

Why Do Terrorists Stop?

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Over the past forty years, several terrorist groups have emerged, changed policies, and, in many cases, disappeared. Some were primarily suppressed by police and intelligence work, others simply dissolved, and still others persist, but have renounced violence or have ceased to be active. Under what circumstances do terrorists and their organizations bring terror campaigns to an end? What combination of factors brings this about? The conference „Why Do Terrorists Stop?“ brought together specialists on different terrorist groups to look at the data from failed, disbanded, suppressed, and suspended terrorist campaigns from the 1960s through 2006 to analyze causes of defeat and decline in search of lessons that would be useful in fighting currently active terrorists and terrorist organizations.

The original idea for this conference came from Leena Malkki and Beatrice de Graaf, whose research poses the question, „Why do terrorists stop?“ After meeting and discussing the idea with de Graaf, Timothy Naftali submitted a proposal for a two-year project that supported the conference participants in conducting research on different terrorist groups with funding from the Smith Richardson Foundation. At this conference — funded by the GHI and organized by Carola Dietze and Christof Mauch, with the assistance of Alia Ayub — the researchers met to share and compare their results.

After words of welcome from the director of the GHI, Hartmut Berghoff, as well as from Christof Mauch and Timothy Naftali, the conference opened with a keynote lecture by STEFAN AUST (Hamburg). Aust discussed the Red Army Faction and its history based on his intimate knowledge of the sources and his personal acquaintance with some of its members. In his comment, Bruce Hoffman

systematically noted similarities between the German left-wing terrorism of the 1970s and current Islamic terrorist groups, especially Al Qaida. In this way, he proposed fundamental general characteristics of modern terrorist groups.

The first conference panel dealt with revolutionary terrorism. BEATRICE DE GRAAF (Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht) opened the panel with a presentation on the Italian Red Brigades. In her paper, de Graaf discussed positive and negative lessons from counterterrorist experiences in Italy. On the negative side, she demonstrated that neither the arrest, prosecution, conviction, and incarceration of leaders nor the implementation of preventive counterterrorism laws and police measures had the intended results. Instead, even more violent leaders followed, and the arrested leaders came to be seen as martyrs, invoking public sympathy. This, in turn, created a new pool of recruits. Trials and severe sentences failed to frighten off future terrorists. Rather, the left-leaning public perceived these measures as a form of political repression directed against the left as a whole. The new preventive laws thus contributed to the polarization of society, while the use of *agent provocateurs* discredited the law enforcement agencies. Turning to the positive lessons to be learned from the Italian example, de Graaf pointed to the importance of striving to alienate terrorists from their rearguard. She also underscored the value of finding strategies to win legitimization and support for counterterrorist measures in society.

LEENA MALKKI reported on her research on the Rode Jeugd group in the Netherlands. The Rode Jeugd was a group of young workers that came into being around the same time as the Red Army Faction in Germany and the Weathermen in the United States. However, it never developed into a full-fledged urban guerilla group. Malkki explained this as a consequence, on the one hand, of the increasingly efficient counterterrorist measures of the Dutch authorities, and, on the other hand, of the organization's failure to change its internal structure when it changed from protest to resistance. Moreover, the liberal political climate in the Netherlands played a crucial role. The Rode Jeugd was never demonized, and

the Dutch authorities soon learned to avoid unnecessary provocations. Thus, members' paths back into society were never closed. The fact that no one was killed, either by the Rode Jeugd or by the law enforcement authorities, prevented the conflict from escalating beyond the point of no return.

ASSAF MOGHADAM (US Military Academy, West Point) spoke on the three generations of the Red Army Faction and its dissolution. The first generation declined, Moghadam argued, mainly because of the massive counterterrorism efforts conducted by German law enforcement agencies, which resulted in a series of arrests and a number of deaths in shootouts with the police. The three people who left the group — Beate Sturm, Ulrich Scholze, and Peter Homann — quit because of internal disagreements and conflicts or because they were tired of life in the underground. Similar to the first generation's decline, some members of the second generation were arrested as a result of German investigations. However, ten members of the RAF voluntarily opted to turn away from terrorism. Ideological reasons, tactical disagreements, moral considerations, rising doubts about the sense and future of armed struggle in Germany, interpersonal conflicts, and/or the strain of life in the underground prompted them to leave. This willingness to step out was made possible by the fact that they were offered a refuge in East Germany. Of the third generation, only a few members were apprehended and sentenced, while two were killed. The rest are still unknown. In 1998, members of this third generation declared that the „Project RAF“ had now ended. Moghadam attributes the dissolution of the group mainly to internal splits, the Kinkel Initiative, and the collapse of communist regimes, which forced most left-wing revolutionaries to acknowledge that the struggle against imperialism had suffered a tremendous setback.

