

# Hostage ordeal coming to an end?

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The Washington Post \_\_\_\_\_  
 The New York Times \_\_\_\_\_  
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 The Wall Street Journal \_\_\_\_\_  
 The Christian Science Monitor \_\_\_\_\_  
 New York Daily News \_\_\_\_\_  
 USA Today \_\_\_\_\_  
 The Chicago Tribune \_\_\_\_\_  
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**D**are we hope that the impending release of Western hostages in Beirut signals an end to this particular episode of Middle Eastern terrorism? I believe the answer is a cautious yes.

Terrorism has historically come and gone in cycles, and we may be nearing the end of this current one. The difference today is that this cycle is not being suppressed by the use of police and military forces, as has usually been the case. Instead, changes in the political environment are bringing Western hostages home.

The Syrians, having lost their Soviet patron and having seen in the Persian Gulf war that the United States could play an effective role in the Middle East, have decided to cooperate with the West in removing this "irritant" at small cost to themselves. The Iranians, recognizing the necessity for economic intercourse with the Western world after a decade of near isolation, have decided to remove this impediment to reopening commercial relations. The Lebanese, after accepting Syrian tutelage and thereby restoring a semblance of governmental control over most of their country, have decided the presence of hostages is impeding further return to normalcy.

Any of these three favorable conditions could reverse overnight. The Syrians could become disillusioned with the United States, especially as it attempts to straddle Arab and Israeli interests in a Middle East peace process. The Iranians could revert to militant fundamentalism. Or the Lebanese could see their government collapse back into impotency.

Alternatively, terrorism could be perpetuated by fanatic Arab groups determined to interrupt any progress toward peace with Israel or by Iraq's Saddam Hussein.

This simply says that it may still take time to bring this cycle of terrorism to a close. What is significant,

though, is that so many players currently appear to see it in their interests to play a role in halting hostage taking. These players include the Syrians, Lebanese, Iranians, Israelis, hostage holders, United Nations, the Swiss, Western Europeans and Americans.

Such widespread concern is building a momentum that will be difficult to stop.

International awareness of the terrorist problem and a willingness to cooperate in dealing with it are key to defeating it. For instance, one of the names involved in negotiations for the release of the remaining 10 Western hostages is Mohammed Hamadi.

Hamadi hijacked TWA Flight 847 to Beirut in June 1985 and murdered an American passenger. Although he escaped when the incident ended, we knew a good deal about Hamadi by then and asked the West Germans to monitor his brother living in their country. When Hamadi joined that brother a year and a half later, the Germans arrested them both, took them to court, and convicted and jailed them. That kind of cooperation inhibits terrorists and must be encouraged.

A current demand of one group of hostage holders is that the Hamadi brothers be released in exchange for two Germans among the 10 remaining hostages in Beirut. We must resist that, even at the expense of delay in the release of the non-Germans.

The freeing of duly convicted criminals would send a dangerous signal to would-be future terrorists. They would assume that, if they were caught, some accomplice would take some new hostages and make a deal to spring them loose.

In short, despite repeated protestations in this country that we will never countenance deals with terrorists, we will. But some deals are acceptable and some are not. We need to learn to better discriminate among them.

For instance, since hostage taking in Beirut began in 1982, we have been involved in eight deals. Six were basically "arms-for-hostages" and were ill-advised because they left us vulnerable to having more

hostages taken if the Iranians wanted more arms. Another was a swap of 566 prisoners in Israeli jails for 40 Americans who had been hijacked on TWA Flight 847. That was more acceptable because the Israeli prisoners were more like prisoners-of-war than convicted criminals and were very likely to be released anyway.

Today's proposed swaps, which constitute the eighth deal, are similar and seem acceptable to me, as long as the Hamadis are not included. But it is important that we as a nation understand that, in situations like this, difficult judgments — such as whether or not to turn loose convicted terrorists — have to be made. We should not merely follow some arbitrary rule such as "We will never make deals."

Making deals is, of course, not our only recourse when confronted with hostage taking, even though with respect to Beirut over the past nine years the alternatives have not appeared attractive.

Our intelligence and military-rescue capabilities have not been adequate to risk going in and rescuing hostages. We have eschewed punitive military attacks because of our moral scruples about killing innocents, even though we had good evidence of those responsible for bombing our embassy there.

One attempt to employ the CIA's dirty tricks department backfired when our partner, Lebanese intelligence, went off on its own and killed

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80 innocents in an attempted assassination.

Economic pressures were judged ineffective because we were dealing with groups of terrorists, not nations, or because we could not muster sufficient international cooperation to make embargoes effective.

With this lack of viable recourse, we have been understandably frustrated. But we can be pleased that we have become sufficiently sophisticated about not rushing into arms-for-hostages deals, ill-fated rescue missions or some other low-probability effort.

And we should be encouraged that as we continue to draw friends and allies into greater cooperation against terrorism, the chances of defeating this cycle in the Middle East will continue to improve. The battle may not yet be over, but the balance has tipped in our direction.

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*Stansfield Turner was director of the Central Intelligence Agency from 1977 to 1981. He is most recently the author of "Terrorism and Democracy" (Houghton Mifflin, 1991), which examines the experiences of eight U.S. presidents in dealing with hostage situations. © 1991, New Perspectives Quarterly. This article was distributed by the Los Angeles Times Syndicate.*