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- Français
- Home
- Contact Us
- Help
- Search
- canada.gc.ca

[Home](#) > [Publications](#) > [Perspectives](#)

• CSIS

- About CSIS
- Our Priority Areas
- History
- Newsroom
- Publications
- Careers

• Quick Links

- CSIS RSS Newsfeed
- Partners and Related Sites
- FAQ
- A-Z Index
- Site Map
- Proactive Disclosure

Report No. 2000/01: Trends in Terrorism

December 18, 1999

This paper uses open sources to examine any topic with the potential to cause threats to public or national security.

Introduction

1. The 22nd of July, 1999, may have marked the thirty-first anniversary of modern international terrorism. On that date in 1968, three members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) hijacked an El

Al Boeing 707, en route from Rome to Tel Aviv, carrying ten crew and 38 passengers. The aircraft was flown to Algiers' Dar al-Bayda Airport, where lengthy negotiations were undertaken for the eventual release of passengers, crew, aircraft and hijackers. The incident is widely regarded as a principal initiator of the deadly continuum of international terrorist attacks which have exerted significant political influence during the past three decades.

2. An early and ongoing victim of terrorism, the commercial airlines industry has been a focus of domestic and international incidents. Initially, attacks against aircraft demonstrated publicity value, often achieved their aim, and proved attractive to state sponsors. The industry responded in a positive and responsible manner by implementing security improvements and fostering international protective cooperation. Hijacking and armed attacks occur less frequently in today's world-a measure of improved defensive awareness-although still posing a risk in locations where preventive measures are not stringently observed. A greater danger today lies in the sabotage or bombing of commercial aircraft, a menace which will only diminish in the face of constantly improving security precautions.

3. The changing threat to the airlines industry underscores the dynamic nature of terrorism. Motivations, targeting, strategy, tactics-even logistics-continue to evolve, in keeping with efforts on the part of security agencies to meet the challenges and to stay ahead of the dangers. Terrorist atrocities in Algeria, characterized by the horrific slaughter of women and children; bombs hidden aboard a train in Pakistan which claimed 23 lives and injured 75 others; and the deaths of more than 260 persons as the result of truck-bomb explosions at the US Embassies in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, are reminders that terrorists retain the determination and ability to strike ruthlessly at a broad range of targets in many locations.

4. A multifaceted phenomenon, terrorism demands extraordinary domestic and international collaboration to combat the hazards it presents. Over the past 10 years, improved intergovernmental cooperation has contributed to a notable drop in the number of international terrorist incidents.¹ Despite the reduction in incidents, terrorist violence in many parts of the world will continue to promote an uncertain security environment, and will remain an ongoing threat to international and domestic stability and to the lives and livelihood of hundreds of innocents.


[Top of Page](#)

Discussion

5. **Motivation.** Originally reflecting a largely left-wing ideological foundation, today's terrorists are increasingly likely to be motivated by campaigns of ethnic nationalism or religious extremism. Often the two go hand in hand, such as the aspirations of Sikh militants for an independent state of Khalistan or the fundamentalist Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ), which seeks to establish an Islamic state in Egypt.

6. **Religious Extremism.** Islamic extremists literally pose the largest danger in terms of religious terrorism. In part an outcome of magnitude of numbers and Islam's global reach, it is also because, unlike the cohesive grouping of the past, many militant Islamists are individuals who do not owe allegiance to any particular organization, making identification and trace checks very difficult. Sunni terrorists, such as Ramzi Yousef, convicted in the New York Trade Center bombing, tend to be representative of this trend, whereas Shi'a terrorists continue to pursue their goals in a more collective fashion, obtaining direction and support from Iran. Although the Sunni-Shi'a schism remains, some cooperation between members of the two branches of Islam has been evident.

7. Muslim terrorists are often Mujahadeen, devoted to Islam and committed to Jihad, ("Holy War"), possessing combat experience of such locations as Afghanistan, Bosnia, and Chechnya. Well-schooled in handling weapons, explosives and communications equipment, they know the value of the Internet, fax machines, cellular telephones and encryption. Increasingly sophisticated and willing travellers, they have access to excellent false documentation and international contacts, and can blend easily into a local émigré community, where they can plan and execute attacks without being readily identified. It is their nebulous, unstructured characteristics, combined with zealous dedication, which contribute in large measure to the menace they present. Osama bin Laden is one such extraordinary example, made several times more dangerous by virtue of his immense wealth, personal capabilities, and charisma.

