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78. ANALYSING THE TERRORIST THREAT

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INTRODUCTION

It could be argued that there have been three phases in the last century during which particular concern has centered on the evolution of chemical and biological weapons (cbw); first, from the first world war to the end of the second; secondly, from the early fifties to the mid-eighties. In that second phase assessment of the level of risk of enemy use of chemical and biological agents depended largely on the state of east-west relations; in other words still within the military context. The third phase, and the one with which we are most concerned today has an entirely different perspective: the risk, particularly to civilian populations, of terrorist usage, 'State sponsored' or otherwise. Potential users of cbw are frequently - and probably correctly - referred to as acting within "The New Terrorism". While including 'classic' terrorist groups (of which there are at least twenty-nine listed by the United States alone), the term "New Terrorism" has wider implications, incorporating for the first time those referred to as "millennium" and 'single issue' activist organizations (such as animal rights) and individuals bent on revenge for whatever personal reason. The goal posts are perceived to have moved over the last fifteen years from inter-state conflict situations, or battlefield scenarios, in which military tactics would have been the main consideration, to ad-hoc possible use by any individual or organization with a grievance. Greatly improved communications, enhanced access to data and the relative ease of cross-border travel add to the potential for acquisition and eventual use. There have been several incidents that mark the new trend within the industrialized nations and on which government policy of containment and protection of population must be based; yet it is not only the industrialized world at risk. The psychological repercussions within society of the threat of use or actual use is a major consideration and one that has not been assisted by wild and emotive press stories, some based on fact, some partially correct and some totally fictitious. All aspects collude in making a threat assessment a difficult task to achieve.

The problem with analyzing a subject such as ours is that it often invokes more questions than it answers and highlights several factors on which one cannot rely. For example, analyzing historical data and establishing precedence of terrorist use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) will give, at best, an incomplete picture. Playing the 'numbers' game is dangerous to findings as well. For instance, what is the true definition of the term 'mass destruction'? Nuclear weapons would certainly be categorized in that manner. It is arguable whether the same can be said for chemical weapons, but it is somewhat more realistic to use the term in relation to biological weapons. In the public perception, all have been confounded into the one alarming WMD title. The Aum Shinrikyo incident in Tokyo in which twelve people were killed and up to a thousand needed hospital care, had a disproportionate psychological affect across the globe in comparison to terrorist bomb outrages that have slain ten times as many.

What, then, is "New Terrorism"? In analyzing the level of threat, one has to start by posing several crucial questions such as "do such groups or individuals have the skill to complete their aim"? "Who are these groups and individuals", "how does one categorize them" and crucially "what is their motivation"? Why would any group, organization or individual opt for use of chemical or biological weaponry in preference to any other weapon?

Answers to such questions are key to "new terrorist" motivation and key to the assessment of risk level.

If analysis of the "new terrorism" is one side of the coin, the other is just as daunting. Who or what would be targeted by "new terrorism"? Industry, in which pharmaceuticals and petrochemicals are high profile, is an obvious target; yet, paradoxically, there has been little evidence to date of threat becoming reality in that sector although industry is vulnerable due to its manufacture of an extensive range of every-day products, many of which are precursors to most chemical weapons. Food contamination is the one area in which there is evidence of continuity of criminal/terrorist interest, acquisition and use.

Many take the view that the world has entered into a Century of Biology in which biotechnology will see much development and change, particularly within the bio-molecular engineering range, genetic engineering etc. Evolution of the threat of the future means we must look at the positive and negative threat, not just focus on what might catch the news headlines. Technology change is but one part of the conundrum in threat assessment, the other includes ethnic, religious, social and political issues.

METHOD

Who, what, where and when are naturally the fundamental aspects to be considered. Included in each one, however, has to be regard for other aspects such as (a) are the potential users capable of achieving their aims? (b) are there any examples on which to draw? (c) an overview of the role of emotive press stories and how this interacts in administrative decisions and (d) the worrying rise in hoax incidents.

WHO/WHAT/WHEN/HOW.

