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# Terrorism: Its Evolving Nature

By

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[The following is a reprint of a statement by Ambassador Bremer presented in Congressional testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee in Washington, D.C., on February 9, 1989. The statement has been published as *Current Policy No. 1151* by the Bureau of Public Affairs, U.S. Department of State.]

The callous destruction of Pan Am Flight 103 on December 21, 1988, was a terrible international tragedy. The victims were not only the passengers and crew on the plane and the villagers in Lockerbie [Scotland], but also their relatives, friends, and all those who were touched by this horrible act. We deeply regret the loss families and friends of those on Pan Am 103 have suffered, and we share their anguish. And we share the pain of the people of Lockerbie who also lost friends and relatives.

We are determined to do everything in our power to see that this cowardly, senseless act will not go unpunished. We are committed to bringing the perpetrators to justice. Working with the British and other governments, we will follow every lead until we have answers. It may take time—there are not always quick answers in these cases—but I am confident that by using all of our resources, we will succeed in locating the murderers. Then we will exert all efforts to bring them to justice.

Right now investigators from the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] are in Lockerbie, in London, in Frankfurt, and elsewhere working closely with their counterparts. We have established a task force within the intelligence community to mobilize our assets worldwide to gather information on potential suspects. We have approached dozens of other governments through intelligence and diplomatic channels for their assistance.

Because the case is under investigation, and hopefully will eventually lead to trial, I am sure you will understand that I am not able to discuss the details of the investigation itself. However, I am optimistic that in the end, we will succeed.

In your February 3 letter of invitation to appear before the committee, you asked me to address a variety of topics. Some of these, including the adequacy of the Foreign Airport Security Act, an overall evaluation of the required foreign airport security assessments, and several others can be addressed more authoritatively by my colleagues from the FAA [Federal Aviation Administration]. Consequently, I defer to them on these matters.

However, three of the topics raised in your letter are directly relevant to my area of responsibility, and I would like to respond to them. They include:

- An assessment of the current international terrorism threat to U.S. interests and civilians,
- An overview and status of the U.S. Government's counterterrorism policy, and
- The extent of international cooperation with the U.S. Government on practical antiterrorism measures.

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## THE TERRORIST THREAT

Let us begin with the threat which terrorism poses to U.S. interests today.

Our preliminary analysis of the data for 1988 indicates that there were almost 900 international terrorist incidents last year, a new record. Terrorism clearly remains a major international problem.

The international nature of the terrorist threat is poignantly highlighted by the passenger list from Pan Am 103. Citizens of almost 20 nations died as a result of this single tragic event. Overall, international terrorism claimed the lives of almost 400 people last year.

In dealing with international terrorism, we must—and do—constantly evaluate the nature of the threat, which changes markedly over time. As we take steps to reduce our vulnerability to terrorist attack, terrorists continue to find new “weak links” in the security chain which they exploit. There are no quick fixes in this business.

For example, as the committee is aware, the international aviation community has made considerable progress in making it more difficult for hijackers to introduce weapons into the cabin of an aircraft. The tightened security and inspection procedures envisioned by the Foreign Airport Security Act of 1985, which your committee helped initiate, played a useful role in this security effort. As a result, there has been a significant drop in the number of hijackings. In 1986 and 1987, there was a total of three hijackings worldwide.

But while hijackings are down, aircraft sabotage is up. In 1986 and 1987, there were six explosions aboard aircraft resulting in 135 deaths. For the first time, we have had more incidents of sabotage than hijacking. And now we must add Pan Am 103 to this tragic toll.

New technology makes an impact on the counterterrorism front. In some instances, technical advances like plastic explosives help terrorists. On the other hand, our counterterrorism efforts are strengthened by the availability of new technology, such as the thermal neutron analyzer machines, to detect such explosives. The evolution of technology will go forward. So we must continue to anticipate how terrorists might try to turn technology to their advantage.

Our basic goal is constant. We seek to deter and prevent terrorist attacks. In the event of a terrorist incident, we seek the apprehension, prosecution, and punishment of those responsible. Our government has developed a counterterrorist policy to deal with the broad worldwide terrorist threat and its evolving nature.

## OVERVIEW OF U.S. COUNTERTERRORISM POLICY

American counterterrorist policy stands on three solid pillars.

