68   T. Hof, *Staat und Terrorismus in Italien 1969–1982*, München: Oldenbourg, 2011, pp. 297–303.
69   Ibid., pp.141–51 and 242–9.
70   Ibid., pp. 73–105.
71   E. Chenoweth, 'Italy and the Red Brigades: The Success of Repentance Policy', in J.J.F. Forest (ed.) *Countering Terrorism and Insurgency in the 21st Century, International Prospective, vol. 3: Lessons from the Fight against Terrorism*, London: Praeger Publisher, 2007, p. 362.

7   Quid pro quo

State sponsorship of terrorism in the Cold War

Thomas Riegler

Introduction

1970s and 1980s terrorism is very different from contemporary political violence: whereas radical Islamic terrorists today form a web of decentralized local actors without clear hierarchies, who are linked together by the internet, the 'old terrorism' of the Cold War era was a group phenomenon, with clear structures, and primarily secular by nature. One of the foremost characteristics of organizations, led by Abu Nidal or 'Carlos', was that the terrorists received substantial assistance from state actors. The main sponsors, Soviet satellites in the Middle East and the Eastern Bloc, not only tolerated the presence of terrorists on their soil, but provided them with training, weapons, explosives, and safe passage. The enlisted groups and organizations were then used to conduct surrogate operations against rival states, internal enemies, or dissidents. Whereas the relationship between sponsors and terrorists has often been described in the form of top-down control, this contribution instead suggests more of a balanced mode of quid pro quo collaboration among the two parties.

To explore the connection between states and terrorists further, a case study is presented by drawing on primary sources from the Foundation Bruno Kreisky Archive (StBKA, Vienna) and the Federal Commissioner for the Stasi Archives (BStU, Berlin): the confrontation between Austria and the Abu Nidal group, which was then supported by Syria. Since Austria played a key role in promoting the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) as a political force in the late 1970s, it became a target for Palestinian hardliners, who opposed any compromise with Israel. By attacking Austria in 1981 and 1985, Abu Nidal served his own ideological agenda, but also satisfied the political interests of his sponsor in the Middle Eastern power game – which makes this case a telling example for the described pragmatic cooperation between host and client.

State-sponsored terrorism and the Cold War

In 2010, Corinna Ponto, the daughter of a prominent victim of the Red Army Faction (RAF), published a critical article in a major German

newspaper. Therein she criticized the 'mythologization' of prominent RAF members as popular culture 'icons', while the history and background of German left-wing terrorism still remain largely unexplored:

> The actions of the RAF were systematic, as well as supported by a system. [...] This system directed the attack against the system of the free and democratic constitutional state by eliminating certain important officials of that system. And the system behind it was composed of financiers and agents and principals, whose long arms we still, even after forty years, do not know exactly.[1]

Ponto, who had researched her father's death in the files of the East German Ministry for State Security (MfS), described the process as being caught up in a 'murky and frightening web.

Indeed, many aspects and mechanisms of 1970s and 1980s terrorism are still largely unknown to the greater public, since the media and historical research tend to personalize political violence, while neglecting vital structural aspects such as financing, training, and sheltering. Ponto's conclusion was that Cold War terrorism had a Janus face – on the one side the known protagonists, on the other side intelligence agencies and the secret policies, whose exact influence on the events is still a matter of dispute.[2]

With regard to the RAF, the terrorist attacks orchestrated by its 'third generation' against prominent Western German officials during the 1980s and early 1990s remain unsolved until today. No culprit has ever been charged with those crimes that stunned investigators with the level of their sophistication.[3] The military and deadly precision of the 'third generation' fed suspicions that the RAF had gotten a helping hand – in the form of assistance and training by MfS special forces, who wanted to target its 'main enemy' by using terrorist surrogates. Yet, so far, the evidence for active involvement of the MfS in RAF terrorism is inconclusive.

The still mysterious 'third generation' is a telling example of the gaps in the public debate on Cold War terrorism. In Germany, the discourse concentrates mainly on the origins of the RAF, the student revolt of 1968, and the post-war generational conflict, while neglecting the later years, when terrorism became a sort of secondary front in the overall struggle between the East and West. According to German historian Wolfgang Kraushaar, waging terrorist proxy wars could have been an advantage for both East and West to deliver destabilizing 'pin prick attacks', while conventional warfare was not an option in the nuclear age.[4]

