



Contemporary Terrorism: From National to Regional and Global Threats*

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Abstract: *Experience indicates that terrorist groups thrive on collaboration across national boundaries. Shared ideologies and commitments to radical strategies (such as professed struggles against capitalism, imperialism, racism, Zionism, and democracies) motivate groups to work together on a global scale. Informal and formal relationships among various terrorist groups and state sponsors have resulted in a national, regional, and international terror framework.*

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Terrorism—as a tool, method, process, and projection of psychological and physical violence in violation of law—is not new. Although the tactics and strategies of terrorism as employed by both non-state and government agencies in the name of ‘higher’ ideological, theological, or nationalistic principles to attain political, social, or economic objectives date from time immemorial, it is the twentieth century and even the early twenty-first century that are unique for the extraordinary scale of the globalization and brutalization of this mode of waging war by other means.

More specifically, no community, country, or region is immune from conventional and unconventional threats of terrorism. The Middle East is the most terrorist-active region and this has serious implications for international security. Turkey is a classic case study.

Turkey has been a prime victim of terrorism over the last 35 years and will continue to suffer from it in the foreseeable future. With a changing global and regional political environment, the Turkish regime is attacked by virtually all kinds of terrorism present in today’s world, namely

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ideological, religious, and ethnic terrorism. Flourishing in the impoverished parts of the country and supported by foreign powers at odds with Turkey, terrorism has inflicted much damage on the Turkish people in the last two decades.

Although the terrorist organization the PKK announced a so-called unilateral ceasefire on October 1, 2007, terrorism has escalated, particularly as a result of attacks originating from terrorist bases in Northern Iraq. In response to the intensification of hostilities originating across the border, Turkey undertook successive air strikes and deployed troops against terrorist targets inside Iraq. Apparently, Turkey's military actions were sanctioned by the United States which provided its NATO ally with the actionable intelligence required for such operations.

When terrorism turned into a low-intensity conflict in Turkey toward the end of the twentieth century, the government was forced to develop new military and legal methods to fight it, while remaining determined not to negotiate with or make concessions to the terrorists. This, in turn, led to legal and diplomatic problems that came close to making Turkey a pariah state on account of its human rights record. Fortunately, the government strategy against the separatists provided an environment of reconciliation and peace, which made it possible to improve human rights and democratic practices. In the future, Turkey's terrorism problem is expected to mutate into a transitional narco-criminal one, which will be harder to fight than its previous form due to its economic dimension. Nevertheless, the determination of the civilian and military authorities to overcome this new form of terrorism is promising better days for Turkey.

The global and regional outlook is however more bleak. Consider the challenge of the international network of terrorism. Experience indicates that terrorist groups thrive on collaboration across national boundaries. Shared ideologies and commitments to radical strategies (such as professed struggles against capitalism, imperialism, racism, Zionism, and democracies) motivate groups to work together on a global scale. Informal and formal relationships among various terrorist groups and state sponsors have resulted in a national, regional, and international terror framework. The international character of many terrorist efforts often compounds the difficulty of identifying the initiator or sponsor of a given terrorist act.

Clearly, Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda is the most elaborate international terrorist network operating around the world, with dire consequences for the security interests of the United States and its friends and allies, such as Turkey. That is, al-Qaeda (the Base), also known as the International Front for the Jihad against Jews and Crusaders, the Group for the Preservation of the Holy Sites, and the Islamic Army for the Liberation of the Holy Places, operates in over 90 countries. Al-Qaeda seeks to unite all Muslims and establish a government which follows the rule of the Caliphs, according to bin Laden's strategic plan.

Indeed, in the post 9/11 environment, tomorrow's al-Qaeda and affiliated terrorists will continue to utilize a broad range of conventional weapons, including explosives and missiles, as illustrated by suicide bombings worldwide. The arsenals of future operations will most likely consist of mass destruction instruments, such as biological, chemical, radiological, nuclear, and cyber terrorism. In the face of such devastating dangers, the question is not if the worst is yet to come, but when 'super terrorism' will occur and with what consequences for national, regional, and global security concerns.

