

What Constitutes State Support to Terrorists?

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Despite the best efforts of governments worldwide to eradicate it, state-sponsored terrorism continues to dominate headlines. Whether we look at the scores of Afghan WAD/KHAD-supported attacks on Pakistani marketplaces,¹ or at almost two decades of Libyan-orchestrated depredations around the world, aid given to terrorists by governments continues to stymie our best efforts to protect ourselves. Indeed, many theorists have suggested that external support by governments is necessary to ensure the survival of terrorist bands, whose limited self-generated resources would otherwise cause these organizations to wither over time.²

Taking action to stop this official assistance to terrorists³ has thus become a crucial component in legislative as well as non-traditional proposals to combat the overall phenomenon of terrorism. Many proposals as well as laws on the books call for actions against regimes which 'aid and abet terrorism'.⁴ But where does one draw the line? If we are to go beyond mere name-calling, we need to determine what specific, observable actions draw our ire, and whether some actions are more reprehensible – and thus more critical to expose and combat – than others.

In addition to the policy question, the issue of state support raises methodological concerns which affect the conduct of our empirical research. As part of Vinyard Software's work in creating the ITERATE III dataset on international terrorist incidents,⁵ we have wrestled with the issues of state support to terrorists: what constitutes evidence of support, and what constitutes a pattern of support? We have found in coding incidents that we may be faulted by some of our readers on criteria for inclusion. 'Some' evidence and 'overwhelming' evidence, as the US found when trying to get West European governments to move against Libya following the bombing of La Belle Disco in April 1986, is in the eyes of the beholder. If the US cannot get like-minded Europeans to agree on what a cancelled check and radio intercepts mean, it is doubtful that the far more disparate membership of the United Nations will take action against member states with goals parallel if not identical to their own.

The patron state issue also raises the broader question of what constitutes support for terrorists. Are we looking for specific-event assistance, or broader facilitation of terrorism without actually being involved in discrete

incidents? Perhaps we (or the discipline as a whole) need a scale of types of behaviour/attitudes that governments can take which, volitionally or unintentionally, tend to make a terrorist's life easier. This article offers a scale of such actions, ranging from passive support to actual incorporation of the terrorist group into a quasi-official arm of a renegade government.

Motivations of Governments

As a first cut in constructing our scale, we can suggest several general degrees of government support/attitudes toward terrorists. In rough order of culpability/evil, there are:

- intimidated governments;
- ideologically supportive regimes;
- generally facilitative supporters;
- direct support in incidents by governments;
- official participation.⁶

To place regimes in any of these categories, we can examine specific observable behaviours made by governments which would lead us to infer the motivations of those governments. While we must always be mindful that these inferences can be faulty and we must consult multiple sources before feeling confident in these judgements, behaviours are, after all, what assist terrorists and what concern us here.

Refining our scale further to assign behaviours within each category, we can rank the behaviours in roughly ascending order of usefulness to the terrorists. One can quibble with the specific location of any given behaviour within these rankings; the scale is designed to be heuristic rather than theological.

Intimidated Governments⁷

In the first category we find governments which do not necessarily sympathize with the terrorists but whose actions, whether by inadvertence, inattention, ignorance, or intimidation, somehow assist terrorists. Examples of these acts appear below:

ACTS BY INTIMIDATED GOVERNMENTS WHICH DO NOT NECESSARILY SYMPATHIZE WITH THE TERRORISTS

1. Granting terrorist demands;
2. Refusal to sign/ratify bilateral/regional/universal anti-terrorist treaties;
3. Refusal to legislatively/judicially enforce #2;

4. Refusal to extradite on legal technicalities;
5. 'Quiet deals' by governments who permit terrorists to transit country in return for guarantee of no attacks on local soil.

Whatever one's rationale for granting terrorist demands, there can be little doubt that it directly assists terrorists. Indeed, such governments are giving the terrorists exactly what they request, a phenomenon almost unique among the behaviours along this scale. Wherever one stands regarding the debate on the merits of long-term deterrence versus short-term altruistic concern for hostages,⁸ giving in starts governments on the slippery slope of terrorist assistance.

Other behaviours in this category are ones which the terrorists generally do not directly request, but which nonetheless assist them. Fence-sitting regarding anti-terrorist treaties, no matter how many other governments agree to them, tends to weaken the appearance of universal resolve to combat terrorists, and gives them the impression that if you attack the system at such vulnerable points, they can still win. We have put refusal to enforce such treaties, whatever the domestic political or constitutional excuses, higher on our list because this tergiversation gives terrorists the impression that perhaps all signatories were not really serious when they drafted the treaties.

Refusing to extradite on legal technicalities – vice political reasons, a greater offense on this scale – is similar to the previous entry on the scale, but gives more specific aid and comfort to the terrorists. Knowledge that they need not fear a probably tougher court in an aggrieved nation lessens overall terrorist fear of retribution.⁹

Quiet deals, while difficult to prove, are often cited by the Western press as explaining why terrorist attacks by foreign groups decline precipitously in certain countries. While the ploy does seem to buy a fragile peace for these countries, it bolsters terrorist resolve that their methods can work.