While the specific background of these proceedings remains vague, the notion that terrorism indeed played a major part in the Cold War confrontation is not new. Starting with the 1979 Jerusalem conference of the 'Jonathan Institute to Fight Terrorism', the Soviet Union was publically accused of sponsoring terrorism. Fitting the political imperative of the Reagan administration's confrontational policies, Moscow was described as

the centre of terrorist activity worldwide, with every major group sponsored and forming a subversive proxy force to undermine Western democracies.[5] Most influential in the promotion of this threat was 'the Terror Network' (1981) by Claire Sterling, an American correspondent living in Italy. Her main thesis was that Moscow had infiltrated every major left-wing group, including the Palestinian factions, and turned them against Western targets. A Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) research team later found out that 'the Terror Network' contained some 'black information', which had been circulated by the intelligence service itself.[6] But US officials nevertheless used the book to send their message: Foreign Secretary Alexander Haig presented 'the Terror Network' at his first press conference to accuse the Soviet Union of state sponsorship of terrorism.[7] Unofficially, the US intelligence community had reached a more sober assessment on the subject in 1981 – with regard to the links between Moscow and Middle Eastern groups the National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) stated:

> The Soviets provide assistance, including training and weapons support, to states and organizations which they know conduct or support terrorist activities. The Soviets themselves do not direct these groups, however they encourage specific terrorist operations. In some cases, they have advised their friends and allies against the use of such tactics, although they have acquiesced in their use.[8]

Since this early discourse was swayed by ideology and lacked a neutral fact oriented basis, it took the fall of the Iron Curtain (1989) for the nature of the nexus between the Soviet Union and international terrorism to become more apparent. While Moscow had not been the source of all terrorist evil, as described by Sterling, it was certainly no innocent bystander. The Soviets had supplied arms not only to Third-World 'national liberation movements' in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, but also to terrorist groups in the Middle East and in Northern Ireland. Substantial as it was, this supporting role did not amount to total control as Sterling and other experts had suggested. According to historian Timothy Naftali, these relationships, 'while significant, were limited and represented assistance to autonomous movements. These groups did not become extensions of Soviet foreign policy.'[9]

An often-cited example for the relationship between the KGB and terrorist allies is Wadi Haddad, founder of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PLPF) external operations department and 'godfather' of international terrorism. According to Vasili Mitrokhin, a senior KGB defector, Haddad had been recruited by the KGB under the codename 'NATIONALIST' in 1970.[10] KGB chief, Yuri Andropow, reported to prime minister Leonid Brezhnev:

> W. Haddad turned to us with a request of help for his organisation in the acquisition of certain kinds of special technical means necessary

for carrying out specific terrorist operations. The nature of our rela-
tions with W. Haddad allows us to exercise partial control over the
PFLP External Operations Department and influence it in the interests
of the Soviet Union, as well as to carry out actions in the interests of the
Soviet Union through W. Haddad's organisation under necessary
secrecy.[11]

Another file from 1975 delineates the operational support that Haddad
received: via secret transfer in the neutral waters of the Gulf of Aden, the
KGB handed him a batch of foreign made weapons and munitions (fifty-
eight sub-machine guns, fifty pistols, including ten equipped with silencers,
and thirty-four thousand rounds of ammunition).[12] In the same year, the
KGB funded Haddad's organization with US$30,000.[13] Alexander
Bodarenko, a former official of the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs,
confirmed in a 2007 German TV programme that Haddad's group had
indeed been employed by the KGB: 'This organisation was not subordinate
to us. It decided alone. It was not very easy for us to get them to the desired
results.' As former PLFP spokesman Bassam Abu Sharif explained further,
it was cooperation among equals: 'Andropow was really keen to use Wadi's
skill, but Wadi was generally opposed to be the tool of anyone'.[14]

There is little other evidence for such direct connections between
Moscow and international terrorism, but the relationship of the West with
terrorist actors is even harder to determine. While it is important not to
equate the actions of the superpowers and their allies, this aspect should
not be neglected. It is well established that the US checked the Soviet
Union's assistance for Third-World national liberation movements by
aiding 'freedom fighters' in Angola, Afghanistan, and Nicaragua. In the
latter country, CIA directed mercenaries and contract agents carried out at
least twenty-one sabotage attacks on economic targets between 1983 and
1984 in order to topple the left-wing government.[15]

One of the best known examples for Western links to terrorism is the
secret NATO stay-behind network, commonly known under the Italian
codename 'Gladio'. Originally designed as a guerrilla force in case of a
Warsaw Pact invasion, it was also used internally in some NATO member
states to prevent communist parties from coming to power. The stay-behind
networks supported coup d'états in Greece and Turkey, as well as the
suppression of political opposition in Portugal and Spain. In Italy, sporadic
acts of right-wing terrorism were used to create tense political situations, in
which the electorate rallied behind the status quo.[16]

