

*Refocusing Analytic Priorities***Terrorism Analysis in the CIA:
The Gradual Awakening (1972-80)**

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As Central Intelligence Agency contract historian [redacted] notes in the following, CIA and Intelligence Community (IC) analysts have touched on the subject of terrorism virtually since 1947. The evolution of the effort into its current intensity and bureaucratic framework was slow, taking place episodically over decades. [redacted] study examines the early phases of this evolution within CIA, ending just before the controversial terrorism estimate penned under DCI William Casey's management in 1981. [redacted] does not address the evolution of terrorism analysis elsewhere in the IC, a fit subject for more work. —ed. [redacted]

Scholars have long debated the exact definition of terrorism, but all agree that international terrorism was around long before the National Security Act of 1947 gave birth to the CIA. Thus, in one sense terrorism analysis in CIA is as old as the agency itself. When international terrorist incidents of consequence for American interests unfolded, analysts wrote about them. As then-Deputy Director of Central Intelligence (DDCI) E. Henry "Hank" Knoche told the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (SSCI)

in 1976, the Agency had been attempting since the early 1950s "to sort out and monitor" the activities of insurrectionary groups that formed the basis for later terrorist groups.¹ [redacted]

The Office of Current Intelligence (OCI) in the Directorate of Intelligence (DI) occasionally wrote an intelligence memorandum or something shorter on terrorism issues, such as recurrent terrorist incidents in Guatemala, Venezuela, Algeria, Yemen or Israel.² But the Agency and the IC as a whole did not think of themselves as being in the business of collecting intelligence on and analyzing international terrorism so much as tracking and analyzing individual revolutionary movements and terrorist incidents. Consequently, the analysis of international terrorism—at least as a major preoccupation of the Agency—is a more recent and gradual development. [redacted]

Perceptions in the United States of the international terrorist threat reached a turning point in the late 1960s and the 1970s. The change was evolutionary and flowed from several concurrent developments. First, in these years there was a substantial increase in the number of active terrorist groups, and these

All statements of fact, opinion, or analysis expressed in this article are those of the author. Nothing in the article should be construed as asserting or implying US government endorsement of its factual statements and interpretations.

~~SECRET~~//20320301*Growth of a Discipline*

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groups committed an increasing number of international terrorist attacks. These terrorists operated in more countries than before, particularly in areas of vital interest to the United States. [redacted]

International terrorism began to emerge as a global phenomenon, with various ideological orientations and goals. In the Middle East, especially following the Six-Day War in 1967, terrorist movements took root among the Palestinians, but such groups also proliferated in Latin America, and incidents became increasingly common in urban centers in West Germany, Italy and Japan. Moreover, terrorists appeared to increase their interaction and cooperation across international lines, and their actions became bolder and more dramatic. In addition, it was apparent that Americans had become prime targets.³ [redacted]

Finally, in contrast to 19th century revolutionaries, who tended to confine their violent acts to their own country, foreign operations by terrorist groups in the late 1960s and the 1970s became more common. As Walter Laqueur notes in *A History of Terrorism*, beginning in the 1960s, "Palestinians would operate in Paraguay or France; Japanese terrorists in Kuwait, Israel, and Holland; Germans in Sweden or Uganda."⁴ The consequence of these diverse factors was a growing awareness among policymakers and IC leaders of

the terrorist threat to US interests and of the need for intelligence and analysis from the CIA. [redacted]

From Truman to Nixon [redacted]

Terrorism as a topic lacked major significance for the CIA—and the US government—during the first quarter-century of the Agency's existence. The National Security Council (NSC), the IC, and the Agency's operations and analytic directorates were in harmony in assigning a relatively low priority to terrorism.⁵ The summaries of the topics covered during Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) meetings with President Lyndon Johnson at the White House in 1965 are one of many barometers that point to the topic's relative lack of importance: there was no mention of the subject.⁶ [redacted]