On December 2, 2008, the United States' Commission on the Prevention of WMD Proliferation and Terrorism' issued a bipartisan report asserting that it is likely that terrorists will resort to biological and nuclear attacks by 2013 if governments fail to undertake major security and preventive measures. The commission, co-chaired by former Democratic Senator Bill Graham of Florida and former Republican Senator Tim Talent of Missouri, recommended that the new American administration appoint a national security aide devoted exclusively to coordinating U.S. intelligence, military and political efforts to curb weapons proliferation. Other recommendations include improving rapid response efforts to deal with mass biological weapons attacks and convening an international conference on biosecurity.¹

What is also challenging to the global security system in the twenty-first century is the expansion of violence in the maritime environment. The proliferation of piracy, insurgency, and terrorism is a stark case in point. More specifically, the tactics utilized by these actors include hijacking, arms smuggling, human trafficking, drug trafficking, assaulting land-based maritime facilities, shelling tankers, firing rockets at port energy infrastructures, launching seaborne raids against civilian targets on land, attacking offshore oil rigs, and bombing vessels in port. Piracy most dramatically reflects the current serious maritime security situation:

- Some 95 ships were attacked and more than 39 were hijacked in 2008 off Somalia. In 2007, a total of 31 incidents were recorded, and in 2006, only 10 cases were reported.
- Piracy ransoms are partially funding insurgencies in Somalia and Africa as a whole.
- Some 14 ships are still detained by Somali pirates and approximately 330 crew members from 25 countries are being held hostage.

Among the maritime incidents reported by the media in 2008, the following attacks are noteworthy: pirates seized a Spanish tuna boat off Somalia (April 20); an Iranian bulk carrier and Japanese-operated tanker were hijacked by Somali pirates (August 21); pirates grabbed a Ukrainian ship load with 33 Russian-made T-72 tanks and numerous weapons off Somalia (September 25); a Turkish ship carrying iron ore from Canada to China was captured by Somali pirates (September 28); armed rebels killed a Nigerian sailor during an assault on U.S. Chevron's oil facility in Southern Nigeria (November 7); a Chinese fishing boat with 24 people on board was captured off Kenya by unidentified persons (November 14); separate bands of attackers seized a Thai ship with 16 crew members and an Indian Vessel with a crew of 25 in the Gulf of Aden (November 18); and a U.S. cruise ship with over 1,000 people on board escaped pirate speedboats along a corridor patrolled by international warships (December 2).

The record of violence in the maritime environment indicates that vessels, citizens, and interests of other countries were targeted, namely Italy, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Georgia, Greece, Malaysia, Brunei, Germany, The Netherlands, France and Egypt, and Syria.

To be sure, the most spectacular and unprecedented incident recorded is the capture by Somali pirates of a fully laden Saudi supertanker, the *Sirius Star* (1,080 feet long, dead weight 318,000 tons), with a cargo of 2 million barrels of oil worth more than \$100 million. This hijacking occurred off the coast of eastern Africa (some 450 nautical miles southeast of Mombasa, Kenya)

¹ See *World at Risk*, Random House, New York, December 2008.

outside the 'security zone' in the Gulf of Aden that various military ships have been patrolling since summer 2008. The brazen attack on the biggest tanker ever hijacked, which had a crew of 25 people (including British, Croatian, Polish, Filipino, and Saudi nationals), began on November 16, 2008. The pirates subsequently moved the tanker close to their base at Harad, some 180 miles from Somalia's capital, Mogadishu, where they have total control of the area. Meanwhile, the Saudis vowed to retake the ship and apparently negotiations with the ship owners for a passable ransom have begun.

Regardless of the outcome of the *Sirius Star* case, the implications for maritime security are discouraging. For instance, a major Norwegian shipping group Odfjell SE, already ordered its more than 90 tankers to sail around Africa rather than use the Suez Canal to avoid attacks by pirates.

Clearly, piracy is not the only challenge in the maritime environment. Both insurgents and terrorists have been active in modern times. A partial list of contemporary perpetrators include: the Somalia National Movement (SNM), the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), Marxist Popular Forces 25 April (FP-25), the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ealam (LTTE), the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), Abu Sayyaf, the Irish Republican Army (IRA), Jama'ah al-Islamiya, Fatah, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the Popular Front of the Liberation of Palestine – General Command (PFLP-GC), the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), Abu Nidal Organization, Hizballah, Japanese Red Army (JRA), the Movement of 19 April (M-19), Anti-Castro groups, and Puerto Rican independence terrorists, and single-issued political extremists such as anti-abortion and animal rights radicals.

The aforementioned insurgent and terrorist groups have been involved in thousands of attacks in the post-WWII period. For instance, on October 20, 2001, LTTE suicide attackers rammed their five boats into a ship carrying fuel off the coast of Sri Lanka. Apparently this operation was carried out in retaliation for a Sri Lanka naval attack on the terrorist Sea Tiger base earlier that month.