*First*, we will not accede to terrorist demands. We will not pay ransom, pardon convicted terrorists, or pressure other countries to give in to terrorist demands. In other words, we will make no deals. But we will talk to anyone authoritative—anywhere, anytime—about the welfare and unconditional release of our hostages.

*Second*, we have taken the lead in pressuring states which support terrorist groups and use terrorism as part of their foreign policy. We have shown these states that they will be penalized for supporting terrorism. The United States will not tolerate their aiding and abetting terrorist groups by supplying them with weapons, money, passports, training bases, and safehouses.

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*Third*, we are imposing the rule of law on terrorists for their criminal actions. Good police work is catching terrorists, and they are being brought to trial. Since 1986, the United States has had a law which enables our law enforcement agencies to better combat terrorism overseas. Popularly called a "long arm" statute, the law makes it a federal crime to kill, injure, threaten, detain, or seize an American citizen anywhere in the world in order to compel a third person or government to accede to a terrorist's demands.

## U.S. POLICY: HOW IS IT WORKING?

So we have a clear and comprehensive counterterrorist policy. How is it working?

Let us look first at the "no concessions" element of our policy. Obviously, this element of our policy was damaged by the Iran-*contra* affair. However, since then, we have made crystal clear our government's steadfast commitment to the "no deals" principle. No country, no group should believe there is gain in trying to blackmail the United States.

Based on my own meetings with counterterrorism officials and experts from other countries and in this country, I believe we have largely recovered the credibility lost by the Iran-*contra* affair. The international counterterrorism community understands our position, and there is strong bipartisan support here for our policy of firmness in dealing with terrorists. I hope and believe that the new Administration will continue to benefit from this high level of support by the American people.

We have enjoyed an important measure of success on the second ingredient of our policy—pressuring states which support terrorism. As a result, some of the more notorious state supporters of terrorism have attempted—publically at least—to distance themselves from terrorism.

Our 1986 air strike on Libya's terrorist camp was the watershed event in the world's fight against terrorist-supporting states. European nations followed our lead against Libya by imposing political, economic, and security measures against the Qadhafi regime. European Community members expelled more than 100 Libyan "diplomats" and restricted the movements of other Libyan "diplomatic" and "consular" personnel. These moves severely damaged Libya's European network dedicated to supporting international terrorism.

Qadhafi learned that his support for international terrorism would not be cost free, and he changed his behavior which, after all, was the objective of our attack. Libya's involvement in terrorism declined from 19 incidents in 1986 to 6 in 1987, and another 6 in 1988.

However, we must remain particularly vigilant regarding Qadhafi. There is reason to believe that Libya continues support for terrorism, albeit in a more subtle, less flagrant fashion. Moreover, Libya's continued work on a chemical weapons production facility emphasizes the need for extremely careful monitoring of Qadhafi's actions.

Syria, another long-time supporter of terrorism, also felt the pressure of our counterterrorism strategy. In late 1986, British and West German courts established Syrian complicity in terrorist attacks in London and West Berlin. Together with Great Britain, the United States joined an international campaign employing diplomatic, political, and economic sanctions to convince Syria to reduce its link to terrorist groups.

These efforts worked. In 1985, Syria was implicated in 34 terrorist incidents, but in 1986 only 6. In 1987, a year after our pressures, we detected Syria's hand in only one incident and in none in 1988. Moreover, Syria expelled the violent Abu Nidal Organization from Damascus in June 1987—a major victory for our counterterrorist policies.

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These efforts may not force these nations to cease entirely their support for terrorist groups. Indeed, both Libya and Syria continue to provide such support. But a concerted, vigorous Western strategy does make them move more cautiously and become more circumspect.

The third and final element of our counterterrorism policy—using the rule of law against terrorists and encouraging others to do the same—is maturing into a potent weapon for two basic reasons. First, there has been a significant change in international attitudes toward terrorists. Second, governments have decided to provide law enforcement agencies the resources necessary to deter terrorism.

Not long ago, many usually responsible countries granted terrorists dispensation for their crimes. Ironically, terrorists were perceived as victims of those vague forces called “oppression” and “imperialism”—victims, or worse, romantic adventurers whose behavior should be indulged.