Clandestine operations of Western intelligence services included the
infiltration of terrorist groups. This was an efficient mean for combating
political violence, but it produced some controversial results: several inves-
tigations have unearthed evidence that during the 1980s, British
intelligence services had colluded with Loyalist death squads to 'turn the
screw' on the Provisional IRA.[17] In Turkey, special forces engaged in a dirty

war against the Kurdish PKK with widespread use of torture and tactics like
'disappearing' victims.[18] More and more information suggests that the Red
Brigades in Italy had been penetrated, which allowed some degree of
control over their operations.[19] Little is known about the secret struggle of
the West German authorities against left-wing terrorism. But it is evident
that, from the beginning, agent provocateurs were involved in arming the
radical fringes of the 1968 student movement.[20] On one occasion in 1978,
the domestic intelligence service went so far as to fake the liberation
attempt of an RAF member by blowing a hole into the prison wall.[21]

Examples like these demonstrate that Western counter-terrorism had its
dark side and that the fear of terrorism was sometimes manipulated to
sustain political stability. However, according to the available records, the
Eastern Bloc's involvement with terrorism was by far more substantial and
directly aimed against the West. This is clarified in the following section by
quoting from relating files from the archive of the German Democratic
Republic's (GDR) Ministry for State Security and declassified CIA sources.

Sponsoring terrorism: the role of Middle Eastern governments and Eastern bloc countries

Soviet satellites in Eastern Europe and allied regimes in other regions
engaged in substantial dealings with terrorists. This was especially true in
the Middle East, where all major Arab groups were affiliated either with
Libya, Syria, Iraq, or South Yemen (theocratic Iran was the main sponsor
for Shiite extremists, mostly during the civil war in Lebanon in the 1980s
and against American targets in the Arab peninsula in the 1990s). The
governments had various reasons for the employment of terrorists. Mostly,
they were used as surrogates to target regional rivals. For example, Syria
and Iraq used terrorists to strike against each other's officials and facilities.
From 1983 until 1985, Jordan was attacked several times by forces sent out
by Syrian president Hafez al-Assad to punish the government in Amman for
its support of the Islamist opposition against his rule.[22]

Another major reason was to have a covert capability ready to use against
internal threats posed by dissidents and exiles. Between 1980 and 1985, the
Libyan government alone engaged in more than thirty assassination
attempts outside of its borders.[23] Sponsorship of terrorism was also an
important means of undermining Western policies in the Middle East, to
destabilize pro-Western governments and moderate Arab regimes, to
weaken Israeli security, and to derail peace initiatives between Israel and
the Palestinians. In effect, sponsors had various advantages to gain: plausi-
ble deniability, the possibility to project power despite little geopolitical
significance, and the enhancement of their image as fighters for the cause
of the 'oppressed'.[24] There is also no doubt that using terrorists bore
considerable risks such as provoking retaliatory attacks or a tarnished inter-
national reputation in case of these secret policies becoming public.

The terrorists, on the other hand, profited from access to training facilities, weapons, explosive devices, passports, intelligence, ideological promotion, money, or safe havens. Despite considerable tensions, such relationships proved mutually beneficial. Yet when interests no longer coincided, there were frequent and rapid shifts of allegiance. Abu Nidal, for example, relocated his organization three times: from Baghdad to Damascus and then on to Tripoli. From time to time, economic sanctions, diplomatic expulsions, and demarches, counter-terrorism measures, and regional political developments caused states to lower their profiles and become more discreet. In such situations, terrorist allies became a liability and were soon divested of protection.[25] How strained and difficult relations could prove is apparent from a 1989 CIA report on the terrorist connections of Libya's leader Muammar al Qadhafi:

> The Libyan leader's influence with these groups – based primarily on his ability to provide them support – is not always sufficient to solicit attacks. Qadhafi's ability to do so is circumscribed to some extent by a desire on the part of his clients to protect their independence, by differences in political agendas, and by different views on how to achieve shared goals, as well as by the Libyan leader's mercurial temperament and repudiation as an unreliable patron.[26]

Eastern European nations had their own reasons for their approach to terrorism: the GDR, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, and Romania tolerated the presence of terrorist groups on their territory. They had direct ties to several Middle Eastern organizations, among them the Abu Nidal Group, the PLFP, and the Carlos Group. Moscow certainly knew about these arrangements and 'presumably acquiesced'.[27] Western European groups benefited only to some degree. According to Czech investigators, members of the Italian Red Brigades who were involved in the kidnapping of Aldo Moro (1978) had been trained in a military installation in Karlsbad.[28] Czechoslovakia functioned also as the key supplier of the plastic explosive Semtex. The main purchaser was Libya, which transferred large amounts to its Palestinian clients, which in turn provided other groups with the material.[29] Most notably, from 1980 onwards, the GDR sheltered ten 'retirees' of the second generation of the RAF. This 'drop out' programme aroused interest on the part of the active members. From 1980 until 1982, members of the RAF were trained in the use of rocket launchers, obviously in connection with the attack on NATO's commander Frederick Kroesen on 15 September 1981. However, it has not been possible to determine whether this training session occurred before or after the failed assassination attempt.[30] The suspected, but unproven involvement of the MfS in RAF-'third generation' terrorism has already been mentioned.