In the second panel on Palestinian terrorist groups, NASRA HASSAN (UN, Vienna) presented findings from interviews she conducted with members of the Black September Organization. According to her interviewees, the Palestinian organization Fatah created the Black September Organization for strategic reasons. It then dissolved its terrorist branch

when its aim had been achieved. Moreover, there was considerable pressure from the USSR and other nations in the Warsaw Pact to end the use of terrorist methods. Therefore, a change of political strategies from violence to diplomacy seemed necessary. To dissolve the Black September Organization, Fatah used a „domestication strategy“: Fatah members met the members of the Black September Organization in small groups and „married them off,“ thus reintegrating them into society, while at the same time binding them to Fatah.

YORAM SCHWEITZER (Institute for National Security Studies, Tel Aviv) presented his research on the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) organization and its factions. Until the rise of Al Qaida and the attacks of September 11, this group was regarded by many as the prime example of international terrorism. In spite of its successes, the PFLP chose to curtail its international operations — just like the Black September Organization — for political reasons. When the PFLP, as a member of the PLO, concluded that its international terrorism had exhausted most of its advantages and that it might do the Palestinian cause more harm than good, it decided to abandon this strategy. However, in the case of the PFLP, this dissolution was not completely successful. Several factions emerged over time that continued to focus on international terrorism as their sole *modus operandi*. These factions relied exclusively on international terrorism. Their professionalism and specialization rendered them highly successful in the short term. However, their organizational structure led to certain weak points that contributed to these groups' decline. For example, they needed the support of states, which made them vulnerable to political change; their leaders were central to their organization, and they had limited cadres of high-quality operatives, so they were vulnerable to „focused targeting.“ Taking these weak points into account, Schweitzer argued, might help in devising counterterrorism strategies.

The third panel investigated ethnonationalist terrorism. ROGELIO ALONSO (Universidad Rey Carlos, Madrid) presented a paper on the Basque ETA, one of Western Europe's most enduring terrorist organizations, in which he argued that the question

is not so much why individual members stopped, but why ETA has not followed the same path as other disbanded terrorist groups that appeared at the same time in the European context. In 1982, the transition to democracy did lead a faction of ETA (the ETA político-militar, or ETA-pm) to renounce violence. The Spanish government, in return, rewarded ETA members who chose this path with social reinsertion measures that enabled them to start a new life: From the early 1980s to 1995, a total of 370 individuals benefited from these practices. However, another ETA faction, the ETA-militar, or ETA-m, decided to continue. Three factors explain this decision. First, a terrorist campaign was waged against suspected members and supporters of ETA by the Grupo Antiterrorista de Liberación, an illegal group of police officials that hired assassins and killed twenty-seven individuals, justifying the continuation of the armed struggle in the eyes of many ETA members. Second, ETA adhered to a fundamentalist nationalist ideology that prevented it from accepting any solution other than the full satisfaction of its most extreme demands. Third, a strong subculture of violence persisted. Nevertheless, ETA suffered a setback in 2000, when a „Pact for Freedom and Against Terrorism“ was signed by the two main parties in Spain. The strong consensus in support of the pact enabled the state to apply pressure on ETA simultaneously from political, legal, social, and judicial angles, with very effective results. But in 2004, government representatives negotiated a truce with ETA in exchange for political concessions, thus conveying the message that the threat of violence can pay off. These negotiations gave ETA the opportunity to rearm and restructure. Negotiations, therefore, must also be recognized as a factor in the continuation of violence.

Next, BEATRICE DE GRAAF (Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht) presented her research on the Free South Moluccan Youth. In 1970, the Free South Moluccan Youth seized the residence of the Indonesian ambassador in Wassenaar near The Hague. With this action, this terrorist group aimed to draw the attention of the public and government to the plight of their people, who had lived in the Netherlands for twenty-five years and had been

neglected throughout that period. Moreover, they strove to gain a nation independent from Indonesia for their people back home, a Republic of the South Moluccas: They wanted to force the Dutch government to put this issue on the UN agenda. When they realized that they would not be able to achieve these goals, they staged three more terrorist acts, among them the hijacking of a regional train from Assen to Zwolle, which resulted in some fatalities. The Dutch government reacted with the so-called Dutch approach, which it contrasted with a so-called German approach to combating terrorism. That is, it tried to resolve such crises by means of negotiation, while at the same time addressing the social and economic grievances of the Moluccan minority and undertaking deradicalization measures. In addition, the government employed judicial measures against Moluccan terrorists that survived the actions, and used Dutch special forces in the case of the hijacked train. Most of the radical Moluccans viewed the dialogue between Moluccan leaders and Dutch ministers, several welfare initiatives and positive discrimination, and the enhanced media attention as considerable political successes, and did not deem new violent adventures necessary. After 1978, no more actions followed. In this case, thus, negotiation had exactly the opposite effect as with ETA.

