



National Intelligence Estimate

**CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM
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The Soviet Bloc Role in International Terrorism and Revolutionary Violence

Key Judgments

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NIE 11/2-86W

THE SOVIET BLOC ROLE
IN INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM
AND REVOLUTIONARY VIOLENCE (S)

KEY JUDGMENTS

The full text of this Estimate
is being published separately
with regular distribution.

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SCOPE NOTE

This Estimate supersedes SNIE 11/2/81, *Soviet Support to International Terrorism and Revolutionary Violence*. In this Estimate, *terrorism* means premeditated, politically motivated violence directed against noncombatant targets by nongovernment groups or clandestine state agents, generally to intimidate a target audience.¹ *International terrorism* involves citizens or territory of more than one country. *Transnational terrorism*, a kind of international terrorism, means attacks by terrorists outside their own homelands. *Revolutionary violence* is aimed at changing the fundamental political orientation of a society by force.

Since the SNIE presented an adequate historical treatment of the issue, in preparing this Estimate, we have concentrated on the developments of the past few years. At the same time, we have expanded the scope of the study to include related activities on the part of:

- *The rest of the Warsaw Pact countries*. In this Estimate the term "Soviet Bloc" means the Warsaw Pact countries.
- *Other Soviet allies* such as Cuba, Angola, Vietnam, and—to the extent their activities may have been undertaken in conjunction with the USSR—Libya and Syria.

We have also deemphasized the categorization of groups that engage in terrorism. The 1981 SNIE distinguished rather firmly between revolutionary insurgent groups and strictly terrorist groups, while acknowledging that many insurgent groups use terrorist tactics, and many terrorist groups have revolutionary goals. In this Estimate we focus on the nature of the support rather than on the nature of the groups per se. Our approach is to divide the world's non-Communist countries into clusters according to their predominant forms of political extremism:

- *The Middle East*. Most of the political violence originating in this region is an outgrowth of three independent—though overlapping—transnational phenomena: the Palestinian problem, radical Islamic fundamentalism, and the growing use of terrorism by states such as Syria, Libya, and Iran. Many of the

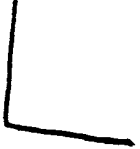
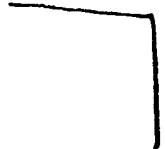
¹ This definition implicitly excludes violent acts by overt government organizations, officials, or agents.

extremist groups of the region routinely attack foreigners and operate outside their own countries, especially in Western Europe; thus they are often labeled international or transnational terrorist groups.

— *The Rest of the Third World.* Most of the political violence originating in other Third World countries is associated in some way with rebellion against national governments. The violent opposition groups operate almost exclusively in their own countries, although some have bases in sympathetic neighboring countries, and some attack foreign as well as domestic targets. Rebel groups in these countries are often able to establish control over regions or resources—usually in rural areas—beyond the reach of central government authority, thereby acquiring the status of insurgent groups.

— *The Developed Countries.* In general, the democratic Western countries have strong, stable political systems that, though governments may fall, are highly resistant to violent change. Nevertheless, leftwing extremist groups are active in a good number of West European countries and in Japan. In some Western countries, violent separatist and irredentist groups are also a problem. Many of the rebels in developed countries are ideologically indistinguishable from Third World insurgents and would be insurgents themselves if they could, but since it is not feasible for them to take and hold territory, they do not qualify as insurgents and are usually called terrorists.

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KEY JUDGMENTS

The Soviet leaders' approach to terrorism derives from their broader view that violence is a basic, legitimate tool of political struggle to be applied or sponsored in those settings where its use will benefit the USSR. As a result, the Soviets have no moral compunctions about supporting foreign insurgent and terrorist groups; the primary consideration is whether the activities of these groups further Soviet interests.

The Soviets support some groups openly and directly, mainly those with some claim to international political legitimacy, such as the PLO or the South-West African People's Organization (SWAPO). In dealing with many foreign political extremist groups, though, the Soviets camouflage much of their involvement by working with and through allies and radical states. To the extent that some of these states engage in terrorism or support extremist groups on their own accounts, the precise Soviet role is further obscured.

Though Moscow's dealings with foreign political extremist groups are highly differentiated, in general they follow these basic patterns:

- The Soviets support Palestinian and other radical anti-Israeli and anti-US groups based in the Middle East; most of them use terrorism as a means of seeking political objectives.
- The Soviets back insurrectionary movements in susceptible Third World states. Moscow refers to these organizations as national liberation movements; many of them engage in terrorist activities.
- The Soviets are not identifiably involved with terrorist groups in Western Europe and other developed areas where, more often than not, leftwing political violence interferes with Moscow's broad regional aims. Such violence does, however, create disruption that damages Western interests. Another view holds that the Soviets believe that, in most cases, terrorism in Western Europe furthers their aims. Moscow expects it to have a destabilizing effect on Western Europe and to undermine the US military posture there.²

² The holders of this alternative view are the DIA, Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps.

- Moscow's East European allies generally follow the Soviet lead in their own dealings with foreign insurgent and terrorist groups. In some cases they act as Soviet surrogates; in other cases they appear to be acting on their own. Other Marxist states in the Soviet orbit, particularly Cuba, also cooperate with the USSR in helping favored extremists groups around the world, but they tend to be more independent than the East Europeans.

