Times*, October 11, 1985.

[6]David C. Martin and John Walcott, *Best Laid Plans: The Inside Story of America's War Against Terrorism*, New York, Harper & Row, 1988, p. 253.

preemptive and retaliatory strikes against terrorists and their state sponsors. Thus, with each anti-U.S. terrorist incident, the pressure built for a military response. While the interception of the Egyptian airliner carrying the *Achille Lauro* hijackers was popular with the American public, there was still a demand for military action against terrorists and their state sponsors.

But Washington had to deal with the problem of finding an appropriate target. It is often difficult to locate terrorists or even to determine who is responsible for a particular terrorist act. Furthermore, retaliation in a populated area carries the risk of civilian casualties. However, after U.S. intelligence intercepted messages sent from the Libyan People's Bureau in East Germany to Tripoli, indicating Libya's sponsorship of the April 1986 bombing of a West Berlin discotheque in which two American servicemen and a Turkish woman were killed and almost 200 other people were injured, the decision was made to launch an air raid on Libya. According to some observers, the raid was not purely retaliatory:

> The evidence of a continuing Libyan campaign against Americans moved the issue beyond retribution to pre-emption, beyond retaliation to self-defense. A strike against targets linked to Qaddafi's support of terrorism not only would avenge past outrages but also might prevent future ones.[7]

On April 15, therefore, 24 F-111 fighter-bombers, 28 KC and KC-135 refueling planes, and five EF-111 electronic jamming planes took off from American bases in Britain. Four refuelings were made during the flight. Six of the F-111s and one of the EF-111s were spare planes that returned to Britain, as planned, after the first refueling. Because France would not grant permission for the aircraft to fly over French territory, the aircraft had to fly 1,200 extra miles (a total of 2,800 miles) over the Atlantic Ocean and the Strait of Gibraltar. The F-111s attacked three targets near Tripoli: the military side of the Tripoli airport, a Libyan commando training center at Sidi Bilal port, and the el-Azzizya military barracks where Qaddafi and his family were sleeping. Although Qaddafi survived the attack, his adopted daughter was killed. One U.S. plane crashed before reaching its target, and four did not participate in the raid due to technological failures,[8] including breakdowns of lasers and high-technology target sensors which were required for the release of "smart bombs."[9] One smart bomb com-

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[7]Ibid., p. 290.

[8]*New York Times*, April 18, 1986.

[9]*Los Angeles Times*, May 3, 1987.

pletely missed its target and struck the French Embassy.[10] In addition to the Tripoli strikes, 15 Navy A-6 and A-7 attack jets based on aircraft carriers in the Mediterranean struck two Libyan bases near Benghazi. Two of the Navy A-6s also aborted their mission because of mechanical problems.

The air raid finally put to rest the criticism that the United States was continually threatening military retaliation against terrorists and their state sponsors but never following through with action. It put Qaddafi on the defensive, and the rhetoric from Tripoli subsided for a period of time. However, several incidents of terrorism in the aftermath of the raid were attributed to Libya. One American and three British hostages were killed in Lebanon; an American working at the U.S. Embassy in Sudan was shot in the head from a passing car; and an attempt was made to bomb a U.S. Air Force officers' club in Turkey. The prospect of Libyan-sponsored retaliatory attacks led to improved security in Western Europe, which thwarted several incidents. The raid also made Western nations somewhat more willing to take stronger diplomatic and economic measures against Libya to keep the United States from striking again.[11]

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

In terms of planning and execution, the most difficult of the three U.S. military responses to terrorism was the hostage-rescue mission, because of the risks associated with secret military operations on enemy soil. The other two U.S. military counterterrorist operations were more successful because they were both conventional operations—the kind the military is best trained for,

The U.S. experience with military countermeasures also reveals the difficulties of striking geographically distant targets. Few U.S. military assets are permanently stationed within close range of terrorist targets. Thus, the U.S. task in combatting terrorism differs from that of other countries that have utilized military means, e.g., Israel.

The hostage-rescue attempt and the Libya raid also illustrate the technological risks of counterterrorist military operations. While technology has made important advances—from improved physical security measures to sophisticated intelligence and military devices—the failure

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[10]*New York Times*, February 4, 1987.

