

A. Internal Action

While the pressures exerted by a subversive movement can be seen in operation and to some extent anticipated, terrorist attacks are usually made without prior warning, and on targets chosen at will and sometimes at random. It is impossible to protect *every* bank from a terrorist raid, or *every* prominent personality from assassination or kidnapping, and no one can save the lives of innocent citizens when a bomb explodes in a crowded shopping centre. Only the terrorists themselves know when and where the next attack will be made (unless and until their organisation has been penetrated by agents of the security forces). The aims of counter-action must therefore be:

- To penetrate the terrorist organisation or in other ways secure intelligence about its plans.
- To prevent terrorism by discovering and isolating the centres of terrorist action, denying essential aids (e.g. food, shelter, money and medical treatment) and forcing the terrorists into the open.
- To eliminate the leaders, by capture and detention. Lesser operatives, when identified, may be left in circulation if they can provide leads to those at the top. Without leaders, small organisations tend to wither or lapse into internal squabbles, to the benefit of the security forces.

(i) *Coordinated planning.* The brunt of counter-action will be borne by the national police force and by the internal (security) and external intelligence services (where the latter exists). But many other government agencies will be involved. These include provincial police forces and gendarmerie, immigration control, frontier and coastal guards and the official information services. The problem is that these bodies are responsible to different ministers. In some countries—Spain and Italy, for example—the internal or counter-espionage services, as well as those operating abroad, work under the control of the Defence Ministries and not, as in some other countries, under the Interior or Home Ministries.

In any anti-terrorist campaign, it is highly desirable that there should be a single authority, responsible to one minister, or to the Prime Minister or Head of State, which has the power to impose an agreed strategy on all the agencies concerned. If this is politically or constitutionally impossible, at least there should be a common agreed strategy.

(ii) *Intelligence.* Most European countries have several intelligence-gathering services: foreign intelligence, internal security, police (special branch), armed services. Intelligence gathered by these separate organisations should be pooled and centrally assessed.

Three separate processes are involved in intelligence-gathering: (i) establishing detailed background dossiers on active and potential terrorists and those who might lend them support and compiling organisation charts to show the command structures of underground organisation; (ii) creating an efficient retrieval system so that this information can be passed on swiftly to the men in the field as they need it; and (iii) developing "strategic intelligence" into "operational intelligence" through local contacts that will make it possible to lay hands on the right man at the right time. The development of computer science has opened up almost limitless possibilities for the accumulation and rapid retrieval of file material on the greater part of the population; the problem for the authorities in a liberal democracy is to determine at what point the computerisation of information represents an intolerable intrusion on personal liberties. But there is no doubt that the centralisation of relevant information—and the facilities

for "plugging in" the men in the field—will vastly simplify the work of the security forces in confronting an urban terrorist campaign.

(iii) *The police.* The police (with the intelligence services) will inevitably find themselves thrust into the front-line. The number of police available in a given country is nearly always less significant than their preparedness to deal with political violence, which is bound to involve special training—in an intellectual as well as a technical sense. In Britain, for example, the ratio of police to the total population is higher than in the United States and some Western European countries, and yet until recently the police had received almost no conditioning for counter-terrorist operations. This was partly the legacy of their founder, Sir Robert Peel, who had promised that no "officer class" would be allowed to emerge in the British police; even today, there is a total of less than 500 graduates in a total police force of just under 100,000 in England and Wales. The British police response has also been constricted by the decentralised organisation that still prevails; it seems quite extraordinary to many outsiders that there is still no Special Branch for the country as a whole, let alone a central executive for all the regional police forces.

(iv) *Task forces.* In any anti-terrorist campaign, it is desirable (and ought to be possible) to set up a *national task force*, drawn from the agencies involved (see above) and dedicated to research, investigation and the coordination of counter-measures, for which the existing forces can be used in their respective capacities. It is vital that there should be no delay or confusion in the coordinating body's access to records of all kinds or in its demands for executive action. In addition, the task force should be able to co-opt specialists, such as psychologists, linguists, locksmiths, clergymen, political analysts, media people, etc.