Ideologically Supportive Governments

Further along the scale are those governments whose motives are clearer. Far from being intimidated by the terrorists, they more openly embrace the motives – if not yet the methods employed – of these bands. Their actions include:

ACTS BY IDEOLOGICALLY SUPPORTIVE GOVERNMENTS

6. Propaganda/rhetorical support to terrorist groups in media, international organizations;¹⁰
7. Permitting group to open office on local soil;
8. Refusal to extradite on political grounds;

9. Receiving visiting terrorist leaders on level normally given to heads of state;
10. Early release of incarcerated terrorists;
11. Failure to arrest hijackers who leave airplane on country's turf;
12. Granting of landing rights to hijackers;
13. Refusal to permit foreign hostage rescue squads into country;
14. Failure to arrest known terrorist transiting country.

Without belabouring the point with commentary on each entry, we shall simply note that these actions are more incident-specific than those earlier on the scale. Moreover, the given action requires a more formal decision by central governments which would more clearly understand the consequences of their actions in terms of assistance to terrorists.

Generally Facilitative Governments

Governments at this point on the scale have now decided that the actions of terrorist groups are in keeping with their own foreign policies. There can be no question of the sympathies of governments engaging in these actions. While not yet assisting in specific incidents, these governments are directly adding to the general capabilities of terrorists to conduct attacks. These actions include:

GENERALLY FACILITATIVE SUPPORT

15. Permitting group to set up safehouses/safehaven on local soil;
16. Permitting terrorists to conduct training on local soil;
17. General training by government of umbrella guerrilla bands which have terrorist appendages;¹¹
18. Large monetary contributions to umbrella group's coffers;
19. Provision of arms to group or lax supervision of third party arms transfers.¹²

Incident-Specific Support

Governments engaging in these types of incidents are engaging in what Brian Jenkins has referred to as a type of surrogate warfare. While governments understand that they probably cannot win a conventional or nuclear battle with an adversary, they can conduct protracted conflicts with enemies through terrorist groups, which gives them the added benefit of deniability, however implausible. These actions include:

DIRECT SUPPORT TO TERRORISTS IN INCIDENTS

20. Providing false/true documents/passports/backstopping aliases/cover stories;

21. Providing diplomatic pouch to move terrorist items;
22. Provision of non-lethal operational assistance – maps, safehouses, communications;
23. Direct financing for specific operation;
24. Direct training for specific operation;
25. Provision of weapons for specific operation;
26. Adding to terrorist demands during incident;
27. Payment of insurance/bonuses to terrorists after the fact.

Joint Operations

Finally, we find governments which incorporate the terrorist methodology – and sometimes the terrorist group – into the government repertoire of official (if covert) action. These actions have included:

OFFICIALLY-SANCTIONED PARTICIPATION OF GOVERNMENT PERSONNEL IN INCIDENTS¹³

28. Participation of intelligence/security service personnel in planning of operation;
29. Government personnel joining terrorist attack squad
30. Joining terrorist attack squad once incident has begun
31. Incarcerating hostages
32. Shooting at hostage rescue squads

Concluding Remarks

Using the above scale, the ITERATE III project treats behaviours 20–32 as triggering our listing the incident as having state support. Acts lower on the scale, while we may be displeased with them, do not constitute the type of patronage which we would find sufficiently notorious for our purposes.

This scale, of course, is not meant to be exhaustive, nor need one agree with the absolute ranking given one action in comparison with another action. The intention of the scale is to determine the relative demerit of a pattern of actions – the broad category is key, not the numerical position.

The author hopes that this scale helps contribute to a more focussed policy debate on what constitutes state aid to terrorists and what we should do to stop it.¹⁴ If we can agree on these definitional and typological preliminaries, we may be on our way toward a more effective policy

response, and make the world just a little bit safer from further terrorist attacks.

