

TERRORISM

JULY 10, 1985

CONFIDENTIAL MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: THE SCOURGE OF INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM
ITS' THREAT TO AMERICA

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THE THREAT OF TERRORISM

History is replete with episodes of “hit – and – run terrorism”, staged acts of mayhem, enacted for the purpose of producing calculated effects on a viewing audience. Deplorable and destructive as these violent incidents may have been, they were predictably performed by small groups of extremists who had few supporters and very limited resources. Consequently most of these vintage scenes of violence, confined as they were in duration and geography, had little effect on the political vitality and stability of the societies in which they occurred.

But, over the past two decades a new and more virulent strain of the violence has emerged. No longer bound in time, or by place, it has become a widespread contagion of epidemic proportions. Sponsored and supported by sovereign states, as a weapon of proxy warfare, the malignancy of modern international terrorism, has grown to the point where it can threaten the well-being and health of democratic institutions everywhere.

Fortunately, we in the United States were spared much of the savagery and chaos that came with the dawning of the “Age of Global Terrorism”. Unaffected, unaware and uninformed as we were at the onset in this international plague, it’s not surprising, that the tragic mini-drama of the TWA Flight 847 in Beirut, like the epic-saga of the Iranian Hostage crisis, filled Americans with incomprehension, frustration and even fascination.

Certainly television ratings indicated that the drama-filled replay of democracy’s impotence was a source of viewer enthrallment but there’s reason to believe that Lebanon’s Shia version of “Play It Again Sam”, also produced considerable feelings of agitation, indignation and maybe even humiliation. There, in living color were two “Beirut Bag Men” cowardly criminals in pillowcases, taunting, threatening and terrorizing the world’s greatest nation.

How did we react to this provocation? From the public's perspective we responded immediately, airlifting network camera crews to the scene and canceling the vacations of Tom Brokaw and President Reagan- in that order. Then we deliberately raised the stakes by placing all personnel of the four major networks on alert status throughout the Middle East and Europe. Next we took the crisis to the brink by wearing down antagonist Nahbi Berri with round-the-clock television interviews. From break-of-day bargaining on "Good Morning America" to nocturnal negotiating on "Nightline", he was forced to stare into a camera lens until he finally blinked. In the end a novel "Doctrine of Media Retaliation" had delivered the message "Mess with us and next time you'll not only have to deal with Bryant Gumble by day but Larry King all night".

Admittedly, this is an exaggerated and perhaps a surrealistic chronicle, nonetheless beneath the hype and hyperbole, is a crucial issue of causality.

Virtually accepted as dogma, for almost four decades, has been the tenet that the credibility of America's retaliatory capability has constrained the Soviet Union from direct aggression against members of the NATO Alliance. Indeed, this conceptual premise is the foundation for Mutual Deterrence which posits that no sane government would start a nuclear war if it believed that such an action might trigger unacceptable retaliation in kind.

Simply put, as long as the Kremlin leadership cannot perceive the benefit of a favorable exchange ratio, no incentive exists for a surgical first strike. Therefore, Moscow's decisions may be affected more by their assessment of America's resolve and determination to match its' words by deeds and less by our stated policies or rhetoric. Tersely formulated: Will the Soviet Union interpret our prolonged passivity in the face of recent terrorist provocations as a sign of diminished resolve?

For their part the President and Secretary of State seem ahead of Congress and the media in anticipating this question related to "credibility carry-over effect". Like the words of a Chinese proverb, "When you pluck a flower you disturb the stars", foreign policy is a complex tapestry, where a multitude of threads are inextricably intertwined.

To be sure, Mr. Reagan knows first hand that his swift response to the PATCO Strike and the decisive invasion of Grenada had worldwide reverberations.

Unfortunately, Byzantine bloodletting in the labyrinth that is modern Lebanon is not conducive to immediate and effective reciprocation to a provocation. Delayed reactions, on the other hand, always cause problems in communication and raise doubts about motive. Take as an example NATO's decision to deploy Pershing II and Cruise missiles as a response to the Soviet installation of SS20's. Since there was a five-year time interval between the decision and its actual implementation, when it did occur it created the impression among many Western Europeans that the move constituted an American escalation of the nuclear arms race.

So before the memory of the skyjacked Beirut hostages, the recent killing of six Americans in San Salvador, and the murder of two Americans aboard a Kuwaiti Airliner in Teheran last December fade from the public agenda, the United States must act to protect its citizens at home and abroad. In essence, tomorrow's non-combatant victims of terrorism will be the result of today's flaccid response to terrorism.

We must match our words with the capability to predict, prevent and punish these criminals. The tying of Yellow Ribbons is not a strategy of deterrence but rather the substitution of symbol for substance, words for deeds—the snare in whose coils a President's credibility can be destroyed.

When viewed strictly in numerical terms, the amount of casualties produced by terrorist acts, pale when compared to the tortuous bloodletting in Lebanon, the continuing carnage from the Iran-Iraq war, or even the nation's homicide rate. Still, the spreading plague of international terrorism portends peril far greater than statistics alone might imply. Although the most visible crime of our time, the true nature and significance of this new brand of political violence has failed to register with the public at large.