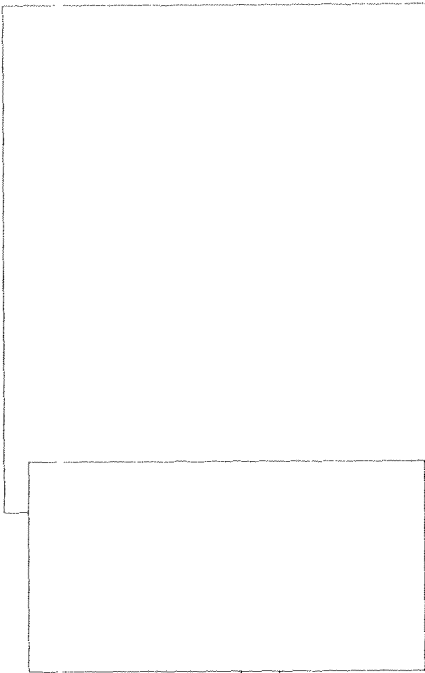
The Agency was under no apparent pressure to focus on terrorism from another body that helped guide Agency collection

and analysis, the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board (PFIAB). Neither the Agency's annual report to that body in July 1968, to cite one example, nor the CIA file of correspondence with PFIAB at same time give any hint that terrorism was a topic of keen interest.⁶ [redacted]

Another strong indicator of policymaker indifference was the lack of any enduring cabinet-level body, such as was later created, to concentrate on international terrorism and the management of crises. [redacted]

Agency and IC analysts, of course, occasionally produced major papers on aspects of terrorism, often in response to special requests, but such studies were relative rarities. The Office of National Estimates, for example, in 1968 published a special national intelligence estimate (SNIE), *Terrorism and Internal Security in Israel and Jordan*, that dwelt in some detail on long-lasting issues of terrorism in the Middle East, including state-sponsorship and prospects for an end to violence.^{6a} [redacted]

⁶ Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul H. Nitze requested the estimate, which became a joint effort of CIA, the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) at the State Department, the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), and the National Security Agency (NSA).



Still, the strongest candidate for a point of origin of the Agency's counterterrorism effort is September 1972. Terrorist incidents dramatically grew in number that year, double the number for 1971. The incidents resulted in 157 persons killed and 413 wounded, compared to 36 killed and 227 wounded the year before.¹⁰ And, on 5 and 6 September, Palestinian terrorists shocked the world by killing two Israeli participants at the Munich Olympic games in Germany and taking hostage nine others, all of whom later perished during a rescue attempt.

In addition, Nixon created a working group, also chaired by the State Department, to support the cabinet committee. The committee's responsibilities encompassed coordinating counterterrorism activities, including "the collection of intelligence worldwide."¹¹ Nixon made clear to the DCI that he wanted CIA's full cooperation: "I expect that you will be fully responsive to the requests of the Secretary of State and assist him in every way in his efforts to coordinate government-wide actions against terrorism."¹²

Increasing Policymaker Interest

No single day marks the point in time when terrorism became an object of CIA analysis and collection. The more than two-dozen airline hijackings of US and Latin American planes to Cuba that took place in 1968 (compared to 12 during 1961-67) and the initiation of Palestinian international terrorist activity that same year caused an increase in attention to the matter, but they did not result in sustained interest among policymakers or within the CIA, which, understandably, continued to focus on things that concerned its primary customers.

That event more than any other provided the impetus for getting the carriage of counterterrorism rolling throughout the US government's foreign affairs and security establishment. On 9 September, Secretary of State William P. Rogers sent DCI Richard M. Helms a letter in which he said that CIA had a "key role" to play in providing "accurate and timely information" about the terrorists. Moreover, he wrote, "We would find useful additional CIA analytical studies on terrorist organizations." Several days later, on 25 September, President Nixon took a major step toward institutionalizing a focus on terrorism in a memorandum to Secretary Rogers in which he authorized the establishment of a Cabinet Committee on Terrorism. The secretary of state chaired the committee, and the DCI was a member.

At last, the policymakers had politically powerful organizations to channel the efforts of intelligence organizations against terrorism. Nixon's action did not, of course, by itself transform the Agency's counterterrorism effort, but it provided a foundation upon which succeeding administrations could build. The Cabinet Committee on Terrorism and its various successors under other administrations, when combined with the intermittent terrorist attacks on Americans, US interests, and US allies secured the level of policymaker interest necessary to sustain at least a minimal operational and analytic effort in the CIA.