[11]Martin and Walcott, *Best Laid Plans*, pp. 313–314.

of high-technology equipment at critical times can either ruin or impede an entire operation.[12]

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[12]It should be noted that one possible way to prevent technological failures from negating a counterterrorist operation would be to use more helicopters, fighter-planes, etc. Thus, if some of the key assets failed during a counterterrorist operation, there would be sufficient backup aircraft or bombs to replace the malfunctioning ones. According to this argument, the United States should have used ten or twelve helicopters instead of eight in the rescue attempt in Iran. However, using *too* many resources increases the chance of detection, and logistics and timing compications can arise. In the case of the rescue mission, more helicopters would have required more fuel to be flown into Desert One, which would have made it more difficult for the entire rescue team and aircraft to leave Desert One before daybreak and avoid being detected (Martin and Walcott, *Best Laid Plans*, p. 31).

VII. POLICY STATEMENTS AND OFFICIAL THREATS

Terrorism has elicited a great many statements and warnings by U.S. government officials concerning the nature of the threat and actions that the United States could take. This has been the most highly—and purposively—publicized aspect of U.S. counterterrorist measures. It has also been the least effective and most damaging to other U.S. foreign policy objectives.

The temptation for policymakers to make grandiose statements about terrorism is strong. Terrorism is, after all, a highly emotional issue. The prospect of terrorists, either independent or state-sponsored, perpetrating violent attacks on Americans can lead high-ranking officials to deliver very tough verbal messages. More often than not, though, these messages have little deterrent value and instead raise expectations among the American public that are not subsequently fulfilled.

The Carter administration allowed itself to be preoccupied with the hostage issue in Iran for over a year at the expense of other foreign policy concerns; but it was the Reagan administration that escalated the rhetoric on terrorism to unprecedented heights. President Reagan's early promise of "swift and effective retribution" against terrorists later haunted him throughout his presidency. Because of the repercussions that different types of responses to terrorism can have, and because of the difficulty of identifying or locating the perpetrators of an incident, swift and effective retribution is seldom possible. Nevertheless, Secretary of State Alexander Haig followed the president's lead when he stated at his first press conference in March 1981 that terrorism would replace human rights as the number one issue in American foreign policy.

From that point on, Reagan administration officials provided the public and the media with a steady stream of images and metaphors. Secretary of State George Shultz and Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger equated terrorism with "war." For the public, any "war" that the United States was involved in should result in "victory," a notion that could never be applied to terrorism, since a single bomb at any time is all terrorists need to avert defeat. Yet the administration continued to place the terrorism issue at the very top of the U.S. foreign policy agenda.

The public relations campaign against terrorism also included the naming of a high-level government task force to evaluate U.S. counter-terrorist policy. Headed by then Vice President George Bush, the task force issued a report in 1986 before the arms-for-hostages deal with Iran became public knowledge. The report included the following passage:

> The U.S. position on terrorism is unequivocal: firm opposition to terrorism in all its forms and wherever it takes place. . . . The U.S. Government . . . is prepared to act in concert with other nations or unilaterally when necessary to prevent or respond to terrorist acts. . . . The U.S. Government will make no concessions to terrorists. It will not pay ransoms, release prisoners, change its policies or agree to other acts that might encourage additional terrorism. At the same time, the United States will use every available resource to gain the safe return of American citizens who are held hostage by terrorists. . . . U.S. policy is based upon the conviction that to give in to terrorists' demands places even more Americans at risk. This no-concessions policy is the best way of ensuring the safety of the greatest number of people.[1]

Yet the arms deal with Iran contradicted the main tenets of the report. It underscored the basic fact that in dealing with terrorists, it is very difficult to adhere consistently to official policy. The terrorist threat is so diverse that the response to incidents must depend on the circumstances at hand. At times governments make concessions to terrorists and simply do not call them concessions. But the secret deal with Iran was the culmination of the issue of U.S. preoccupation with terrorism. That preoccupation and the arms deal it generated placed in jeopardy U.S. policy in the Middle East and U.S. credibility around the world.

The United States also launched a disinformation campaign against Qaddafi in 1986 to keep him off balance and encourage disaffected Libyan military officers to stage a coup. The U.S. leaked faulty reports of new plans for Libyan terrorism, as well as unsubstantiated assessments that Qaddafi's hold on his leadership was shaky. While disinformation campaigns have long been used by governments to bring about desired results, the issuing of untruthful statements can lead to the loss of credibility with one's own people. It also creates confusion among allies about whether subsequent information is accurate or is part of a campaign to attain support for some activity.