Only in some cases did Socialist countries directly employ the services of terrorists. In 1981, Romania's dictator Ceausescu ordered a strike by the

Carlos Group to 'silence' the Romanian branch of Radio Free Europe in Munich (a gross operational error was committed by detonating the fifteen-kilo bomb in front of the Czech section of the building).[31] Mostly, the value of the terror connection paid off in an indirect form: the host gained access to valuable intelligence, Western weapons and technology, while the client benefited from safe haven, training, and easy transit into Socialist countries and Western Europe. A major motif for the Eastern bloc was to keep its territory safe from possible security risks. The danger of possible retaliatory attacks by terrorists in case of an active approach against them was taken very seriously.[32] Another priority was to ensure that Socialist countries would not be implicated in case of terrorist attacks in Western Europe. But, while the secret services had detailed knowledge about planned strikes, sometimes nothing was done to stop the perpetrators. In 1983, an MfS officer returned confiscated explosives, which were then used to commit a bomb attack against the Maison de France in West Berlin. In the case of the La Belle bombing (1986), the MfS knew at least five days ahead that Libyan agents would possibly target the discotheque, but no warning was given.[33]

This is hardly surprising, since the destabilization of the West by terrorism was in the interest of the Eastern Bloc. It provided the Socialist countries with a means of inciting or exploiting violent conflict on a regional as well as global scale, with small risk of US retaliation or direct military confrontation. But some red lines were observed: when Palestinian terrorists hijacked a Lufthansa jet in 1977, the Soviet Union and the GDR pressured its ally South Yemen to prohibit the landing and thereby foiled the original plan of the terrorists.[34] On another occasion, Bulgaria allowed the arrest of several left-wing terrorists by German police on its territory in 1978.[35] In the same year, Yugoslavian authorities detained four RAF members in Zagreb, but released them after receiving threats from a Palestinian group.[36] 'Carlos', whose presence became an open secret for Western intelligence agencies and thereby compromised his hosts, was eventually kicked out: in 1984, he was banned from the GDR and Hungary, in 1985 Czechoslovakia served its ties with his organization.[37] Obviously, terrorist plotting against the West was tolerated within certain limits, on the condition that it would not cause a major disruption in superpower relations. But, as Markus Wolf, head of the foreign intelligence division of the MfS, wrote in his memoirs, his superior, Minister for State Security Erich Mielke, did consider a supportive role for terrorist organizations in the event of war: 'his theory seemed to be that the terrorists we befriended or, as in the case of the Red Army Faction, sheltered, could be used as behind-the-lines guerrilla forces for sabotage against the West'.[38]

In contrast to these frank words, during the Cold War, the reasons for this uneasy but extensive cooperation with terrorists were often dressed up in terms of ideology. An undated document about a meeting between representatives of the MfS and members of the Palestinian PLFP stated:

The socialist GDR supports, in accordance with its possibilities, national liberation movements all over the world, and stands in solidarity at the side of the Palestinian people in their fight for assertion of their legitimate rights. The support of the Palestinian resistance is in line with the foreign policy activities of the GDR. It is an expression of active peace policy, proletarian internationalism and anti-imperialistic solidarity of the GDR with the national liberation movements.[39]

According to historian, John O. Koehler, Minister of State Security Mielke never used the word 'terrorism' when discussing the assistance for Arab groups organized by his subordinates:

The gist of the Stasi chief's talk was that the question of whether capitalism or socialism would achieve world supremacy would be decided in the Third World. Mielke described the Arab world as especially critical to the outcome of this epic struggle, and said that 'whoever controls the intelligence organizations of those countries will contribute decisively in the battle against imperialism'.[40]

Mielke's subordinate, Wolf, was closely involved in the implementation of this policy. In his memoirs, he described how his department established close contacts with the PLO's security branch soon after Arafat had visited the GDR in 1972. The PLO abandoned international terrorism in 1974, yet its operational capabilities profited from the assistance granted by the MfS:

