

INTER 86

A Review of International Terrorism in 1986

Anat Kurz, Ariel Merari,
Sofia Kotzer, Tamar Prat.

JCSS Project on Terrorism



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Publishing a survey summarizing the recent year is inherently a problematic task. On the one hand, the work has to be done rapidly, so as to remain relevant and timely. On the other hand, a survey of this kind necessitates some distance in time, in order to gain more complete information and to allow for data assessment and scrutiny. The result of these conflicting demands is always a compromise. The fact that we were able to publish this report, imperfect as it may be, in a relatively short period of time after the end of 1986, is due to the efforts and skills of many persons. The JCSS Information Center, under the direction of Moshe Grundman, made a special effort to clip and distribute data on terrorism-related events in real time to enable their processing for InTer 1986. In addition to the authors credited, at the Project on Terrorism Yael Treiber, David Tal and Yoram Schweitzer analyzed raw data, while Orit Zilka, Talia Bentwitch and Yoel Kozak mounted the information on computer. Doron Bal, who had a central role in developing the computer program, has continued to improve it. Miriam Cassuto and Ziva Baron wordprocessed reports. Joseph Alpher, the JCSS Deputy Head and Executive Editor, made an indispensable contribution in streamlining the survey and preparing it for printing.

Ariel Merari

Director, Project on Terrorism

INTRODUCTION

This report surveys international terrorism in 1986. It is the third annual survey of its kind published by the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies' Project on Terrorism. As in previous years' reports, the current survey contains statistical data which delineate various aspects of international terrorism, as well as brief articles which analyze major current issues in international terrorism. This year the articles include a discussion of western states' policies on terrorism, an article on the use of and support for terrorism by Middle Eastern states, and an analysis of trends in Palestinian terrorism. A chronology of significant international terrorist events in 1986 is included, as well as extensive tables and a glossary of terrorist organizations.

The report is based on data collected, collated and computerized at the JCSS Project on Terrorism. That project was established in 1979. Its aims are to maintain a data base on terrorism around the world, to issue periodic situation reports, and to conduct studies analyzing the processes, trends and phenomena of terrorism.

The JCSS terrorism data base contains three files:

Terrorist Events - a systematic cataloguing of international as well as domestic terrorist incidents that

take place in most parts of the world;

Terrorist Groups - a continually updated collection of information on terrorist groups around the world, according to a predetermined list of detailed categories;

Countries' Attitudes to Terrorism - monitors and documents the various forms of state support for terrorist groups, as well as the methods states use to combat terrorism.

For purposes of data collection, a terrorist group is defined as an organization other than a state (although it may enjoy state support and/or act in the service of a state) which resorts to the systematic use of violence in order to achieve political ends. A terrorist incident is any violent activity conducted by a non-state organization in order to attain political objectives. An international terrorist incident (in contrast to a domestic incident) is defined as a terrorist incident which in some way involves more than one state. In addition to these categories, the JCSS data base monitors international terrorist activity conducted by direct emissaries of states on foreign territory--like the Libyan hit teams.

The data base relies mainly on information from the mass communications media (primarily dailies, weeklies and periodicals), professional publications, and government releases. Media information concerning terrorism is

problematic for two reasons: first, coverage of events, especially those taking place in remote parts of the world, is sometimes deficient--although international terrorist incidents are generally covered better than domestic ones, and terrorist activity involving western interests receives particularly good coverage. The second point is related to the clandestine nature of terrorist activity. Information about the actual perpetrators and their intentions is sometimes incomplete, contradictory or simply absent. However, there is usually no doubt regarding the physical results of an incident.

As mentioned above, international terrorist incidents are defined as those events in which more than one country is involved. Nevertheless, in the present report, as in the previous ones, we excluded incidents that formed part of an underground struggle conducted by rebels against a foreign army in their own country. Inclusion of violent events associated with struggles of this sort would considerably distort the picture of international terrorism. Thus, statistics in this report do not contain attacks on the IDF in Lebanon, events in the struggle conducted by the local population against the Vietnamese army in Cambodia, clashes between Afghan rebels and Soviet units, events involving French or Libyan units within the context of the civil war in Chad, etc.

INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM IN 1986: MAIN FEATURES

A total of 437 international terrorist incidents were recorded in 1986, an increase of seven percent compared to the 408 incidents of the previous year, and 6 percent more than in 1984. In terms of the overall frequency of incidents, therefore, the intensity of international terrorism has not changed markedly in the course of the past three years. But terrorism has tended to deliver an international impact by means of a relatively small number of high-casualty or extortionate incidents, and the frequency of these was lower in 1986 than in 1985 but higher than in 1984.

Tactics

Three types of terrorist tactics accounted for 93 percent of the incidents: bombing, armed assault and kidnapping.

For many years, bombing has been the most common terrorist tactic, and 1986 was not exceptional in this respect. In this year bombings (including thwarted attempts) constituted 50.6 percent of the total number of terrorist incidents, a small decrease compared to the previous year's 52.9 percent. Like most other types of terrorist attacks, however, the mere classification of a

tactic cannot convey the significance of an incident in either physical terms or with regard to its psychopolitical impact. Thus, whereas in 1986 there were fewer high-casualty bombing incidents than in 1985, one event which had considerable repercussions in this category was the explosion at a Berlin discotheque in April, which precipitated the American punitive attack on Libya ten days later. At least two of the thwarted bombing attacks in 1986 were potentially disastrous, physically as well as politically. These were the attempted mid-air bombings of El Al airliners in London (April 17) and Madrid (June 26).

Armed assaults comprised 31.8 percent of the total number of international incidents in 1986, an increase compared to the previous year's 23.5 percent. Here, despite the numerical escalation, there was a reduction in the frequency of daring, high-casualty attacks. Notorious events in this category were the attack on the British air base at Akrotiri, Cyprus, in August, and the massacre at the Istanbul synagogue in September.

Kidnapping accounted for 10.5 percent of the total number of incidents, a decrease from 1985's 13.2 percent. The two foci of this terrorist tactic were Lebanon and Colombia.

The remaining categories of terrorist tactics found expression in a handful of events. The most noteworthy

among these incidents was the attempted hijacking of a Pan Am airliner in Karachi, Pakistan, in September, which turned into a barricade-hostage incident and resulted in 21 fatalities and more than 100 wounded.

For details, see Tables 1 and 21 in Appendix I.

Geographical Distribution

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s Western Europe has been the favorite arena for international terrorist activity, due mainly to the fact that it has been the preferred arena of international operations for Middle Eastern terrorist groups. In 1986 there was a decline in Western Europe's share of international terrorist activity: 30.2 percent of all international incidents took place in this region, compared to 44.7 percent in 1985 and 40.5 percent in 1984. The decline was the result of a decrease in the international terrorist activity of indigenous European groups, as well as a shift in the geographical preferences of Palestinian groups. At the same time, international terrorist activity by some Latin American groups increased. Thus, 27.7 percent of the world's total in 1986 occurred in this region, compared to 19.8 percent in 1985. The Middle East captured 20.1 percent of the world total, a slight rise from 17.2 percent in 1985.

Two thirds of the world's international terrorist

activity in 1986 occurred in nine countries: Lebanon (17.2 percent of the world's total), Peru (11.5%), Colombia (8.9%), Spain (7.3%), The Federal Republic of Germany (6.4%), Pakistan (5.9%), France (3.9%), Greece (3.2%), and the Netherlands (2.5%). Six of these countries were among the top nine in the previous two years: Lebanon, the Federal Republic of Germany, Colombia, Spain and France.

For details, see Tables 2 and 3 in Appendix I.

Aims of Terrorist Attacks

An examination of terrorist incidents according to their aim yields the following results: 9.3 percent were actual or attempted assassinations, 10.8 percent were aimed at random killing, 19 percent were aimed at killing and causing property damage simultaneously, 40 percent were apparently intended to cause only property damage, and in 5.5 percent of the incidents the terrorists' aim was extortion. Overall, 39.1 percent of the incidents were intended to kill, a marked decrease compared to 52.8 percent in 1985. This measure of terrorist lethality, therefore, indicates a decline in the deadliness of terrorism in 1986.

For details, see Table 8 in Appendix I.