Any assessment of the public component of the U.S. effort to combat terrorism must include the role of the media. Terrorist incidents are dramatized by round-the-clock coverage and continual reports on

[1] *Public Report of the Vice President's Task Force on Combatting Terrorism*, p. 7.

unfolding developments. But the media are often unfairly blamed for overreacting to terrorism, when they, along with the public, are actually taking their cues from the government. The media will report what government officials say, as well as how they react during, preceding, and after a terrorist incident. If the image from Washington is one of calm and quiet resolve, then that is what will be reported. But if it is one of crisis, then that is what the public will see via the media. As one observer wrote during the Reagan years, the attention the United States was giving to the terrorist issue played right into the terrorists' hands:

> The public nature of the Reagan administration's antiterrorist stance represents a serious flaw in U.S. policy. International terrorists are weak political actors lacking the means to express their wants other than through the use of violence geared to generate publicity. By consistently drawing the media's and public's attention toward the issue of terrorism and individuals like Colonel Khaddafi, the administration is helping terrorists achieve recognition and legitimacy. Instead of deterring and reducing the terrorist phenomenon, the Reagan administration may be promoting terrorist behavior by providing a channel to the public for those groups seeking recognition.[2]

Another observer noted that the Reagan administration had not "thought through the problem posed when its activist rhetoric is confronted by a challenge that does not safely allow for an active military response."[3]

The attempt to establish and announce criteria for launching military operations against terrorists or their state sponsors underscored the inconsistencies in the U.S. public campaign against terrorism. By repeatedly issuing rigid policy statements for public consumption, the administration opened itself up to criticism for not attacking Iran or Syria when evidence linked those countries to anti-U.S. terrorism. By ignoring the realities that certain policy statements on terrorism could never be followed through without seriously damaging U.S. foreign policy objectives in strategic regions, the administration presented too simplistic a picture to the American people about the dynamics of international terrorism and the options available to the United States.

Since terrorists thrive on publicity, taking that element away from them should be a critical part of U.S. counterterrorist strategy. While

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[2]Marc A. Celmer, *Terrorism, U.S. Strategy, and Reagan Policies*, New York, Greenwood Press, 1987, p. 92; see also Jeffrey D. Simon, "Misunderstanding Terrorism," *Foreign Policy*, Summer 1987, pp. 104-120; and Brian Michael Jenkins, *Terrorism: Policy Issues for the Bush Administration,*, The RAND Corporation, N-2964-RC, May 1989.

[3]James Larry Taulbee, "Retaliation, Deterrence, Terrorism and the Reagan Administration," *Defense Analysis*, Vol. 1, No. 4, 1985, p. 282.

media coverage will always ensure a certain degree of publicity, the government can begin changing the way terrorism is perceived in this country—by lowering public expectations about what really can be done about terrorism, refraining from equating terrorism with "war" or with threats to national security, and by implementing practical intelligence, physical security, diplomatic, legal, economic, and military countermeasures.

VIII. A COMPARISON OF U.S. AND FOREIGN COUNTERTERRORIST EFFORTS

Examining the experiences of other governments in combatting terrorism could provide important insights by identifying the successes those governments have had in resolving incidents or in reducing their overall terrorist threat. And by analyzing the mistakes other governments have made, we may be able to avoid similar pitfalls ourselves.

However, applying lessons from the counterterrorist record of other governments is complicated by several factors. First, no two countries face the same terrorist threat. The scope of terrorist activity, the intensity and lethality of attacks, and the targets of the violence vary from country to country. The internal pressures governments are under to respond to terrorism—public opinion, legislative, bureaucratic—also vary among nations.

The main difference between the U.S. experience and that of other countries is that the threat for most governments lies within their borders, while for the United States the threat is worldwide. Other governments can usually bring their police, intelligence, and legal powers to bear in dealing with terrorists: Italian officials were successful in the early 1980s in breaking up the Red Brigades organization, the Turkish military regime ended a long period of domestic terrorism in the late 1970s, and the Uruguayan military crushed the Tupamaros in the early 1970s. On the other hand, the United States finds itself at a distinct disadvantage when anti-U.S. attacks take place on foreign soil. The difficulty of capturing terrorists or launching military retaliatory strikes increases with the distance from one's home territory.