For the past decade, however, it is widely recognized that the most serious threat to maritime security is the challenge posed by Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda. One of its important military components is a maritime capability consisting of a fleet ranging from an estimated 15 to 300 vessels. Al-Qaeda's tactical methods include the shipment of weapons and deployment of ships as bombs directed against naval targets, critical infrastructure, and port cities and straits. In October 2000, for instance, a spectacular al-Qaeda suicide attack by a small boat against the *USS Cole* in the port of Aden killed 17 American sailors. Also, in June 2002, Moroccan authorities arrested three operatives planning attacks on U.S., British, and Israeli ships in the Strait of Gibraltar. And, in October of that year, a French-flagged oil tanker, the *Limburg*, was attacked by al-Qaeda members in the Gulf of Aden. Moreover, it has been reported that Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri, identified as al-Qaida's maritime operations chief and who was arrested in November 2002, planned to attack U.S. ships in the Strait of Hormuz. In short, two conclusions are apparent. First, attacks on shipping allow al-Qaeda to disrupt the global economy, divert resources to protect the seas, and serve as a vehicle for recruiting. And second, al-Qaeda is not merely interested in destroying shipping but also in using vessels to close maritime lanes and conducting seaborne mass casualty attacks.

One of the most spectacular terrorist assaults recorded in the post-9/11 period took place in Mumbai between November 27, 2008 and November 29, 2008. Ten determined terrorists, reportedly members of Lashkar-e-Taiba (a Pakistani-based movement with al-Qaeda affiliation and dedicated to 'liberating' Kashmir from India's rule), spread terror, death, and chaos in the subcontinent's economic and financial capital. The city of some 14 million turned into a war zone for three days. The purpose of this attack was to cause random and selected mass casualties to Indians and foreigners, take hostages as human shields for safe passage, confuse response forces, and further destabilize the region by undermining the peace process between India and Pakistan. When the bloody assaults on eight different sites in Mumbai were ended by the Indian security forces, the human cost was horrific: nearly 200 people were killed, including 22 foreigners, and over 200 were injured.

What is of particular tactical and strategic concern is that the terrorists hijacked a fishing trawler at sea that was used to launch their land attacks. More specifically, the unfolding piracy-terrorist maritime drama began when a private Indian fishing boat with five crew members sailed from the western Gujarat state in mid-November 2008. At some point afterwards, the trawler was hijacked at sea by a group of attackers probably boarding a mother vessel at the Pakistan port of Karachi. Once in control of the trawler, the terrorists slit the throat of one of the crew members. Three nautical miles off Mumbai, the attackers abandoned the vessel, opened inflatable dinghies they were carrying, and sailed into the city coast on November 26, some ten hours before splitting into four assault units. Apparently the terrorists' plan was to return to Pakistan with the same abandoned trawler. In sum, one of the implications of this latest drama is that the international community must beware of possible conventional and unconventional seaborne terrorist plots in the future.

In view of the foregoing dangers, it is important to underscore several security problems. For example, globally, there are some 15 million containers in circulation and approximately 120,000 merchant ships that require some sort of security protection. There is also a concern of tracking difficulties such as re-naming, re-painting and re-registering ships. Additionally, fictional corporations are formed by owners of these vessels to disguise them.

It is not surprising that in the face of the vulnerabilities in the maritime environment, states at a unilateral and multilateral level have responded to the numerous challenges in accordance with their specific concerns. Regarding the piracy threats, for instance, in 2008 alone, the following actions should be mentioned: the U.S. Navy fired at Somali hijackers of a Russian ship (February 12), Somali troops stormed a Dubai vessel and arrested seven pirates (April 22), the French army freed hostages off the coast of Somalia (September 16), the UN adopted a new Somalia piracy resolution (October 7), NATO dispatched ships to tackle Somali pirates (October 9), Russian and British frigates joined forces to thwart a pirate attack on a Danish cargo vessel off the coast of Somalia (November 12), the Indian Navy ship *Tabar* sank a suspected mother ship used by Somali pirates in the Gulf of Aden (November 19), and NATO foreign ministers meeting in Brussels demanded that the alliance act amid growing alarm over the maritime attacks (December 2). It is expected that similar and other appropriate responses will be applied in the coming months and years not only against pirates but also against insurgents and terrorists.

Finally, the important role of Turkey in combating terrorism in the maritime environment and elsewhere should be commented on. For instance, representatives from EU member states and ten Mediterranean partners, including Turkey, met in Barcelona, Spain, in November 1995 to begin the Mediterranean Dialogue. Though the ultimate goal of the dialogue was to secure improved political, economic, and cultural relations in the Mediterranean region, it did focus on maritime security cooperation. This initiative was confirmed by NATO's North Atlantic Council the following year. Also, on June 29, 2004, at the Istanbul Summit, NATO members decided to elevate the Mediterranean Dialogue to a full partnership with associate countries. The Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) aims at promoting military-to-military cooperation, fighting terrorism through information sharing and maritime cooperation, and fighting illegal trafficking on a bilateral level with Turkey, Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia.

Moreover, from January 1, 2009 through 2010, Turkey will serve as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, whose primary responsibility is to maintain international peace and security. The selection of Turkey for this important Council seat is a testimony of the world body's confidence in Ankara's capability to carry out this task.