Every nation has its own perception of what constitutes a terrorist threat, and their own perception as to which groups are categorized as such. There is a large consensus of opinion nonetheless. In the United States for instance, the list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations compiled by the Office of Counter-terrorism in October 1999 includes the Spanish ETA, Japanese Red Army, the PKK and Tamil Tigers. Of this sample of four groups only one, the Tamil Tigers, is known to have used toxic chemicals to achieve a tactical success against the Sri Lankan Armed Forces in June 1990. The official list contains several Islamic fundamentalist groups, such as Hamas and Hizballah, all of which are known to either have direct links to Osama Bin Laden or countries known to have sponsored state terrorism yet, unlike the Tamil Tigers proof that the fundamentalist groups have utilized WMD is not evident. So what groups or individuals are known to have used WMD?

(a) Have used or who had potential to do so.

- Aum Shinrikyo
- The Rajneeshees
- The Covenant, the sword and the arm of the Lord
- Minnesota Patriots

The Rajneeshees - so named after its Indian leader Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, is a religious cult that developed widely in Europe - particularly in the United Kingdom and in the United States. In September 1984, the largest settlement based in Oregon, opted to use biological agents against the inhabitants of the nearest town with whom they were in litigation. The agent used was Salmonella. The targets were twelve restaurants in the town; the method of application was by spray of the bacteria into the restaurants' salad bars. The action, which took place in two separate phases throughout the month was conducted by

fourteen specially selected Rajneeshees, including Ma Puja, a Filipino, who had perfected the culture. In total 751 people were incapacitated, and most required some hospitalization. The Rajneeshees had sought large scale incapacitation.

The Covenant, the sword and the arm of the Lord - a 'survivalist religious' group - originally intended to poison water supplies in major US cities in the mid-eighties, using contents of a drum of potassium cyanide they possessed. Their motivation was to "hasten the return of the Messiah by 'carrying out God's judgments' against sinners". The aim was to achieve mass casualties.

Aum Shinrikyo - a Japanese apocalyptic religious sect, perhaps the best known group resorting to the use of WMD. The cult has experience in both biological and chemical agents. Its first product was botulinum toxin in 1990. By 1995, Japanese authorities believe the cult had produced anthrax as well and was looking at the possibility of manufacturing Q fever. Under the guise of assisting the victims of Ebola, a group from the cult visited Zaire in 1992 in an attempt to obtain the virus for culture in Japan. By 1993 the cult was producing small batches of nerve agents sarin, tabun, soman and VX. There was an intention to produce hydrogen cyanide, phosgene and mustard gas although these latter do not appear to have materialized. According to Japanese police, the cult produced VX on four occasions and made use of it during at least three assassination attempts. By the time of the cult's arrest and subsequent police investigations 'on site', installations were found to have been perfected that would have enabled the production and storage of up to 70 tons of sarin alone, at a daily pdn rate of 2 tons. The group had obtained its production facilities and assembled them, from open sources, from Teflon tubes to coil-method heat exchangers. The decision to place 600 gm.bags of sarin in several places within Tokyo's subway system in March 1995 had been motivated by the cult's belief that Armageddon was about to arrive with the imminent descent upon their location by police. Twelve people were killed in the incident and about one thousand affected to varying degrees.

Note: Although the above examples represent religiously motivated cults, their aims were different. The Rajneeshees for instance wanted to achieve an objective; Aum Shinrikyo sought the realization of an apocalyptic prophecy.

The Minnesota Patriots Council (MPC) - an anti-US government tax-resistant activist group which, in the mid 1990's had acquired ricin, the deadly protein toxin derived from castor beans. The materials - and instructions on formulation - had been obtained by open source, from a right-wing publication. The ricin, some 200 times more potent than cyanide, had been intended for individual assassinations - in this case against an Inland Revenue officer. Four leading members of the group were arrested before their intention could be put into operation, and they were sentenced under the Violation of biological Weapons Anti-Terrorism act.

(b) Are rumoured to possess or have the potential

The Weather Underground - a radical left-wing group operating during the 1970s. The group was widely (internationally) said to have acquired incapacitating agents from the US Army's defense research center at Fort Detrick, Maryland. The persistence of the rumours have lead to the erroneous acceptance of the theory as fact. The group's history was one of attack, including with bombs, against federal buildings.

R.I.S.E. - remains obscure on several aspects. Its title is probably derived from Reconstruction, Society and Extermination and based on the ideology of its originator Allen Scwandner that mankind is destroying itself and the planet the remedy for which was elimination of mankind excepting for a chosen few. Although some have claimed he and his followers were right-wing nazis, the most likely orientation is that of left-wing eco-terrorist.