Many governments, though, have been as frustrated as the United States in their attempts to combat terrorism, particularly in hostage rescue attempts. The storming of a hijacked Egyptair plane by Egyptian commandos in Malta in 1985—the very same plane the United States had intercepted following the *Achille Lauro* incident—resulted in the deaths of more than 50 people, most of them hostages. Many of the hostages died from smoke inhalation, when Palestinian terrorists set off three phosphorus grenades which filled the airplane with toxic fumes. Some deaths were caused by the Egyptians firing into the interior of the plane without knowing where or who the terrorists were.[1] In another incident, terrorists in Pakistan in 1986 began shooting

[1]Robin Wright and John M. Broder, "U.S. Secretly Aids Anti-Terror Units," *Los Angeles Times*, July 2, 1989, p. 18.

passengers and detonating grenades when they mistakenly believed a rescue attempt was under way after the lights went out in a hijacked Pan Am plane. Twenty-one people were killed and more than 40 were injured in that 1986 incident. The presence of Pakistani commandos apparently made the hijackers nervous.

Colombian troops launched a counterterrorist assault at the Palace of Justice in Bogota in 1985, where M-19 guerrillas were holding hostages. More than 100 people—including 11 Supreme Court justices—were killed in the assault.

At the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich, West German police could not save the nine Israeli athletes who had been taken hostage by the Black September terrorist group. Police sharpshooters failed to kill all the terrorists, and those who survived the initial assault killed the hostages.

Several successful hostage rescue operations have been conducted by foreign governments, but most of these involve unique circumstances. In 1976, three Israeli C-130 aircraft carried Israeli paratroopers and special forces more than 2,500 miles in a daring raid on Entebbe Airport in Uganda. The commandos were able to rescue more than 100 hostages who had been hijacked on an Air France plane. Three hostages, seven terrorists, approximately 40 Ugandan troops, and the leader of the rescue mission were killed during the raid. A fourth hostage, who had been in a hospital, was later murdered on the orders of Uganda's president, Idi Amin.

The raid on Entebbe has been considered by many to be the model for successful hostage rescue missions. However, it was unique in that it was the first long-range rescue mission ever attempted, and it therefore caught the terrorists and the Ugandans completely by surprise. After a new military tactic has been introduced, it can never again have the same chance of succeeding, since the element of surprise no longer exists.[2] And indeed, terrorists today expect all types of counterterrorist operations, including long-range rescue efforts by government special forces. The Israelis were also aided by the fact that they had helped train Ugandan paramilitary forces and were thus familiar with their tactics and operations. Furthermore, an Israeli construction firm had helped build the new terminal building at the airport, so Israeli authorities knew the layout of the airport.[3]

Another successful hostage rescue operation was conducted by West German commandos who stormed a hijacked Lufthansa 737 plane on

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[2]Ernest Evans, *Wars Without Splendor: The U.S. Military and Low-Level Conflict*, New York: Greenwood Press, 1987, p. 38.

[3]*New York Times*, July 5, 1976. The hostages were being held in the old terminal building.

the tarmac in Mogadishu, Somalia, in 1977. All 86 passengers were rescued, one terrorist was captured, and three others were killed. This operation was aided by the cooperation of the Somalian government, which allowed the rescue mission to be conducted on its territory. That eliminated the need for secrecy in transporting the commandos to Mogadishu or the possibility of confronting Somalian military forces during the rescue operation. This "permissive environment" model for hostage rescue operations was the one for which U.S. counterterrorist units had been trained in the late 1970s. They were therefore not prepared for the "nonpermissive environment" in Iran, where the host government supported the terrorists.[4]

Another successful counterterrorist operation was the British Special Air Service (SAS) rescue of hostages being held at the Iranian Embassy in London in 1980. The SAS commandos stormed the embassy from the roof and adjoining townhouses, freeing 19 hostages; the commandos killed five of the six terrorists and captured the sixth. Two hostages were killed, one just prior to the rescue mission and the other during it. A key factor in the success of this mission was that the SAS