Indeed, most Western European countries have already opted for the formation of task forces—that is, "fire brigade" police para-military units equipped to intervene both in serious riots and in urban guerrilla confrontations. The usefulness of a specialised counter-terrorist unit was amply demonstrated by the events in the Netherlands on 31 October 1974. The 15 hostages being held by armed criminals in Scheveningen jail were released as a result of a commando assault by a Dutch counter-terrorist squad. The Dutch force employed a variety of talents: diversionary action (involving tremendous noise, flares, smoke bombs and sirens), the use of a thermal lance to slice through a steel door in six seconds, rapid movement, skilled marksmanship, and well-processed background intelligence on the Arab terrorist who had organised the kidnap and the criminals inside the jail.

Britain has been one of the few European countries traditionally opposed to the idea of a "third force". The argument in Britain has usually revolved around the claim that an armed counter-terrorist squad would undermine the pattern of cordial relations between the neighbourhood "bobby" and the public, based (allegedly) on the long-standing tradition of an unarmed police. But it now seems clear that more than an *ad hoc* police unit (like the national anti-IRA unit set up in Britain in November 1974) is required to muster the specialist skills needed to defeat terrorism.

Under the present system, Britain is in a position where the Army would need to be brought in at the first sign of serious trouble. Of course, there is a strong argument in favour of perpetuating this system: the army combines the range of skills and the practical experience of Northern Ireland and is clearly the most competent force available to deal with terrorism inside Britain itself. For this reason, the British solution may be to second army experts to form the backbone of a new joint police/army "fire brigade" squad. Counter-terrorists units should also have on call an advisory team of psychologists who have studied the problems of negotiating with political extremists. This is already the pattern in the Netherlands and West Germany, and in many urban police departments in the United States.

(v) *Information and publicity.* Public unease in a democratic State must be allayed by proper publicity on the need for counter-measures, so that the psychological means and tactics employed by the terrorists, and their aim of sapping the government's civilian support, can be thoroughly understood. This is especially important when and if it becomes necessary to call in military aid,

which may be essential in view of the advanced weaponry (see below) available to contemporary terrorists.

The terrorist side has often used the media to great advantage. Television interviewers have been known to present terrorists in a sympathetic light and one-sided presentation of the news may damage the official case. Nothing serves the cause of the terrorists better than a glamourised "clandestine" interview with hooded men, filmed expressly for television. It is the duty of those seeking to protect the public against the gunman and the bomb-thrower to seek to enlist the cooperation of media personnel with a view to a fair presentation of the need for counter-measures in the common interest. West German and British television services provide programmes on criminal events, in which the public are invited to cooperate with the police. This has proved a successful concept, and it could be extended to include cooperation against terrorism. Terrorists should not be allowed to get away with the pretence that they are spokesmen for legitimate pressure groups.

(vi) *Psychological warfare.* The battle against terrorism (like the attempt to counter subversion) is primarily a battle for minds. There is a considerable literature providing a theoretical justification for political terrorism, shading over into direct incitement to violence in the case of the "underground" press. Far more effective, however, are the propaganda efforts to discredit the security forces in a situation like Northern Ireland, through allegations of "torture", brutality in the conduct of searches and the killing of innocent civilians.

The most effective response to this kind of propaganda attack is (i) to educate the public in the constant risks and stresses of a soldier's (or a policeman's) life in a situation of endemic violence; and (ii) to provide similar education in the techniques employed by the terrorists themselves. British newspaper exposés of the misappropriation of "commandeered" property by IRA chiefs in Northern Ireland, for example, were highly effective. So are any authenticated news items about coercive terrorism—such as the IRA's "kneecapping" of those who disobey the organisation's orders. Psychological warfare techniques always have to be chosen for the intended audience. Arguments about the immorality of violence that will be readily accepted by the bulk of (say) the British or West German public may have no effect on the recruitment pool for terrorists operating in a Catholic ghetto like the Ardoyne in Belfast or a community of migrant Arab workers in Frankfurt. At this level, the authorities will have to be more resourceful: they will need, for instance, to expose rivalries and corruption in the terrorist leadership.