NOTES

1. Consult, for example, *Patterns of Global Terrorism: 1987* (Washington, DC: US Department of State, 1988), as reported in John M. Goshko, 'World Terrorism up 7 per cent, U.S. Says', *Washington Post* (23 Aug. 1988), p.10, which notes in passing the increase in incidents is due to 'a wave of high-casualty bombings in Pakistan carried out by . . . the Afghan intelligence service known as WAD'. The report notes the WAD conducted 127 attacks inside Pakistan, killing 234 persons and wounding 1,200.
2. Consult, for example, the directory of terrorist groups, and their extensive networks of external supporters, in Alex P. Schmid, Albert J. Jongman, *et al.*, *Political Terrorism: A New Guide to Actors, Authors, Concepts, Data Bases, Theories, and Literature* (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1988).
3. Our discussion is confined to regime assistance to terrorist bands, not the separate issue of terrorism (or other forms of gross violations of human rights, usually of the local citizenry) by repressive regimes, of whatever ideological persuasion.
4. For a fuller discussion of these proposals, consult the works cited in Edward F. Mickolus, *The Literature of Terrorism: A Selectively Annotated Bibliography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1980), pp.297-301, as well as Edward F. Mickolus with Peter A. Flemming, *Terrorism, 1980-1987: A Selectively Annotated Bibliography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1988), pp.67-81.
5. ITERATE III (International Terrorism: Attributes of Terrorist Events) is a follow-on to earlier numeric datasets on international terrorism. Available from Vinyard Software, 2243 Beacon Lane, Falls Church, Virginia, USA, it covers the 1980-87 time-frame. A numeric dataset, compatible with the ITERATE I and II coding schemes, is available, as is a computer-searchable textual version, which describes each incident. For a more detailed description of the datasets, consult Edward Mickolus, Todd Sandler and Jean Murdock, *International Terrorism in the 1980s: A Chronology, Volume 1: 1980-1983* (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1988), and the companion work, Edward Mickolus, Todd Sandler and Jean Murdock, *International Terrorism in the 1980s: A Chronology, Volume 2: 1984-1987* (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1989).
6. A similar scale of counter-terrorist actions could be constructed, with many of the entries the reciprocals of the items which will be described below.
7. As is evident by the opening sentence of this section, not all of the governments engaging in these behaviours are intimidated by the terrorists. Some may even be sympathetic to the terrorists, and engage in some instances in behaviours further along the scale. However, the vast majority of governments which engage in these behaviours are probably trying to avoid trouble for their nationals and believe that concession, rather than confrontation, is the easiest way out.
8. For a more thorough discussion of this debate, see Edward F. Mickolus, 'Negotiating for Hostages: A Policy Dilemma', Vol.19, No.4, *Orbis* (Winter 1976), pp.1309-25.
9. International narcotics traffickers, particularly members of the Medellin cocaine cartel in Colombia, show similar concern about being extradited to the United States, and go to extreme lengths - including million-dollar bribes to judges, hiring a terrorist group to kill the majority of the Colombian Supreme Court, and conducting a no-holds-barred media and lobbying blitz against extradition treaties - to throw a monkey-wrench into extradition efforts.

Our ire with governments which refuse to extradite can be tempered somewhat by offers such as that given by Ireland when it refused to extradite to the United Kingdom an accused Irish Republican Army gunman. Although he held that Patrick Ryan could not get a fair trial in the United Kingdom due to media sensationalism, Irish Attorney General John Murray offered the British the option of using a 1976 Irish law to press

- charges in an Irish court. See Karen DeYoung, 'Ireland Turns Down Request by Britain to Extradite Priest', *Washington Post* (14 Dec. 1988), pp.A-27, A-32.
10. Paul Wilkinson would put this behaviour even further along the scale, under Generally Facilitative or even Direct Support. Personal communication, 6 Oct. 1988.
 11. The Soviet Union, for example, was frequently cited in the late 1970s and early 1980s by Western observers for having trained and armed members of the Palestine Liberation Organization, some of whose members later turned up on terrorist missions. While many could argue that the Soviets did not intend for their arms and skills to be used by terrorists and that they were only assisting a revolutionary group which happened to have terrorist appendages, such aid did, even if arguably inadvertently and indirectly, build terrorist capabilities.
 12. While charges that Libyan leader Muammar Qadhafi has armed terrorists date back to his coming to power in September 1969, he none the less has continued these pursuits. The most recent evidence of Libyan arms collusion on a grand scale is the consignment of 150 tons of Russian-made SAM-7 ground-to-air missiles and other weapons destined for the Irish Republican Army which was intercepted in late 1987. However, senior Northern Ireland security chiefs believe that other shipments have been smuggled in. A senior Army official opined, 'We think it is almost certain they have the SAM-7's. I believe they are not using them at the moment because they do not have the sort of people of the calibre to use them and they are trying to do something about it.' The London Press Association article went on to say that 'A team of top provos is believed to be training in secret in one of Colonel Qadhafi's desert camps and others in isolated parts of the (Irish) Republic. The IRA may have already made an unsuccessful test firing in County Fermanagh. A helicopter pilot reported hearing a "woosh" and seeing what appeared to be a vapour trail.' 'IRA Believed to Have SAM-7 Missiles', *London Press Association* (21 Nov. 1988), reported in *Western Europe; FBIS-WEU-88-226* (Foreign Broadcast Information Service, 23 Nov. 1988), p.4.
 13. The actions of the Iranian government during the takeover of the US Embassy in November 1979 to the end of the administration of President Carter come immediately to mind. The Iranians have kept busy since that incident, opening up camps for local and international terrorists at the Imam Hossein Post, the Manzarieh Camp, the Chamran Post, the Aqdassieh Post, the Qods Post, a Shiraz location, and the Najafabadi Camp. Consult Jack Anderson and Dale Van Atta, 'Khomeini Turns Attention to Terror', *Washington Post* (25 Nov. 1988), p.E5.
 14. Two strategies immediately come to mind, based upon this scale. One is to attempt to prevent certain types of actions, for example, for openers, the 32 listed in this article. Another complementary approach would key on the categorization of governments, and hinge on attempting to work out appropriate sanctions for these patterns of behaviours.