> had total control of the environment. They controlled all the communications into and out of the embassy. They lifted fingerprints from the box lunches sent in during the siege until they were certain exactly how many terrorist they were dealing with. They even redirected aircraft out of Heathrow Airport, using the noise of low-flying jets to cover their movements. SAS could have done none of that if it had been operating in hostile territory.[5]

The need to evaluate each hostage situation on its own merits in terms of the prospects for a successful rescue mission was demonstrated in the Soviet Union in December 1988, when four gunmen seized a schoolbus with 30 children aboard. The gunmen demanded money and a flight out of the country. Although the Soviets certainly had the capabilities to storm the bus, the risk of killing children in a rescue effort apparently led the Soviets to accede to the hijackers' demands. The hijackers were flown to Israel, where they surrendered, and the Israeli government agreed to a Soviet request for their return. Although this case was more criminal than terrorist—no political demands were made, and the gunmen did not claim to represent any political or social group—it illustrates that the use of restraint, or even compliance with the demands of the captors, can sometimes result in the peaceful resolution of a hostage situation.

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[4]Martin and Walcott, *Best Laid Plans*, p. 40.

[5]Ibid., pp. 173–174.

Human alertness has at times helped to prevent terrorist incidents; for example, Israeli security guards found a bomb in a suitcase at the check-in counter for an El Al flight from London's Heathrow Airport. The attempted bombing of the El Al flight came two days after the 1986 U.S. air raid on Libya, which led to increased security precautions throughout Europe and the Middle East. After a Jordanian man was convicted of planning the bombing with the aid of Syrian intelligence officials, Britain broke relations with Syria, and the United States recalled its ambassador from Damascus. These diplomatic countermeasures did have some effect, as the Syrian government—surprised by the British and Western governments' reactions—eventually closed down the Damascus offices of the Abu Nidal terrorist organization.

Many governments' counterterrorist programs have benefited from U.S. assistance. The United States maintains an antiterrorism assistance program through the State Department that includes training police and security personnel from 50 nations and providing foreign governments with communications and airport security equipment.[6] For example, Bolivian police detected a high-explosive bomb at the German Embassy in La Paz in June 1988 using U.S.-supplied bomb-sniffing dogs. Bolivian police had also earlier completed a State Department-sponsored bomb-detection course.[7]

U.S. military advisers and special forces have also aided counterterrorist operations in other countries. In 1983, U.S. advisers helped instruct Sudanese commandos in a successful raid on a rebel hideout where American missionaries were being held captive. The missionaries and other foreigners were rescued.[8] In Venezuela, U.S. advisers instructed Venezuelan troops in July 1984 during a rescue mission on a hijacked plane carrying American hostages. The United States also sent in equipment for the operation, in which all the passengers and crew were rescued.[9]

However, U.S. assistance to foreign counterterrorist units can sometimes go astray. A CIA-trained Lebanese counterterrorist unit in 1985 passed along expertise in explosives to a Christian militia unit which launched an unauthorized car bombing against Sheik Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah's home in Lebanon in 1985. Fadlallah was not at home at the time of the attack, but more than 80 civilians were killed on the crowded street.[10] In another case, the Egyptian commando unit

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[6]*Department of State Bulletin*, Vol. 88, No. 2135, June 1988, p. 63.

[7]Ibid., p. 18.

[8]Wright and Broder, "U.S. Secretly Aids Anti-Terror Units," p. 1.

[9]Ibid., p. 17

[10]Ibid., p. 18

that was responsible for the deaths of more than 50 people in a hostage rescue operation was initially trained by the United States.[11]

No matter how effective a country's countermeasures may be, terrorists will always have the ability to make governments seem weak by perpetrating a few spectacular incidents. In some cases, government officials have pronounced that terrorists have been defeated in their country, only to experience another car bombing or assassination soon afterwards. No government has had a perfect record in counterterrorist tactics, and this will be true for the 1990s. Given the enormity and complexity of the task of combatting terrorism, U.S. countermeasures, for the most part, compare favorably with those of other countries.

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[11]Ibid.