(vii) *Control of explosives.* A good deal more can be done to prevent terrorists gaining access to the routine sources of explosives: supplies of nitric acid, sodium chlorate and ammonium nitrate that are simply sold over the counter or available as ingredients in common fertilisers; thefts of detonators, detonator wiring and other explosive materials from construction firms, quarries, etc. Companies entitled to stockpile explosive materials should clearly be required to guard their supplies properly. Detonators should be properly identified—perhaps through the use of radioactive isotopes in labelling—to enable the police to determine the source if they are used in a terrorist incident.

(viii) *Legal powers.* The question of how far the government is entitled to go in lifting normal legal safeguards in response to a terrorist campaign is probably the thorniest problem of all. The short answer is that terrorists should be tried in a normal way on criminal charges wherever possible. The situation may arise, however, where an entrenched terrorist movement is able to intimidate witnesses, juries and even magistrates, making a normal trial impossible. In this situation, the security forces must have the power to take known gunmen off the streets for a limited period. If emergency powers are sought, however, it should be made clear that they are temporary and will be dropped as soon as conditions permit.

There is also the question of when it is justifiable, and expedient, to ban a particular organisation. It astonished many outsiders that the IRA was not pronounced an illegal organisation in Britain until November 1974—several years after the campaign in Northern Ireland commenced. During that period, it was perfectly legal to display IRA banners and propaganda

(though not to parade in paramilitary uniform) and to raise finance for a movement at war with the British government.

There was always a very simple and compelling reason for banning the IRA in Britain: that its appearance as a legal political group on the other side of the water placed the army in Ulster in an extraordinary moral dilemma and could only help to undermine morale. But in other situations, the strong case for banning an extremist group that openly espouses armed revolution and engages in (or supports) a terrorist campaign will have to be weighed against the practical advantage of having such a group out in the open where it is easy for the security forces to keep it under surveillance. It is the old choice between punishing the crime or the conspiracy, and the choice will have to be based on what is likely to prove most effective in a particular situation.

(ix) *Penalties* for political violence are another source of unending debate. Current discussion tends to revolve around the question of capital punishment. Members of the Study Group were divided on this question. The main argument against the use of the death penalty for terrorists appear to be: (a) the judicial problems, especially in a situation where emergency legislation is in force; (b) the possibility of erroneous conviction (which also applies to ordinary criminals); (c) the prospect of terrorist retaliation and the creation of false martyrs; and (d) the risk of losing a useful future source of information—assuming that the captive can be “turned”. The two most powerful arguments in favour of the death penalty are: (a) its possible deterrent effect on younger terrorists and accessories if not on the hard-core leadership, and (b) its moral impact, as evidence that society under attack is ready to react strongly in its own defence.

Wherever possible (i.e., when they have been charged under normal criminal laws) terrorists should be treated as normal criminals in captivity. Particular care must be taken to avoid the establishment of “school for terrorism” inside jails as the number of prisoners grows.

(x) *Weaponry and technical aids*. Advanced weapons now available to terrorise include hand-held rocket-launchers, bombs equipped with anti-detection devices and similar weapons. Such weaponry cannot normally be countered by conventional police forces. That is why military assistance is sometimes needed, and is in itself a strong reason for creating a special task force. Such task forces need to match terrorist technology with devices of their own, such as radio monitoring, “bugging” devices, advanced audio and visual aids to detection; trace elements for detecting the misuse of materials; helicopters and other aircraft for spotting, surveillance and the rapid transporting of personnel to target areas; and not least, dogs trained for tracking and the discovery of explosives.

(xi) *Rehabilitation*. The work of the authorities does not end with the defeat of the terrorists. Many of them will be in jail or under detention. As far as possible, and with deliberate speed, an effort should be made to rehabilitate and reconcile them with society, especially the young. In this essential task, the social services have a major role to play.