In return for our aid and training, we hoped to get access to PLO information on American security, global strategy, and weaponry... Our service had little information to give the PLO in exchange... We did, however, give instruction. My senior officers were called in to give lectures on intelligence gathering and encoding and decoding, and to pass our experience of counterespionage techniques to Palestinian visitors. We of course guessed that this information might pass to terrorist commandos against Israel or their trainers.[41]

This 'trickle-down effect' indeed did occur: from the early 1970s, especially the Palestinian groups were at the forefront of international cooperation among left-wing groups and movements. Wadi Haddad's PLFP, who as mentioned received Soviet arms, had built extensive links with West German groups such as the RAF or the Revolutionary Cells, the Japanese Red Army, as well as with Basque and Irish separatists. Haddad provided his allies with training, hideouts, finances, and weapons – in return, for example, he enlisted West German and Japanese terrorists in his own operations on several occasions.[42] In early October 1978, even the PLO's own security service hosted a meeting of nine European, Latin American, and Japanese terror groups in a Yugoslav border town.[43] So,

when considering state sponsorship of terrorism, one has to include the active exchange among the groups themselves, which, of course, had been enabled beforehand, as the case of Wadi Haddad and his KGB connections exemplifies.

Owing to its key role in the whole process, the GDR became, in fact, a major basis for international terrorism. This is evident from a report that Major General Werner Irmler sent to Mielke in 1979. The document, where details of the activities of terrorists residing in the GDR were stated, was so sensitive that it was labelled 'only for personal information, return is requested'. Besides Mielke only seven other high-ranking officials got to read the material before it was discussed in a Politburo meeting chaired by Erich Honecker.[44] A key passage reads:

According to inside information, partly politically indeterminable forces of the Palestine national liberation movement, in alliance with anarcho-terrorist groups from Western countries are increasingly undertaking efforts to use the territory of the GDR as a logistical base and starting point for the execution of terrorist acts in Western Europe. The generous solidarity of the GDR with national liberation movements of the Arab people is seen as favourable for the planning and preparation of operations by these forces. The communication possibilities of the capital of the GDR are also taken into account.[45]

The report also details the agenda of terrorist groups such as the Organization of International Revolutionaries, led by Ilich Ramirez Sanchez, aka 'Carlos the Jackal', on East German soil:

Establishment of logistic bases in the capital of the GDR with involvement of GDR citizens; Arrangement of conspiratorial gatherings and meetings between citizens of various Arab states; Acceleration of travel activities of liaisons of the 'Carlos' group into the FGR (Federal German Republic) and other Western European countries as well as to West Berlin; Efforts for the acquisition of weapons, explosives, funds, and information; Agreements for an expansion of a conspirative 'revolutionary department'; Inspiring violent acts of the armed struggle as well as single actions, terrorist attacks and so on against the imperialistic policy of the US, the Zionists, and the clique around Sadat; Activating contacts to anarcho-terroristic forces in the FGR/West Berlin; Intentions to create operation centres in the SAR (Syrian Arabic Republic) via the capital of the GDR with involvement of the embassies of the USSR and the GDR in Syria.[46]

By providing such possibilities, countries like the GDR enabled comparatively small terrorists organizations like the one led by 'Carlos' to function in a way that served their own strategic interests.[47]

Another exemplary case is the ventures of the Palestinian terrorist Abu Nidal in Eastern Europe. Like 'Carlos', he served a number of different Arab regimes and also had a strong presence behind the Iron Curtain. In 1987, the MfS explored the relations of Abu Nidal's organization (also known as 'Fatah-RC') – in regard to the links with the Soviet Union, the report specified:

> For years the group has maintained unofficial contacts with the SU (Soviet Union), especially through the military attaché of the embassy in Damascus. Because of increasing pro-Soviet leanings of the group, these contacts have been intensified since 1984. Since then, the 'Fatah-RC' accepts special requests to acquire military equipment... Stable contacts to leading staff of the KGB headquarter are said to exist. Meetings take place in Warsaw, Sofia, Damascus and Tripoli. In these meetings, the current KGB residents are said to take part. Regular consultations are held with the second secretary of the USSR embassy in Tripoli.[48]

According to another document from 1986, the Abu Nidal group offered specific 'services' in order to establish its secret contacts:

> Providing political and military information about American military-political advance into Arab countries, Turkey, and Greece; acquisition of information, documentation, and blueprints of Western special and military equipment subject to the embargo; preparation of information on the structure and activities of the secret services of the US, England, France and others against Arab countries and the Arab national freedom movement, etc.; influencing other like-minded organisations to refrain from terrorist operations on the territory of socialist countries and against their representations in foreign countries.[49]