For a 'cult' that is relatively unknown, R.I.S.E. had a remarkable propensity to obtain pathogens. Via a well-educated co-cultist, R.I.S.E. sought eight microbial cultures but ended up with possessing five - *Salmonella typhi* (typhoid fever), *Neisseria meningitidis* (bacterial meningitis), *Clostridium botulinum* (botulinum toxin), *Corynebacterium diphtheriae* (diphtheria) and *Shigella sonnei* (dysentery). The vehicles for dissemination were to have been by aerosol and contamination of water and food supplies. R.I.S.E. was raided by police and subsequently folded but the question remains (a) could they have achieved their aims and (b) how close were they to doing so? To both points the answer is negative. What remains alarming with the R.I.S.E. saga is the nature of and amount of pathogens they were able to obtain.

The Baader-Meinhof Gang (Germany). An extreme left-wing German group operating in 1970/1 throughout Europe, it was widely believed that they had obtained mustard gas as a result of a raid on an US ammunition dump. Regarded as "New Left" and manned mostly by students, the Gang was otherwise known as the Rote Armee Faktion (Red Army Faction, or RAF). The range of its activities and willingness to resort to criminal activities, including physical attacks, led to its prominence along with other mainstream terrorist groups of the time, including the IRA, PLO, ETA etc. Yet the rumour that mass-casualties were the order of the day via water contamination for example, was eventually discounted as just that, rumour. The habitual targets for the group, individual assassinations and attacks on state property and personnel were not seen to have changed. This conclusion, doubtless correct, did not halt the rise in public concern during extensive press coverage.

Note: Of the three examples above, only one had the potential even though this was limited. The lessons are that (a) a group or individual can obtain the constituents and (b) the owners of such potential would find themselves severely restricted in effective use by lack of knowledge of some part of the programme. The other two examples were unfounded rumour that nonetheless had an emotive psychological impact on society.

(c) **Individuals**

Individuals with a personal grievance have been known to infect foodstuffs. For instance; a doctor in England injected atropine into bottles of tonic water in a supermarket is a case in point. The killing of Georgi Markov in London with a ricin pellet embedded into the tip of an umbrella is arguably another although this involved state sponsored assassination. Most recent is the case of Larry Wayne Harris who was arrested in February 1998 while carrying what he claimed to be enough anthrax spores to wipe out Las Vegas. (It was found to be harmless vaccine strain). Harris, a member of the neo-Nazi organisation "Aryan Nations" in Idaho, had obtained, through subterfuge, several vials of *Yersinia pestis* (bubonic plague culture) which he stored along with explosives in his home. None of his 'equipment' was used, yet his ability to obtain it has to be cause for ongoing concern.

CONCLUSION

"The New terrorism" is already in existence and works in several directions for religious and political/social reasons but mainly with one target: the civilian population. In many instances the aim is to exert either political or economic pressure on authorities or both. State bodies responsible for turning threat assessments into programme parameters that would be effective, have still some way to go, not least due to the fact that there has been little incorporation of the concerns of biotechnology and pharmaceutical industries in their deliberations. The threat, stripped of rumour and persistently incorrect and emotive press items on the issue, remains low where chemical weapons are concerned and would not in any event constitute a "mass" killing scenario. There is, however, a growing risk on the biological

front. Police, ambulance - first-call response teams - local, regional and national authorities have a hard task still ahead of them. The upside is that industrialized nations have acknowledged the need to reassess where we are and what the risk is. The bottom line has to be "who is likely to want to resort to such methods and what the likelihood of them succeeding would be". It is hoped that the indications given today will have helped in an understanding of the assessment.

REFERENCES

Several points have been taken from two excellent studies on risk factors. These are "Toxic Terror" - Assessing Terrorist Use of Chemical and Biological Weapons, edited by Jonathan Tucker, ISBN 0-262-70071-9 and "Hype or Reality?" The New Terrorism and Mass Casualty Attacks, edited by Brad Roberts, published by the CB Arms Control Institute, Alexandria, Virginia, 2000. Other readings recommended include: "Measures for controlling the threat from biological weapons" published by The Royal Society (UK), July 2000 and "Contagion and Conflict - Health as a Global Security Challenge" - a Report of the CB Arms Control Institute, published by CSIS, January 2000.