No longer is this true. Terrorists began to lose this international indulgence as they widened their circle of targets in the late 1970s. In some instances, they even attacked their sympathizers and supporters. The shock of such actions turned indulgence to revulsion.

And as popular disgust mounted, politicians finally insisted on action to counter the terrorists. Law enforcement agencies were given the resources to do their jobs. National police departments now have the surveillance gear, the communications equipment, and the money for overtime to gather intelligence and to track and arrest terrorists. As a result, more and more terrorists are being brought to trial and convicted. For example:

- On November 3, 1988, a Maltese court sentenced the sole surviving terrorist in the November 1985 hijacking of an Egyptian airliner to 25 years imprisonment—the maximum sentence under Maltese law. The surviving hijacker belonged to the Abu Nidal Organization.

- In July 1988, a Pakistan court convicted five terrorists for an Abu Nidal Organization attack against a Pan Am airliner in Karachi in September 1986.

- A French court convicted, *in absentia*, on October 29, 1988, the notorious Fatah terrorist, Colonel Hawari, to 10 years—the maximum allowed under French law—for complicity to transport arms, ammunition, and explosives, and for criminal associations.

- A West German court is currently trying Muhammad Hamadei, a Lebanese terrorist implicated in the 1985 TWA hijacking which resulted in the murder of an innocent American seaman, Robert Stethem. [Editor's note. On 17 May 1989, the West German court found Hamadei guilty of murder and air piracy and sentenced him to life imprisonment, the maximum allowed under German law.]

- Here in Washington D.C., Fawaz Younis, a Lebanese terrorist will soon go on trial for holding American citizens hostage when he led the 1985 hijacking of a Royal Jordanian Airlines flight.

- In Greece, authorities will soon decide on Muhammad Rashid's extradition to this country where he is wanted for planting a bomb on a Pan Am airliner in 1982. His extradition to the United States would be an important indication of Greece's adherence to its stated policy of combating terrorism.

In short, the United States has a counterterrorism policy in place and it works. However, it is obvious that we cannot succeed alone. Many of the essential ingredients in combating terrorism—gathering intelligence information, monitoring the movements of suspected terrorists, intercepting and apprehending terrorists—require effective international cooperation.

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## INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN COUNTERTERRORISM

As terrorists expand their activities, and as international repugnance to terrorist acts intensifies, nations increasingly regard terrorism as a collective threat and a common problem. The desire to promote international cooperation, already strong, was particularly evident in the aftermath of the attack on Pan Am 103.

International condemnation of the sabotage of Pan Am 103 was swift and emphatic. Many individual nations condemned the attack. The Secretary General of the United Nations issued a statement in late December 1988 expressing "outrage" at the attack. This statement was echoed by the President of the Security Council, speaking on behalf of the council, who condemned the attack and called on all states to assist in the apprehension and prosecution of those responsible. Similarly, the 12 members of the European Community released a joint statement deploring the sabotage of Pan Am 103.

The sabotage of Pan Am 103 has emphasized the need for prompt action to strengthen future aviation security measures. The FAA immediately issued orders for increased security measures on American carriers to deal with the new situations. But we cannot solve the problem alone. It is clear that we need to encourage the adoption of more stringent security measures throughout the aviation community.

## IMPROVING AVIATION SECURITY

To pursue this work, the international community is turning to the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), an agency of the UN system based in Montreal [Canada]. ICAO is the acknowledged body responsible for setting standards in the field of civil aviation and is, therefore, the appropriate forum for international follow-up to Pan Am 103.

On January 24, the United Kingdom and the United States jointly announced that, in response to the destruction of Pan Am 103, they were requesting a special session of the ICAO council to pursue ways "to improve international aviation security procedures." On January 30, the ICAO council decided to hold such a special session on February 15-16, 1989, to discuss ways to counter the growing trend of sabotage against civil aviation. A number of ICAO members—including the United States, the United Kingdom, the Federal Republic of Germany, Australia, and Switzerland—will be represented by their ministers of transportation at this meeting.

We expect representatives at this special ministerial-level council meeting to begin by reviewing briefly the existing aviation security measures. Aviation standards, as defined and adopted by ICAO members, are contained in Annex 17 to the Chicago Convention (which established ICAO in 1944).