8. Extremist militants of other faiths also have an involvement in terrorist violence and must not be ignored. Christian religious groups, such as the Aryan Nations, are active in North America, and are becoming more closely associated with the Militia Movement. The Jewish Defence League maintains a presence in North America as well, but it is in Israel and the Occupied Territories where the combination of nationalism and religious fervour manifests itself in acts of Jewish terrorism.

9. **Nationalism.** Ethnic nationalism continues to be a significant motivational factor in a number of terrorism campaigns, some of which are long-standing (Northern Ireland, Basques, Palestinians, Kurds) and others which are relatively recent (Uighers, Timorese, Achenese). Individually or in combinations, nationalism-separatism-irridentism have demonstrated a notable resurgence since the collapse of the former Soviet Union (FSU); several states currently experiencing politically motivated violence were previously members of the FSU or communist entities. Ideology does play a role in some nationalist movements, but the more usual accompaniment is religious fundamentalism. Strong religious beliefs and nationalist-separatist goals represent a particularly effective motivational combination.

10. **Ideology.** The role of ideology has not been completely overtaken by the influence of religion. A number of left-wing movements continue to exist, such as the Turkish Revolutionary People's Liberation Party - Front (DHKP-C), the Peruvian Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path), and the Naxalites of India. Animal-Rights supporters and Environmentalists-the Issue Groups-tend to be found on the left of the political spectrum, as

well. Right-wing motivation is much more prevalent, however. Racist groups, typified by the Ku Klux Klan, the UK's Combat- 18 (C-18) and various skinhead aggregations (the latter especially prevalent in Germany) form the core of the right-wing movement. Many of the Christian extremist movements are strongly right-wing in nature, as are groups which form the Militia Movement in North America.

11. State sponsorship. State sponsorship of terrorism remains a significant concern. Support by state sponsors through funding, safe haven, weapons and logistics is important to the operation of many terrorist organizations. The US State Department continues to list the governments of Iran, Cuba, Iraq, Libya, Sudan, Syria, and North Korea as state sponsors of terrorism. International cooperation against terrorism, however, in conjunction with political realities and economic difficulties, has been successful in reducing the global level of state sponsorship. Notwithstanding the positive gains, the curtailment of state support in some cases has induced terrorists to turn to purely criminal enterprises for fundraising purposes, including involvement with narcotics trafficking.

12. Targeting and Methodology. Improved international cooperation against terrorism and strengthened security for diplomatic and military facilities have prompted a shift in terrorist targeting and methodology:

- random attacks on tourists and the deliberate killing of foreign-aid and NGO workers are disturbing trends;
- incidents of kidnapping and hostage-taking have become frequent occurrences in South America and the former Soviet Union;
- terrorist attacks focused on economic infrastructures can be expected to continue, including those related to energy distribution, transportation, banking and tourism;
- hoaxes, particularly bomb threats, have been employed on occasion to seriously disrupt transportation and tourism, causing significant local impact;
- the Internet is becoming a resource more frequently used by terrorists as a means to access information, spread propaganda, raise funds, communicate, and plan operations; and
- the possibility of a terrorist threat involving government and commercial computer-driven applications is a growing concern.²

13. The gun and the bomb retain the lead as favoured methods of terrorist assault, as witnessed by the shooting death of former provincial governor Hakim Said in Pakistan and the grenade attack against an Israeli bus stop in Beersheba. Vehicle bombs have proven a particularly attractive medium for terrorists, in part because the trend in recent years has been toward high casualty, indiscriminate targeting, and in part because of ease of manufacture, delivery, capacity, and lethality, with instructions on the Internet and components widely available. Threats

and incidents of suicide attacks have increased in some regions, such as the Middle East and Sri Lanka, and are likely to be repeated.

14. One of the first uses of a chemical nerve agent in a terrorist attack, by the Aum Shinri Kyo cult in Tokyo in 1995, has been widely viewed as the crossing of a threshold. It is a theory reinforced by evidence uncovered recently to the effect that Osama bin Laden is interested in chemical and biological weaponry. The Tokyo attack has evoked a number of serious concerns, among which are fears that:

- some terrorists may now consider public indifference to be such that a more spectacular incident involving a higher casualty rate is necessary to attract attention;
- the effectiveness of improved security measures may prompt terrorists to seek a different method of conducting an attack; and
- a group may have reached a stage of frustration and sense of impotence such that it will pursue any avenue in attempts to achieve its goal.

The approach of the Millennium is considered to raise the potential for independent action by individuals with extreme beliefs, especially those associated with cults, increasing the possible resort to a chemical, biological or nuclear radiation device.