JONATHAN STEVENSON (US Naval War College, Newport) presented his research on the Provisional Irish Republican Army. Stevenson argued that the United Kingdom's experience with the IRA demonstrates that a democratic state can effectively make terrorists stop by bestowing the fruits of democracy on the popular base of terrorist support. On April 10, 1998, the Belfast Agreement was signed. It provided for a power-sharing government in Northern Ireland and sub-sovereign cross-border agencies jointly run by the Northern Ireland assembly and the Irish parliament. This agreement would not have been possible without having a so-called constructive ambiguity on disarmament built into it. That is, the agreement did not strictly require IRA decommissioning, but merely established it as an aim of the peace process. It is true that this ambiguity

caused a lot of trouble, but absolute clarity, according to Stevenson, would probably have produced a political stalemate. He does not consider the Belfast Agreement a promising substantive model for resolving other conflicts, however: „The jury is still out whether it has resolved Northern Ireland’s.“ Nonetheless, three general lessons can be learned from this example: First, that inclusive conflict-resolution processes condition combatants to behave non-violently; second, that the internationalization of peace processes tends to dull old enmities; and third, that ambiguity may ultimately doom peace agreements, but may nonetheless be vital to perpetuating peace processes.

The fourth panel on Islamic terrorism consisted of MAGNUS RANSTORP’s (Swedish National Defense College, Stockholm) paper on the complex mechanisms of Hezbollah’s use of terrorism throughout the 1980s and early 1990s as part and parcel of the Lebanese civil war, as well as Iranian and Syrian foreign policy calculations. Ranstorp argued that Hezbollah’s own official account of history was a mistake by the group, as it provided unusual avenues to undermine the movement. He underscored the sophistication of what he called Hezbollah jujitsu politics as it enveloped itself into the fabric of Lebanese political, social, and military life. With this success, terrorism was reserved for special occasions and was used primarily in retribution, as well as to connect to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, the close nexus between Hezbollah and Iranian intelligence meant that the group, under the cover of plausible deniability, had a global terrorism reach, especially if a US-Iranian conflict were to materialize in the future.

The conference closed with a roundtable featuring MARTHA CRENSHAW (Stanford University), DANIEL BYMAN (Georgetown University) and BRUCE HOFFMAN (Georgetown University) as commentators on the conference as a whole. Martha Crenshaw stressed the differences between the tactical halt to a campaign, the decline or erosion of an organization, and ending terrorism. Daniel Byman pointed to the importance of the three levels of analysis introduced by Donatella della Porta that de Graaf used in her papers:

the external conditions (the macro-level), such as political opportunity structures; organized group dynamics (the meso-level); and individual perceptions and motivations (the micro-level). The question „Why Do Terrorists Stop?“ has to be applied on all three levels. Bruce Hoffman turned the leading question of the conference around by emphasizing that if we want to understand why terrorists stop, we also have to ask why and how they continue. He stressed the fact that groups have a learning curve, and that it is necessary to understand how they learn and how they make sense of their mistakes or of phases of decline. All commentators stressed the importance of extending comparative research chronologically — by taking the anarchist and nationalist movements of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century into account — as well as geographically, to North and South America, Africa, and Asia.

The analysis of the different histories of terrorist groups and their continuation or dissolution showed that there is no „one size fits all“ solution for ending violent struggles. However, the cases of the Italian Red Brigades, the Dutch Rode Jeugd and Free South Moluccan Youth, the German RAF, the Palestinian Black September Organization and PFLP, the IRA, and even the Basque ETA all point to the crucial importance of a population’s attitude towards the legitimacy of armed struggle, of the general political climate and the resulting ways of dealing with terrorists, and of the broader national and international political frame. While effective intelligence and police work could stop certain groups for limited periods of time, political measures and a helpful political climate are necessary preconditions for long-term pacification of terrorist struggles.

Conference Overview:

Welcome: Christof Mauch and Timothy Naftali

Public Opening Lecture: Stefan Aust

Comment: Bruce Hoffman

Panel 1: Revolutionary Terrorism

Chair: Christof Mauch

Beatrice de Graaf (Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht):
Red Brigades

Leena Malkki (University of Helsinki):

Why Do Terrorists Stop?

Rode Jeugd

Assaf Moghadam (US Military Academy):

Red Army Faction

Panel 2: Palestinian Terrorist Groups

Chair: Alia Ayub

Nasra Hassan (UN Vienna):

Remarks on the Black September Organization

Yoram Schweitzer (Institute for National Security Studies, Tel Aviv):

Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine,

Wadia Haddad Organization, May 10 Organization

Panel 3: Ethno-Nationalist Terrorism

Chair: Timothy Naftali

Rogelio Alonso (Juan Carlos Univ. Madrid):

ETA

Beatrice de Graaf (Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht):

Free South Moluccan Youths

Jonathan Stevenson (US Naval War College)

IRA

Panel 4: Islamic Terrorism

Chair: Carola Dietze

Magnus Ranstorp (Swedish National Defense College):

Hezbollah

Round Table:

Bruce Hoffman (Georgetown University)

Daniel Byman (Georgetown University)

Martha Crenshaw (Stanford University)

Final Discussion

Chair: Christof Mauch & Timothy Naftali

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