Over the years, a great deal of important work has been done to improve the measures in Annex 17 which should not be overlooked. For example, following the June 1985 hijacking of TWA 847, Annex 17 was exhaustively reviewed. In December 1985, Annex 17 was amended to include a number of provisions intended to prevent the use of weapons or dangerous devices aimed at causing bodily harm and damage to property aboard aircraft.

In 1986, ICAO's Unlawful Interference Committee reviewed ICAO's security standards to ensure that they were updated promptly as necessary. This committee, with support from the ICAO Secretariat, identified four areas that warranted priority attention as particularly vulnerable to placement of explosive devices. These include ramp security, weapons detection, cargo/mail/small parcel handling, and courier service.

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Work on aviation security standards has continued in ICAO's Aviation Security Panel, which reports to the Unlawful Interference Committee. This panel has identified several priorities for work in ICAO. These include security controls to detect devices which might be carried by unsuspecting parties unwittingly acting as couriers for terrorists, and passenger management methods to ensure that passengers leave nothing behind on an aircraft.

Much of this work will continue and intensify as ICAO defines new approaches to security. To facilitate this work, we hope that the February 15-16 ministerial council session will endorse a plan of work that establishes priorities for technical work in ICAO. The priorities include:

- Detection of sabotage devices, especially explosives,
- Comprehensive screening of checked baggage,
- Comprehensive screening of passengers and hand baggage,
- Controlling access to aircraft by ground personnel, and
- Establishing a new ICAO service available to members at their request to assess security at individual airports and to recommend improvements as necessary.

We also expect the ministerial council will review the status of security-related training provided by ICAO.

Finally, we expect the ICAO ministerial council will discuss the need for increased attention to "tagging" plastic explosives for detection. Relatively little technical work has been pursued to date in this area. However, the tragedy of Pan Am 103 emphasizes both the urgency and importance of such work.

The ICAO council meeting next week will bring together some of the world's foremost authorities in aviation security. Their meeting underscores the commitment of the international community to continue the worldwide fight against terrorism. The combination of this political will and technical expertise lends considerable momentum to the important work in ICAO on aviation security, which has and will continue to make significant progress.

## **HANDLING TERRORIST THREATS**

I know a number of members are interested in our government's policy on handling terrorist threats.

Each week, we receive literally dozens of threats—most of them directed at American officials abroad. We urgently and carefully analyze them. If a threat is deemed credible, we take immediate steps to counter the threat by getting the information into the hands of people who can take steps to counter the threat. For example, in the case of a threat to an airline, we get that information into the hands of airport security officials responsible for aviation security. This is the purpose of the FAA security alert bulletins sent to airline corporate security officials and airport security officials.

We do not routinely make terrorist threats public. To do so would encourage "copycat" terrorist threats which could initially cause panic and disrupt air services and, in the end, cause indifference to the alerts themselves. As it is, we already receive an average of three threats to American airports or airlines each day.

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Nor is it our policy to selectively alert people to terrorist threats. If we have a credible and specific terrorist threat to an airline which cannot be countered effectively on the spot, then our policy is to recommend that the airline cancel the flight. Otherwise, we would issue a public travel advisory to the American traveling public. It is not our policy to alert government officials and not the general public to such a threat. There is, and can be, no double standard.

While priority attention will continue on aviation security, we cannot overlook work in other vital areas. As the *Achille Lauro* tragedy demonstrates all too clearly, passenger ships are also vulnerable to terrorism, including sabotage. The International Maritime Organization (IMO) already has taken a number of steps to enhance maritime security. IMO security measures were analyzed in detail at the October 1988 meeting of the IMO Maritime Safety Committee, which agreed to review these measures annually. During 1989, the IMP will sponsor at least two regional security seminars—one in the Caribbean and one in the Mediterranean. These seminars will offer training and assistance in states' application of IMO security measures. We fully support this work in IMO and will participate in these seminars.

Mr. Chairman, my remarks thus far have been addressed to the topics you identified in your letter of invitation as of particular interest to the committee. Permit me, however, to include a reference to an indispensable component of our counterterrorism effort, namely our antiterrorist assistance program (ATA), a program this committee was instrumental in establishing.