After his expulsion from Iraq to Syria in 1983, Abu Nidal indeed formed ties with Poland and the GDR, and in turn received intelligence and sabotage training. In 1984–85, the MfS organized three courses lasting several weeks for forty-one Abu Nidal cadres in East Berlin. Among the instructors were members of the Arbeitsgruppe des Minister (AGM) – the special forces of the MfS, who were experts in sabotage and behind enemy lines fighting techniques.[50] To fund his terrorist activities, Abu Nidal formed several export and import businesses. As the files of the MfS show, the secret services not only had detailed knowledge about those dealings, but tolerated it on their turf: Zibado Foreign Trade Consultants, a firm controlled by Abu Nidal, was based in the International Trade Center in East Berlin. It was active until at least the end of 1988. According to news reports, Zibado and its parent company SAS (operating from Warsaw), made an annual profit of 80 million dollars, mainly by selling Eastern European arms to Iran, Iraq, Libya, or the PLO.[51]

Case study: Austria as a victim of state-sponsored terrorism

The following section consists of a case study to clarify the nature of Cold War state-sponsored terrorism in detail: Abu Nidal attacked Austria on three occasions in 1981 and 1985. The terrorist offensive was exceptional in regard to the republic's history of political violence. The country had been relatively spared from terrorism because of the nature of its post-war system, which had been devised to provide maximum stability. Thus, to a large extent, terrorism was the work of foreign elements operating on Austrian soil and it was Palestinian terrorism that formed the single most virulent brand.[52]

The major reason for these terrorist strikes was Austria's active role in the Middle Eastern conflict, exemplified by the personal diplomacy of Chancellor Bruno Kreisky (1911–1990, in office: 1970–83). He argued strongly that terrorism could only be tackled if its root causes were addressed. In order to fight terror, the grievances causing it had to be removed as a form of prevention. To achieve this result, a legitimate political representation of the Palestinian cause had to be fostered, thereby rendering the rampant 'armed struggle' obsolete. Therefore Kreisky contributed to the international legitimization of the PLO and its chairman, Arafat. For example, in 1979, Kreisky hosted a widely reported meeting between Arafat and Willy Brandt, then chairman of the Socialist International (SI).[53]

The most important aim of Kreisky's preventive policy was, of course, security for Austria itself. The country's function as a transit point for Jewish emigration from the Eastern Bloc to Israel practically involved it in the Middle Eastern conflict. In 1981, Kreisky argued that because of his good relations with the PLO, Austria had been more or less spared by attacks in the past – despite the fact that extremist groups had a strong motive to attack and disrupt the transfer of Soviet Jews. In 1973, two Arab gunmen had entered a train with Jewish émigrés and took three people hostage. After long hours of negotiation, Kreisky granted them a plane to fly out of the country, leaving their hostages behind. Furthermore, restrictions were imposed on the transfer of Russian Jews by closing down a camp operated by the Jewish Agency. This move drew angry protests from Israel and throughout the West, but served its purpose of deflecting attention from the continuing emigration process. No further attacks against it occurred.[54]

But it was not possible to keep terrorism entirely away from Austria. The famous hostage-taking of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) ministers in 1975 had nothing to do with Austrian politics. The operation aimed to blackmail a ransom to arm the Palestinian resistance in Lebanon and according to some testimony, it was specifically 'ordered' by Qadhafi to increase the pressure for a higher oil price (which makes the OPEC hostage-taking a showcase for state-sponsored terrorism).

In 1981, Heinz Nittel, a high-ranking Viennese city official and Jewish representative, was murdered. A few months afterwards, the Viennese synagogue was assaulted by two Arab gunmen who killed two worshippers and wounded twenty-two others. The worst attack took place on 27 December 1985: three terrorists attacked the El Al counter at Vienna airport with grenades and assault rifles. Three bystanders were killed and thirty-nine wounded.

As mentioned, Abu Nidal was responsible for all three plots. Besides Austria, he also targeted other Western European countries with pro-Palestinian leanings and who supported the PLO. From 1969 until 1974, Abu Nidal himself had been a high-ranking PLO representative in Sudan and Iraq. But soon he became a focal point for the 'rejectionists', a coalition formed by radical Palestinian factions that were aiming to undermine Yasser Arafat's claim to PLO leadership and faithful to the original programme that had elevated armed struggle to 'the one and only way to liberate Palestine'. With Arafat's famous 'gun and olive branch' speech in front of the United Nations (1974) that marked the beginning of the political transformation of the PLO, the split was final. From then on, Abu Nidal waged a merciless shadow war against moderates within the PLO and had its most active proponents assassinated.[55]