Targets

Economic targets - mainly business facilities and

executives - were the single most common category of terrorist targets in 1986: 34.1 percent of the total number of attacks, a considerable increase compared to the previous year's 19.4 percent. Despite security measures, commercial aviation continued to be an attractive target for terrorists: 29 incidents were aimed at airliners, offices of airline companies and airports. Presumably these targets are favored by terrorists because airline companies are often perceived as symbolic representatives of their countries, and because attacks on aviation usually generate extensive publicity.

Political targets (public figures and facilities) were second choice (22 percent), followed by diplomats and diplomatic premises (19.4 percent). Of all attacks, 15.6 percent were directed against the public at large. These figures mark a shift in terrorists' targeting preferences compared to 1985, when political targets were the most frequent category of terrorist attacks (37 percent) followed by diplomatic and economic targets (19.6 and 19.4 percent, respectively). This difference may reflect the increase in the relative weight of Latin America and the decline of Western Europe's share in international terrorist activity, since in the former region economic targets have traditionally been more common than in the latter.

For details see Tables 4 and 22 in Appendix I.

The Victims

The direct victims of international terrorism in 1986 numbered 398 dead, 1118 wounded, 282 kidnapped, 325 hijacked and 407 held hostage in barricade-hostage situations. The total number of victims in 1986 (2530) was not markedly different than that of 1985 (2642). Although the number of fatalities in 1986 was considerably lower than the 639 of 1985, and resembled that of 1984, in which 349 persons were killed, more than half of the fatalities in 1985 were accounted for by the 329 persons killed in a single incident--the mid-air bombing of an Air India airliner. Had one of the several attempted incidents of this kind succeeded in 1986, the year's tally would have been rather similar to the previous year's.

In 1986, 174 incidents (39.8 percent of the 437 international events) resulted in the killing, wounding or kidnapping of persons. Nationals of NATO countries were victimized in 56.3 percent of these incidents, citizens of Arab League states in 10.9 percent, and those of Warsaw Pact states in 4.4 percent. Overall, however, the proportion of incidents involving victims was considerably lower in 1986 than in the previous year, in which 66 percent of the international terrorist events resulted in killing, wounding or kidnapping.

For details, see Tables 10, 11, 12 and 13.

The Perpetrators

Although 51 terrorist groups were involved in international terrorist activity in 1986 (a reduction compared to the previous year's groups), more than half of the incidents were perpetrated by a mere dozen or so terrorist organizations, a phenomenon which was already observed in previous years.

As a geographic cluster, Middle Eastern groups continued to be leading contributors to international terrorism, causing more than 25 percent of the world's incidents--lower than the 31 percent of 1985, but higher than the 1984 figure of 20 percent. Palestinian groups were responsible for 81 incidents (18.5 percent of the world total). Notably, incidents associated with the Lebanese Armed Revolutionary Factions (LARF) were included in the tally of Palestinian terrorist activity, since LARF is apparently a cover name or an offshoot of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine - Special Command (PFLF-SC), headed by Salim Abu Salem. The 81 incidents constitute a slight rise compared to the previous year's 73 international Palestinian terrorist events, although there were fewer high-casualty, spectacular Palestinian-perpetrated incidents in 1986 than in 1985. Palestinian terrorist groups deserve the label "international

terrorists" more than terrorists of any other nationality, since most of their terrorist activity crosses international boundaries. For example, of the 19 identified terrorist incidents perpetrated by the Fatah Revolutionary Council (FRC, Abu Nidal's group), six took place in Western Europe, six in Asia and six in the Middle East.

Shi'ite international terrorist activity, on the other hand, was reduced from 57 incidents in 1985 to 29 in 1986 (6.6 percent of the world's total). Of these, 15 took place in Lebanon and another four in additional Middle Eastern countries. The remaining Shi'ite attacks occurred in Turkey, France, the United Kingdom, Sweden, and Pakistan.

Four of the Latin American terrorist groups were responsible for 85 (19.5 percent) of the international incidents in 1986, or more than 70 percent of that region's international terrorist activity. The two foci of international terrorist activity in the region were Peru and Colombia. Peru was the leading country in Latin America in terms of frequency of incidents. The two Peruvian groups, Movimiento Revolucionario de Tupac Amaru (MRTA) and Sendero Luminoso (SL), perpetrated 29 and 18 international terrorist incidents, respectively. In Colombia, the Ejercito de Liberacion Nacional (ELN) and the