### **ANTITERRORIST ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

Since its inception in 1984, ATA has trained over 650 students from 28 nations in advanced civil aviation security or airport police management. Both courses are offered at the Transportation Safety Institute—an FAA facility in Oklahoma City—and include a mixture of classroom instruction supplemented by on-the-scene instruction at major U.S. airports.

Countering the existing threats to international civil aviation requires an effective aviation security program which includes well-trained staff supplemented by a variety of technical aids. Any such system has built-in redundancy and recognizes that the most critical element in aviation security is the well-motivated employee who takes his or her duties seriously. We are confident that our basic ATA teaching program is sound and contributes to the building of such a system. It teaches the interdependence and supplemental effects of people, dogs, and exiting electronic technology such as x-rays. We will incorporate into our training as they emerge, the "lessons learned" from the Pan Am 103 bombing.

Bomb-detector dogs already hold a critical role in aviation security as part of a comprehensive effort to detect plastic explosives. There are limits, however, to what can be done with sniffer dogs. Dogs are capable of detecting plastic explosives, but they present logistical problems. At large airports such as those in the United States and Europe, dogs provide only part of the solution. Since the ATA program generally works with less developed nations, which often have small international airports, some of the problems presented by using detector dogs at major international airports may pose fewer difficulties at the smaller airports.

We are working to broaden the scope of our aviation security training, such as that offered through the ATA program. During FY 1988, the United States worked with the French to improve aviation security in West Africa, with the Canadians to do the same at Manila International, and with the British in broad-based counterterrorism for Pakistan. In cooperation with South Korea, we organized a conference of Pacific rim nations to establish enhanced aviation security standards before and during last year's Summer Olympic period.

The ATA program, with the range of training that it can offer, is a vital element in the U.S. response to the threat posed by international terrorism. For FY 1990, the President is seeking



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\$10.017 million to support ATA training. These funds will finance training for some 1,500 recipients from 25 nations and provide a modest amount of training-related equipment.

The ATA program also works with the FAA's assessment of airports as provided under the Foreign Airport Security Act. The Department of State and the FAA cooperate closely in this FAA airport assessment program. Embassy officials are routinely involved in scheduling these assessments and facilitating the work of the FAA security officials during their visit. When deficiencies are identified in an airport's security program by the FAA officials, as they were in Caracas [Venezuela] in the summer of 1988, the State Department and the FAA work together to develop an effective assistance program. The State Department, through its antiterrorism assistance program, generally offers training in advanced civil aviation security or airport police management to help correct such deficiencies. The FAA, under its own authorities, provides related assistance. In the case of Caracas, the problems identified were corrected to the FAA's satisfaction before the 90-day notice period expired.

## RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

In addition to training under the ATA program, we are continuing our work in research and development (R&D). One priority is to identify and develop new technology to apply to the process of examining baggage so that materials such as plastic explosives can be more consistently detected. While the first models are only now in production, the thermal neutron analyzer developed for the FAA offers real promise as a means of ensuring that plastic explosives cannot evade detection.

On behalf of the U.S. Government, the State Department coordinates and funds a national counterterrorism research and development program. In FY 1990, we will be seeking \$6 million to support this interagency program. Included in the R&D program are projects to develop new forms of less expensive and more widely applicable detectors to identify plastic explosives or chemical/biological agents in closed containers. I hope that members of this committee will continue to support this program.

Another example of R&D efforts at the State Department is the Bureau of Diplomatic Security's funding for the development of a high-technology "sniffer" to detect nitrogen vapors, such as those emitted by explosives in automobiles, packages, luggage, or on persons. The first operating models of this equipment, developed under contract with Thermedics, Inc., totaling nearly \$7 million, will be delivered to the State Department this summer. This equipment will be applied as part of our program to protect high-threat posts and to ensure the security of the Secretary as he travels. This equipment offers promise as the possible basis for other prototypes which would be applicable for use in checking airline passengers, their luggage, and carry-on items.

Terrorism remains a major international problem. While we continue to make progress in countering terrorism in some areas, new dimensions to this problem emerge with dismaying frequency. There is no single magic solution to this international scourge. Yet our political will is strong, our available resources are carefully used, and our technical expertise is among the best in the world. We remain deeply committed to our concerted effort to combat terrorism, as are the members of the committee. We greatly appreciate your support which is essential if we are to prevail.