15. The use of a nuclear weapon remains the least likely scenario, given current levels of security surrounding nuclear weapons and the undoubted reluctance of any state to support the use of such a weapon for terroristic purposes. The dispersal of a radioactive substance in a terrorist incident does remain a possibility. Nonetheless, despite the seemingly advantageous potential of nuclear, chemical or biological methodology, conventional weapons are still considered to be favoured by terrorists, principally because of familiarity and ease of use.

16. Future casualty rates associated with domestic and international terrorist incidents will vary. Generally more frequent, domestic incidents are usually the result of a shooting or bombing attack directed against security forces or specific civilian opponents; such incidents produce smaller numbers of casualties. Occasionally the numbers of casualties are higher, such as an incident aboard commercial transportation, or one involving a car-bomb or an explosive device placed in a crowded area, as was the case in the bombing of the Murrah Building in Oklahoma City. International incidents are characterized by large-scale casualties because the incidents, although less frequent, are designed to achieve maximum publicity and shock effect.


[Top of Page](#)

Global Review

17. The United States will continue to be the major target of international terrorist activity. Despite Canada's relatively high-profile military involvement in the former Yugoslavia and in the Gulf, Canada and Canadians remain fortunate in recently not having been targeted by terrorists. Canadians abroad, however, must recognize the risk of being in the wrong place at the wrong time and, because of physical similarities, of being mistaken for Americans.

18. Activities associated with the historic Northern Ireland peace agreement, signed in May 1998, at first made encouraging progress, but then encountered difficulties. Elections of the new, 108-seat power-sharing legislative assembly were completed, with David Trimble, a Protestant unionist, elected First-Minister, and Seamus Mallon, a Catholic nationalist, Deputy First-Minister. Contentious issues remain, including disarmament, but participants have indicated their determination to make the peace agreement a success.

19. Rogue elements such as the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA), the Continuity Irish Republican Army (CIRA), and the Real Irish Republican Army (RIRA) still pose a deadly security threat. The RIRA claimed responsibility for the 15 August 1998 car-bomb in Omagh, which claimed 29 lives and wounded 330, making it the worst single attack in Northern Ireland since 1969. However, INLA called a truce in late August and RIRA declared a complete cessation of military activity in September; both the major loyalist groups, the Ulster Defence Association (UDA) and the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) announced a joint ceasefire in 1994. The CIRA remains the only group not to have indicated a cessation of hostilities.

20. Across the Channel in France, risks remain from the spillover of the Algerian strife. In an unfortunate example of being in the wrong place at the wrong time, a Montreal woman was one of four people killed and her husband one of dozens injured when a bomb believed planted by Algerian extremists exploded in December 1996 on the Paris Metro.

21. Although its ranks have been drastically thinned as a consequence of cooperative efforts between the Spanish and French security forces, the Basque separatist group ETA continues to pose a serious threat in Spain. Popular support for the terrorist group has waned, however, especially in the wake of a series of killings of municipal officials; ETA murdered three representatives of Partido Popular, Spain's ruling party, during the first two months of 1998. A particularly brutal and horrific incident was the slaying of municipal councillor Alberto Jimenez Becerril and his wife as they returned from a dinner party in Seville.

22. ETA declared a ceasefire in mid-September 1998, but announced recently that the ceasefire would end in December, 1999. Earlier in the year, three small bomb attacks in Madrid were claimed by the October First Anti-Fascist Resistance Group (GRAPO), a radical Marxist group which had been inactive for several years.

23. In Germany, right-wing extremists, especially racially motivated elements, continue to foment disturbances and conduct arson attacks against immigrant workers and refugees.

24. The shadowy 17 November terrorist organization, which surfaces with attacks in Athens from time to time, continues to elude authorities. Anti-government, anti-NATO, anti-Turkish, and anti-American, the group has murdered a number of American diplomatic personnel and Greek officials over the past twenty years.

25. Despite the arrest of Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) leader, Abdullah "Apo" Ocalan, Turkish security forces remain concerned with an ongoing threat of terrorist violence from the PKK, as well as from several smaller left-wing groups such as the Communist DHKP-C. Bombings have occurred sporadically in Istanbul and Ankara, frequently intended to adversely influence the tourist trade.

26. Across the Mediterranean, in North Africa, the Algerian Armed Islamic Group (GIA) continues its anti-regime campaign of bombings within major cities, especially Algiers, as well as conducting horrific attacks against villagers, often characterized by the slitting of throats or decapitation. Women and children are not spared in the attacks.

27. In Egypt, incidents involving security forces and domestic terrorists in the Upper Nile Valley occur intermittently-also partly designed to have an adverse impact on the tourist trade with the intent of damaging the Egyptian economy. As well, occasional attacks are directed toward Coptic Christians in an attempt to introduce a split between the two religious communities.