IX. CONCLUSION

The U.S. experience in its efforts to combat terrorism during the 1980s holds many lessons for dealing with the terrorist threat in the next decade. Attempts to perpetrate violence—or threats to do so—on Americans and U.S. facilities throughout the world will continue. Some attacks will involve more sophisticated weapons than terrorists have previously used, and a larger number of casualties can be expected. Terrorists are also likely to design new and innovative strategies and tactics to penetrate the tighter security being implemented at airports and other facilities. The diversity of international terrorism will require an equally diverse response from the U.S. government.

The first lesson to be learned from our recent experience is the futility of expecting any decisive victories over terrorism. Progress will be achieved at times, periodic arrests of terrorists will be made, bombs will be detected and plots uncovered, support for terrorist activity will be temporarily suspended by certain states, and governments will cooperate to varying degrees in antiterrorist efforts. But terrorists will always have an advantage, since a single incident at the right time can lead to a perception that no progress has been made in the fight against terrorism. This was illustrated in the aftermath of the Pan Am bombing over Lockerbie, when worldwide headlines, government statements, public fear, and suspension of travel plans all appeared simultaneously.

The second lesson, which follows from the first, is that since the terrorist threat can never be totally eliminated, the excessive statements and promises about counterterrorist action are ill-advised. The phrases about crushing terrorism that win applause today are likely to haunt the government tomorrow, as the threat persists in different forms.

We have also seen that there is no automatic willingness on the part of U.S. allies to cooperate in counterterrorist activity. The arms-for-hostages deal, in which the United States deviated from its often stated "no negotiations, no concessions" policy, illustrates the tendency for governments to resolve terrorist episodes according to their perception of what will work best for their own interests.

But the real lesson of the secret negotiations with Iran was that U.S. foreign policy objectives and long-term U.S. geopolitical interests were jeopardized by the desire to bring back a handful of hostages from Lebanon. Preoccupation with terrorism led to intense internal pressure to "resolve" each terrorist episode, eventually leading to the ill-advised deal.

The public and the media can have a great influence on government responses to terrorism. Policymakers are under enormous pressure to appear to be doing something about the terrorist threat, especially during and immediately after a specific incident. Yet there has been no attempt during the past decade to invoke the long-standing tradition of presidents shaping and molding public opinion on those issues where overreaction or overexcitement on the part of the public can be counterproductive. Instead of fostering restraint in the public's attitude toward terrorism during the 1980s, the government overplayed the threat and the public followed its lead.[1]

The most effective U.S. countermeasures against terrorism have involved physical security and intelligence. These low-cost operations have little potential negative impact on U.S. foreign policy or strategic interests and great potential for international cooperation. The United States has experienced continuing frustration in its attempts to gain international support for economic and military antiterrorist measures. Its economic sanctions have focused on Libya, a country with which several of its European allies have substantial economic ties. And no matter how sincere other governments may be in wanting to see strong action taken against state sponsors of terrorism, they are not likely to cooperate if the actions adversely affect their own interests.

Similarly, Western nations, with the exception of Great Britain, have not supported the United States in its use of military means to combat terrorism. This can be expected to continue to be a problem. Some countries are reluctant to cooperate in military operations because of fear that terrorist groups will retaliate against them. And the U.S. experience with military countermeasures has revealed a number of problems that must be addressed before future operations are launched. The most significant are the risks that can result from being geographically distant from the intended target and the potential technological failures of key assets at critical times.

Anti-U.S. terrorism will never be completely eliminated. The presence of U.S. assets and citizens in all parts of the world and the multitude of terrorist groups ensure that the United States will continue to

[1]An example of presidential restraint affecting public reaction occurred during the spring and summer of 1961, when several American planes were hijacked to Cuba, leading to speculation that Fidel Castro was behind the terrorism. Although the rumors turned out to be false, public and congressional anger was at a point where one congressmen labeled the hijackings an "act of war." President Kennedy held a press conference appealing for calm, pointing out that other issues unfolding in Latin America were far more important to long-term U.S. interests than a wave of hijackings. The Inter-American Economic and Social Council was holding a special session in Uruguay to consider adopting the charter of the Alliance for Progress, and Kennedy implored Americans not to "get overexcited" about hijackings when other more important issues demanded U.S. attention.

be victimized. Therefore, U.S. countermeasures should not be expected to "defeat" international terrorism. They may, however, be effective in reducing the terrorist threat. Although the United States has not succeeded in gaining international cooperation for all its countermeasures, it must continue the effort.

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