This struggle also had an international front, since Abu Nidal wanted to weaken Arafat by undercutting supporters in the West. This effort was in line with the interests of his sponsors. In the beginning, Abu Nidal had been allied to Iraq, which used his organization to target both Jordan and Syria. In 1983, he was able to establish offices in Damascus, despite the fact that his group had tried to kill high-ranking officials only years before. Commissioning Abu Nidal offered president Hafez al-Assad and his intelligence services certain advantages. Starting in the late 1970s, Assad pursued a regional strategy to become the dominant strongman in the Levant area and achieve a 'comprehensive strategic balance' with Israel.[56] To achieve this goal, Assad was eager to control 'all the Arab variables in the battle against Israel', as political analyst Patrick Seale put it. The Syrian President therefore strove to keep the PLO under his influence, to force neighbours like Jordan from making separate settlements with Israel, and deter interferences from the outside.[57]

By engaging in the dynamics of the Middle Eastern conflict and by supporting Arafat and the moderates inside the PLO, Kreisky had antagonized both the radicals and their sponsors, who, in turn, targeted Austria. On 24 September 1981, only weeks after the attack on the Viennese synagogue, the CIA reported: 'Syrians are encouraging Fatah dissident Abu Nidal to stage terrorist operations to discredit Arafat and undermine his policy of limiting such operations to Israel and the Israeli-occupied territories... They are determined to bring the PLO under Syrian control'.[58] So, when MfS-handlers questioned a source in 1981 about Abu Nidal's motive for assassinating Heinz Nittel, the informant pointed to the 'relatively

stable links' between Arafat and Kreisky for a solution to the 'Middle Eastern problem'. The source continued to explain:

> Since Abu Nidal is against a political settlement of the Palestinian problem, he obviously wanted to demonstrate to Arafat that by murdering Heinz Nittel, his group would not stand idle when compromises with the US or other imperialistic nations are made.[59]

Another MfS-report from the same year stressed Syria's role behind the scene:

> It is said that Syria is not interested in a solution of the Palestine problem or in the conclusion of a peace treaty should it not have a leading role. For this reason, Abu Nidal is supported by Syria. The murder of Nittel is described as a warning for Kreisky to abandon his mediator role between Israel and the PLO.[60]

But Abu Nidal also had his own reason for targeting Austria: in the wake of the attacks of 1981, three members of his organization had been arrested, among them a high-ranking 'officer'. The group wanted to liberate him at all costs. It was Kreisky himself who authorized secret negotiations on the prisoner's fate in 1982. When those talks stalled, the terrorists subsequently attacked the Vienna airport in 1985. 'Abu Nidal is known to retaliate against those governments that imprison his members', a CIA paper concluded only days after the assault and emphasized: 'Both Italy and Austria are now holding three group members each. Senior officials of the Abu Nidal group last week held discussions with Austrian officials about the early release of its prisoners'.[61] Kreisky had already left office in 1983, but less than two weeks before the terrorist strike, he had tried to defuse the growing danger by utilizing his personal contact with Libyan leader Qadhafi. A trusted official was sent on a last minute mission to Tripoli to appeal to Qadhafi to discourage Abu Nidal from threatening Austria. The Libyan leader agreed to do just that, but eleven days later the attack nevertheless did take place. Afterwards Kreisky received an apology – the Libyans had been unable to contact the terrorists, who operated out of a military base in Syrian controlled Lebanon, in time.[62]

In order to prevent further bloodshed, a deal was struck. In 1988, the chief of the Austrian state police secretly met with an Abu Nidal representative at Orly airport in Paris. It was agreed that the group would not target Austria again. In return, their emissaries were allowed to visit the imprisoned 'officer' and to occupy an apartment in Vienna. By allowing such a presence in the capital, the Austrian authorities managed to postpone the pressing issue of an early release of the prisoner. He was a free man by 1995, after serving two-thirds of his jail term. At that time, the base in Vienna no longer existed – aided by a foreign intelligence service, it had kept

operating under surveillance until 1993. Despite the high risks involved, there was no further act of Palestinian terrorism in Austria. By that time, Kreisky's successors had already abandoned the former highly visible role in international affairs and instead concentrated on joining the European Union. In part, this was also a result of the public's growing concern about terrorism after the wave of attacks in the early 1980s.[63]

To sum up, the example of Palestinian terrorism in Austria demonstrates the complicated nature of state-sponsored terrorism. The country got into the cross-hairs because of its prominent role in the early stages of the political transformation of the PLO. For different reasons, this drew the ire of both Syria and Abu Nidal – the latter responded with acts of terrorism that were in part funded and supported by Assad's intelligence services. In addition to the shared interest of disrupting Austrian policies in the Middle East and weakening Arafat, Abu Nidal also pursued his own goals, and by keeping up the pressure even reached a form of understanding with the Austrian authorities.