28. The threat and reality of terrorist attacks, as evidenced by the suicide bombings in Jerusalem, continue in Israel and the Occupied Territories and are conducted by groups such as Hamas and the Palestine Islamic Jihad that oppose the peace proposals. Unless some remarkable progress is achieved in the peace process, the situation is unlikely to change for the better.

29. Ongoing factional rivalry between Shi'ite and Sunni Muslim groups is characteristic of terrorist incidents in Pakistan, most of which feature drive-by shootings conducted from the back of motorcycles. The totals, however, are substantively down from last year. Associated from a regional perspective, the activities of Osama bin Laden, emanating from Afghanistan, threaten Western (principally US) individuals and interests throughout the Sub-Continent, the Middle East, and Africa. He will continue his efforts to strike Western targets wherever and whenever opportunity permits.

30. Several recent bombing incidents aboard buses and trains in India suggest an attempt to revive the spectre of Sikh terrorism, while others are related to the ongoing separatist-inspired strife in Kashmir or that of the Bodo tribes in Assam.

31. Evidence of Uigher separatist aspirations and unrest surfaced in Western China, with at least three bomb explosions on buses in Xinjiang and Beijing which reportedly killed nine people and injured eight others.

32. Overall, extremist unrest in Latin America has lessened markedly. The majority of incidents are confined to Colombia and Peru. A high risk

exists in Colombia associated with the kidnapping of Westerners, especially businessmen. In Peru, both the Tupac Amaru and the Shining Path retain their highly dangerous status, despite extraordinary successes by the security forces such as the storming of the Japanese Ambassador's residence in Lima to free the hostages held by the MRTA.


[Top of Page](#)

North American Interests

33. Like other democratic nations in the developed world, Canada is inherently vulnerable to acts of terrorism. Incidents associated with conflicts abroad and transferred to the Canadian environment are termed *homeland issues*, and underlie the major concerns about terrorism affecting Canada today.

34. For a number of reasons, Canada is an attractive venue for terrorists. Long borders and coastlines offer many points of entry which can facilitate movement to and from various sites around the world, particularly the United States. As a wealthy industrial society, Canada is an excellent location in which to raise money in the name of causes abroad. The nation accepts large numbers of immigrants and refugees, and consequently has significant émigré communities which can be a source of haven and support.

35. Many of the world's terrorist groups have a presence in Canada, where they engage in a variety of activities in support of terrorism, including:

- logistical support for offshore terrorism through efforts to obtain weapons and equipment to be shipped abroad, such as electrical detonators for explosives, or remote-control devices that can be adapted for use in the remote detonation of bombs. In one case, a Canadian was involved in an attempt to purchase a Stinger missile for PIRA;
- attempts to establish an operational support base in Canada, to enable groups to send in hit teams for attacks on targets of opportunity;
- fundraising, advocacy, propaganda. For example, not long ago members of the Kurdish PKK tried to enter Canada illegally to carry out a leadership, propaganda and fundraising role;
- intimidation and manipulation of Canadian citizens in émigré communities to support activities for homeland issues;
- a safe haven for terrorists. The recent case of the Saudi Arabian, Hani al-Sayegh, implicated in the Al Khobar bombing, provides one example of this trend;

- use of Canada as a base to arrange and direct terrorist activities in other countries. This is a particular problem with some members of Sikh terrorist groups whose leaders continue to endeavour to use Canada as their headquarters; and
- raising money through illegal activities. Tamil Tiger supporters have been accused of raising money through intimidation and the manufacture and sale of false passports and documentation.

36. Authorities have been reasonably successful in thwarting the growth of right-wing extremism across the North American continent, but the activities of some groups continue to pose a substantial threat. The Militia Movement, for example, while not established in Canada, has endeavoured to expand northward—a cache of weapons and equipment belonging to an American group was discovered in British Columbia.

37. The extreme right—the racist skinheads and neo-Nazis—comprises a number of different factions without a central leadership, which in itself contributes to their unpredictability. Overall, the security concerns stem not so much from their numbers as from the few unpredictable ones willing to commit extreme acts of violence for their cause. Use of the Internet facilitates communication, coordination and recruiting, and both individuals and groups are beginning to become aware of the benefits of encrypting their messages.

38. Aligned in somewhat the same fashion, but with a rather more left-wing approach, are the Single Issue extremists who include environmentalists and animal-rights groups. Although a small element in Canada, they can be dangerous and destructive. Among their activities have been:

- tree-spiking, equipment damage, and the spraying of noxious substances in public buildings in attempts to forestall logging operations; and
- the mailing of pipe bombs and letters containing razor blades, allegedly tainted with poisonous substances, to scientists, taxidermists and hunting outfitters, as well as the extremely costly release of furbearing animals from commercial premises and threats of poisoned turkeys in supermarkets during major holidays, all in support of the animal-rights movement.