In the Middle East, the Soviets and their associates provide [] the PLO. []

] Available evidence, however, suggests:

- That the Soviets disapprove of terrorist attacks in Western Europe by Middle Eastern groups they support and have tried to discourage these groups from conducting such attacks.
- That the Soviets have avoided direct contact with Middle Eastern transnational terrorist groups [] such as the Abu Nidal Group, the PFLP—Special Command, and the Carlos Apparatus.
- That, conversely, several East European states—East Germany, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria—have had direct ties to such groups. Their reasons appear to have been mainly defensive, but in some cases they may also have anticipated using the groups for their own or for Soviet purposes. Moscow certainly knew of some of these arrangements and presumably acquiesced. Another view holds that arrangements made by East European Communist regimes with transnational terrorist groups, in particular those arrangements between Hungary and Romania and the Carlos Apparatus, serve a useful political purpose and further broad Communist objectives, but stresses that they are not mainly for defensive reasons.³

In the Third World, the USSR and its allies—notably Cuba, East Germany, and Bulgaria—provide [] to numerous Marxist insurgent and terrorist groups. Chief among the target countries are Chile, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Sudan. In general, the Soviets and East Europeans advocate revolutionary violence mainly when that appears to be the most promising option; the Cubans and Nicaraguans are more optimistic, viewing violence as a way to create new and promising options.

³ The holders of this alternative view are the DIA, Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps.

Most of the radical Middle Eastern states—those that use terrorism as a foreign policy tool—are fundamentally dependent on the Soviet Bloc for [] The list includes Syria, South Yemen, and Libya, along with elements in Lebanon; Iran is a notable exception. The Soviets have supplied these states with [] often without enforcing controls [] used by terrorist and insurgent groups:

- Even without generous [] support from the Soviet Union, states such as Syria and Libya would probably aid various foreign political extremist groups, but being more vulnerable to retaliation they would have to be more circumspect.
- Although the USSR probably does not instigate the terrorist acts of these states and their surrogates and may not approve of all of them, neither does it risk straining relations with them by trying to make them desist. It undoubtedly recognizes that such acts are usually more damaging to Western interests than to Soviet ones.

In Western Europe, as well as in other areas where democratic institutions are strong, the Soviets regard leftwing terrorism as generally not helpful—indeed often harmful—to their regional objectives. Hence the Soviet Bloc keeps its distance from indigenous West European groups such as the Red Army Faction of West Germany and Action Directe of France. By criticizing and ostracizing such “criminal terrorist groups,” moreover, Moscow attempts to indicate that, like the Western countries, the USSR opposes and is trying to fight terrorism.

To date, however, the Soviet Bloc has generally opposed and obstructed Western efforts to establish effective international counterterrorism programs, in part because such programs might impede the activities of extremist regimes and groups the Soviets back:

- Much of the turmoil around the world is rooted in regional and local disputes of a political, social, or religious nature and has nothing to do with Communism. Many non-Communist extremists, however, have emulated the revolutionary model—and sometimes the terrorist tactics—employed by so many of the groups that receive Soviet Bloc assistance.
- Thus the longstanding Soviet support for political extremism in the Communist cause—and also in the Palestinian cause—has contributed to the development of an international climate in

which alienated or frustrated activists of all political stripes tend to turn to violence readily, rather than as a last resort, and to use terrorist tactics to magnify their impact.

Declining Trend. The terrorist implosion in Lebanon and the growth in terrorism of Middle Eastern origin in Western Europe during the past few years have overshadowed a gradual drop in the amount and seriousness of terrorist and insurgent activity in many other parts of the world. Although international terrorist incidents have been increasing in frequency in recent years, spurred by state-sponsored Palestinian and Shi'ite extremists, indigenous terrorist activity—especially that associated with the extreme left—has been in decline not only in Western Europe but also in Latin America and other parts of the Third World. In a large number of important countries—Turkey, Italy, Brazil, Argentina, to name just a few—the terrorists of the 1980s are few and feckless, compared with their predecessors of previous decades.

Outlook

While there is no indication that any massive or global upswing in terrorist activity is in the offing, we believe that various stimuli will prevent the level of political violence around the world from declining much further. The pattern of recent years has been that, as political extremism on behalf of some cause is brought under control in one country or region, as it usually is sooner or later, political extremism on behalf of some other cause has broken out somewhere else. Thus, at the moment the Montoneros and Tupamaros are quiet, while Sikh, Tamil, and Shi'ite radicals present major terrorist problems. We expect this pattern to persist.

Little Change Expected in Soviet Role. We also expect the Soviet Bloc to continue to support various foreign extremist groups and radical states. The costs to the Soviet Bloc of providing such support appear to be slight, whether in terms of money, reputation, influence, or risk. Often the benefits have also been meager, but in some cases the payoff has been substantial, for example, a peace initiative stalled, a pro-Western government besieged. Where the potential costs appear to outweigh the potential benefits, as in Western Europe, the Soviets simply refrain from getting involved. Given this situation, the Soviets have no reason to modify these durable and flexible policies—unless international developments modify the calculus. In Western Europe, for example, where the Soviets have generally kept their distance from extremist groups of all sorts, serious political instability in a country might tempt them into an adventurous relationship with local leftist revolutionaries.

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Conceivably, even in the absence of any external impetus, the new Soviet leadership might decide to modify Moscow's longstanding policies of supporting foreign political extremists (when it approves of their goals) and of opposing multilateral efforts to make terrorist activities crimes under international law. General Secretary Gorbachev has gone on public record twice in recent months to criticize terrorism, and he has cautioned both Syria and Libya to avoid terrorist acts that might provoke the United States. Moreover, the Soviets have hinted they might be willing to discuss ways in which East and West can cooperate to combat transnational terrorism. On the other hand, the opportunistic Soviet conduct during the recent confrontation between the United States and Libya is one of several indications that, so far, the Gorbachev regime is quite like its predecessors when it comes to actions, as opposed to words.

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