What is Terrorism? It is the calculated menacing and maiming of innocent civilians for the purpose of producing fear and anxiety in the viewing audience in order to gain political ends. By trying to change our thinking, actions and policies through fear

these criminals are engaged in a form of mental rape. What is new is that to their megalomaniac recipe has been added the stock of state sponsorship, a dash of high technology and a great deal of theatrical seasoning. Indeed, as practiced today it's a form of show business, which combines spectacle, fear, excitement and a message.

Consequently the criteria for measuring the success of a terrorist operation depends almost entirely upon the amount of publicity it receives. By this criterion, if you can get the United States of America by its' networks, its' heart and mind will follow. In the final analysis the most likely location for terrorist spectacles in the years or decades to come would be places where the media exists in great numbers such as New York City, London, the Olympic Games or even The Academy Awards.

Wittingly or unwittingly the media are the spokesmen of the Terrorist transmitting their message, the instrument through which the world audience instantaneously knows the deeds with all their excitement, drama and horror. Television journalists and commentators who cover these events are not the proverbial flies on the wall, but co-producers in a theatrical extravaganza. Like it or not they are not objective observers but players in the game.

By indiscriminately menacing, maiming or murdering innocent people, the terrorist attempts to disorient and intimidate the viewing audience. What appears as a random atrocity is so frightening to our own sense of personal security that we virtually need to assume the existence of an understandable reason, motive or explanation behind it? In short, we are already predisposed and conditioned to learn the "underlying grievances", which must have caused the frightening effect. The next stop, of course, is to blame the victim.

Moreover, living in an "Alibi Age", we are even more susceptible to the righteous self-justifications of criminal thugs, especially if they proclaim a political motive. From the philosophy of John Jacques Rousseau to the lyrics in West Side Story, the refrain is the same: "We're deprived on account of we're deprived".

Having said all this, the question is what can we do now to curb the scourge of Terrorism, which at its current rate will become the growth industry of the future?

1. **TIMELY RETALIATION**

For too long we have been reluctant in responding to Terrorism. About a decade ago when those who had real or imagined grievances against the United States began picking-off Americans overseas (military personnel, diplomats or civilians) we delivered pinprick retaliations or just did nothing. We said we did not want to risk harming innocent people in striking back, but that only gave license to those nations that harbor known terrorists. Now the time is long overdue to inform these sponsor countries (Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen, Lebanon, etc.) that if you do not rid yourself of these Terrorists and their bases we will do it ourselves.

As someone once said, “If you want to win the fight against malaria, it will take more than swatting at mosquitoes. You’ve got to drain the swamps where they breed.”

2. **EDUCATE THE MEDIA ABOUT THE THREAT**

We must try to get the American Electronic Media to avoid the “knee jerk reporting reflex” which causes journalists to convey terrorists’ grievances, threats and promises along with the pleas of hostages. Only if they exercise some self-restraint can we save our national government from the paralysis of its will.

Moreover, it would be helpful if journalists understood the difference between terrorists and freedom fighters, between cold-blooded murder and executions and between the innocent victim and criminal perpetrators. In the world of the terrorist, words and impressions are more real and sometimes more deadly than guns and bombs. In short, the “striving for balance and moral blindness may aid and even encourage these criminal thugs.

3. USE DIPLOMATIC AND ECONOMIC LEVERS TO OUTLAW TERRORISM

In the past the United States has made half-hearted attempts to get the United Nations to pass such a proposal only to be thwarted by a coalition of Muslim nations, who insisted that the term “terrorism” be drastically redefined. In effect, that’s like a Doctor saying that he would be willing to take out your appendix providing it is redefined as your daughter. Clearly we must use all the “chips” available and persist in this goal.

4. TIGHTEN AIRPORT SECURITY

On all flights, both international and domestic airports should install state-of-the-art security baggage detectors- including three –dimensional scanners that can spot plastic explosives and weapons. Further, all checked baggage should be x-rayed to guard against time-release or remote control bombs.

In addition, the Federal Government should consider subsidizing the airlines to improve the capability and quality of airport security staff. We should also ban flights to overseas airports that we know are easy targets for terrorists (Karachi, Athens, Manila, etc.)

5. EXPAND AND INTENSIFY INTELLIGENCE GATHERING

Clearly we have been relying too much on technical intelligence collection systems at the expense of the difficult challenge of penetrating terrorist groups with human sources. From all indications, the President will soon sign the necessary ISA finding that will enable us to recruit and train Arab agents to infiltrate suspected terrorist groups in, Iran, Syria and Lebanon. This should only

be the first step since we are sorely lacking in human intelligence collection both overseas and domestically.

Beyond this we must get better coordination among all of our intelligence agencies and greater cooperation with all the civilized nations who stand with us against this threat to progress, modernity and Western Civilization.