Conclusion

In 2010, Olivier Assayas presented his epic film *Carlos*, a biography of Ilich Ramirez Sanchez. According to the director, a key element in the film was the depiction of Cold War terrorism as a form of dirty warfare orchestrated and commissioned by states: 'Terrorism is about one state sending a message to another. Usually you never know who is sending a message to whom, it only surfaces years later'.[64] Assayas may have neglected the role of political and social preconditions for terrorism, but his main thesis is correct: without state support and international cooperation among the groups themselves, 1970s and 1980s terrorists would most certainly not have been as effective and operational as they were.

Compared with contemporary political violence, terrorists like 'Carlos' or Abu Nidal seem to belong to a different age. Back then, terrorist groups were thoroughly militarily organized, operated out of fixed bases, and had a chain of command with one almighty leader at the top. Contemporary radical Islamist terrorism does not need state sponsors any more. On the contrary, it flourishes in failed states, is mainly funded by private individuals, and constitutes a highly flexible network with flat hierarchies. No matter how confusing and destructive Cold War terrorism proved to be, it served political aims and interests. Radical Islamist terrorists, on the other hand, do not pursue a similar clear agenda. The death toll also differs. Spectacular suicide attacks began to set in during Lebanon's civil war during the early 1980s, but remained exceptional. Mainly, the violence inflicted by Cold War terrorists was limited and applied in close relation to the desired results. Today's terrorism targets the public at large for maximum impact, while the perpetrators are no longer constrained by the risk of alienating supporters or sponsors.

The main difference is that the 'old terrorism' cannot be separated from the general framework of the Cold War. The conflict between East and West contributed greatly to the surge in terrorist activity during the 1970s and 1980s. The superpower rivalry provided ample opportunity for terrorist surrogates – they benefited from financial and logistical support, as well as training and other resources. As a quid pro quo, the terrorists served the strategic agenda of their sponsors, but they were not simple heelers. They also pursued their own objectives and kept their independence, trying to make the most out of these partnerships of convenience. The hosts were prepared to drop their uncertain allies at any moment – as long as they functioned according to foreign and internal policy priorities. Similarly, the terrorists proved to be an unreliable lot, always looking for new possibilities and alliances.

Finally, the example of Palestinian terrorism against Austria has shown in detail that terrorism was a form of secret policy during the Cold War, a coercive diplomacy by dirty means. The long list of bloody events can not be understood properly if the hidden political aspects are not taken into account. On the whole, there is need for further research into this grey area, so that the memory of Cold War terrorism incorporates the critical structures facilitating and sustaining the 'years of lead'.

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8 The hijacking of TWA-847

A strategic analysis

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Introduction

The hijacking of flight TWA-847, on 14 June 1985, created a crisis of the first order for the Reagan administration and had a dramatic impact on future policy. An analysis of the event, including the administration's approach and the actions and motives of the sponsors and participants, offers important lessons for possible crisis-situation negotiators today.

The event seemed straightforward enough. Two Lebanese men hijacked the airliner after it left Athens headed for Rome and forced Captain John Testrake to divert from his scheduled destination to Beirut. From Beirut, they flew to Algiers, then back to Beirut. From Beirut they flew to Algiers a second time, then finally back to Beirut where a prolonged negotiation spanning over two weeks took place. The crisis was resolved by a swap of the passengers for over seven hundred Israeli-held prisoners.

The conventional wisdom, expressed in the works of Wills, Martin and Wolcott, and Woodward, holds that the hijack was sponsored by Syria and Iran and carried out by Iran's surrogate in Lebanon, Hezbollah.[1] These authors saw no motive beyond the use of a terrorist act to gain the release of incarcerated comrades. A close look at events, however, makes clear that these assumptions were incorrect and yields a much different interpretation of the hijacking as a supremely political act and offers lessons to those who might face a similar situation today.

A reconstruction of the crisis will demonstrate that Moscow and Qadaffi, not Syria and Iran, were the sponsors of the hijacking, and Imad Mugniyeh, not Hezbollah, was the perpetrator. In fact, Hafez Assad of Syria and Ayatollah Rafsanjani of Iran played critical roles in resolving the crisis both directly and through their surrogates in Lebanon, the Amal and Hezbollah.

A strategic perspective is an essential starting point. The fall of the shah and the resulting Iran–Iraq war offered Moscow an historic opportunity to draw Iran into its orbit. But the great opportunity appeared to be fleeting as President Reagan, starting his second term, expressly sought to re-establish relations with Iran. Moreover, Iran was receptive, hoping to