Close links exist among environmentalists and animal-rights extremists around the world. The movements use the Internet for communication and publicity, as well as publishing newsletters and handbooks which contain instructions on how to conduct civil disobedience, vandalism and sabotage, ("ecotage", as it is known to environmentalists), some of which is extremely dangerous.


[Top of Page](#)

Conclusion

39. The foregoing reasons, alone, require that Canada remain alert to, and cognizant of, the threat of terrorism both from the domestic and the global perspective. The downward trend in the number of international incidents of terrorism as noted in recent years has resulted, in part, from the combination of:

- much improved international cooperation to combat terrorism, such as the sharing of intelligence;
- a decrease in the level of state sponsorship;
- improved security arrangements in some countries; and,
- positive changes within a number of political and economic climates.

However, an optimistic long-term projection should not be entertained—the utility and attraction of terrorism as a political and foreign policy tool, as well other issues such as irrational behaviour on the part of some individuals, cultural factors, and the desire for revenge could bring about a renewal of attacks. The influence of the Millennium and Y2K-related events may also contribute to an increase in the frequency and nature of terrorist attacks, especially in Western countries with highly sophisticated infrastructures.

40. A significant portion of Canada's response to the threat of terrorism has been to foster, and to participate in, international cooperative efforts. Canada has hosted and attended many conferences devoted to the problem of terrorism: the Halifax G-7, the Ottawa ministerial meeting, the extraordinary Sharm el-Sheikh Heads of Government meeting, as well as others in Lima, the Philippines, Tokyo, Paris, and recently, Denver, Colorado. Bilateral and multilateral cooperation is growing rapidly among our respective security agencies.

41. International cooperation is one important avenue to be followed in the battle against terrorism. The dynamic nature of the phenomenon, and the increasing technical and practical experience of those who embrace the use of political violence, however, demand a broad and sophisticated response on the part of counterterrorism forces. The role of intelligence is a major factor in combatting terrorism and one which is beginning to produce impressive results. Increased collaboration within the intelligence community is an outcome of bilateral and multilateral arrangements. A fostering of such mutually beneficial activities is an effective means of responding to the diverse threats posed by terrorism.

42. Canada has a history of spillover effects from conflicts based in other countries—the "homeland issue" influence. Research indicates that ethnopolitical violence remains at historically high levels. Although the numbers of international terrorist incidents were down in 1997/98, they can rise again without warning in any given year. Incidents of domestic terrorism will remain at high levels as well. Canadians must remain alert to these indicators, continuing to encourage efforts to combat terrorism both internationally and domestically, and taking precautions when working or travelling abroad.

Annex I

Terrorist Activities

Motivation	Agents of Violence	Activities	Remarks
Nationalism - Separatism	Separatist & regional autonomy movements; ethnically-based contenders for power	Anti-government, intercommunal violence; attacks on NGOs and peacekeepers	Agreements in some protracted European conflicts; conflicts continue in Asia, ME & Sub-Saharan Africa
Religious - Extremism	Extremist fundamentalists of all religious persuasions	Mass casualty attacks on civilian targets	Most serious international threat
Ideology	Right & left wing extremists (skinheads, racists, anti-racists, anarchist militias)	Hate propaganda; anti-immigrant violence; bombing	Anti-immigrant violence peaked in Europe in early 90s; Largely US threat but with recent incidents in the UK
Single Issue	Animal rights; environmentalist; anti-abortion extremists	Sabotage, mail bombs	Significant threat in oil industry
State & State-Sponsored	Oppressive regimes	Sabotage and use of chemical weapons	

¹Patterns of Global Terrorism, the US State Department publication, acknowledges that the number of incidents for 1998 represented the lowest annual totals recorded since 1971. On the other hand, over 700 killed and around 6,000 wounded in 1998 represented a record high number of casualties in one year. [\[Return\]](#)

²Adequate security to protect against hacker-type inroads and cyberattacks remains a never-ending battle of technology. A concerted terrorist assault on computer networks could bring down communications and power grids in a manner reminiscent of the North American winter ice-storm of 1998, and could create havoc in the business community. Similarly, the physical destruction of critical computer networks could

seriously cripple key global commercial infrastructures such as air transport, stock markets and exchanges, and international banking.
[\[Return\]](#)

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Date Modified: 2008-05-15


[Top of Page](#)

[Important Notices](#)