The Ford administration did not ignore terrorism, but neither did it emphasize it. During its last year in office, it modestly reinforced the importance of terrorism by including specific mention



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Growth of a Discipline

President Carter wanted the Special Coordination Committee to review policy and procedures for dealing with terrorist incidents.

of the collection and production of intelligence "on foreign aspects of international terrorist activities" as one of the CIA's responsibilities in Executive Order 11905 of 18 February 1976.¹³ [redacted]

The next significant sign of interest in intelligence on terrorism at the presidential level appeared the following year when, on 2 June, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs Zbigniew Brzezinski sent a presidential review memorandum on terrorism to the Special Coordination Committee (SCC), which included the Carter administration's top foreign affairs leaders.¹⁴ [redacted]

Brzezinski said the president wanted the SCC to review policy and procedures for dealing with terrorist incidents. He asked the SCC to consider "the adequacy of current capabilities for dealing with a spectrum of terrorist threats" and "recommendations on collection and dissemination of intelligence on terrorist activities."¹⁵ [redacted]

In the wake of this activity, on 16 September 1977, the Carter administration created a National Security Council (NSC) SCC Working Group on Terrorism.¹⁶ Brzezinski, on 20 October 1979, followed that action with a memorandum to the vice president; the secretaries of state, defense, transportation, and energy; the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the DCI in which he clarified the role

of the Working Group on Terrorism and its executive committee

[redacted]

The IC Gets the Message

[redacted]

During the 1970s, the Intelligence Community—and the Agency—came to appreciate that international terrorism was no longer an occasional occurrence and low-priority intelligence topic, but it did so slowly. Although PFIAB Chairman George W. Anderson had written DCI James R. Schlesinger on 15 March 1973 that his board "has a keen interest in our intelligence capabilities against international terrorism, and we intend to examine the subject in its manifold aspects," that message had little impact on overall priorities.¹⁸ [redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

By 1976, however, Agency leadership, particularly the DCI and his staff, had gotten the message that collection and production on international terrorism were priorities. As he was leaving his position of DCI in January 1976, Colby stated that "over the next decade, and probably over the next few years, governments such as ours are likely to find terrorism the most urgent, and least tractable, threat with which they have to cope."¹⁷ [redacted]

On 9 September of that year, the new DCI, George Bush, sent a memo to the principal members of the National Foreign Intelligence Board (NFIB), an advisory body composed of the heads of the IC organizations, stating that the secretary of state had "advised" him of the "urgency and magnitude of the international terrorism problem" and had asked for a strengthening of the "inter-departmental machinery" that dealt with this problem. []

Bush told the NFIB that the request meant that IC organizations had to focus on "the acquisition and prompt dissemination" of counterterrorism information. The intelligence collectors on terrorism were to ensure that their requirements were up to date, and the analytic organizations were to make sure that their information got "expeditious dissemination."²³ []



The first essential step toward improving the Agency's capabilities on terrorism was an increased collection effort by the Agency's clandestine service.

The DO in Charge []

Once the Nixon administration had laid the groundwork for focusing policymaker interest on terrorism, the first essential step toward improving the Agency's capabilities in the area was an increased collection effort by the Agency's clandestine service. In the fall of 1972 and beyond, the Directorate of Operations (DO) took the lead in establishing a counterterrorism program at CIA. []

The initial pressure to heighten the Agency's counterterrorism profile mostly affected the DO. This may have been because the White House and DCI Helms viewed terrorism as primarily an operational and collection problem and were less interested in Agency analysis of the problem. The DO responded with increased effort to counteract terrorists and to collect and organize intelligence on them. It apparently enjoyed some success, since the NSC and the State Department not long after praised its efforts. []

The fact that in 1972 the DO was first in the CIA to devote significant resources to battle terrorism had a lasting impact on CIA handling of terrorism responsibilities, including—in subtle ways—analysis of it. The policymaker focus on clandestine collection rather than CIA analysis may also have played a role in establishing DO dominance on terror-

ism and in persuading the DI to give it only modest attention. []

In any case, although OCI continued to produce analysis on terrorism after the events in Munich, the DI had no immediate organizational focus for terrorism, and without such an analytic organization, the DI to some extent left the field to the DO. Moreover, as the Director of the Office of Political Research (OPR) acknowledged in October 1976, his office did not cover terrorism "on a continuing basis," and he said, without expansion, that his office's current effort was limited mostly to preparing bibliographies and updating an earlier OPR publication.²⁹ The historical record offers no explicit justification for this relative inattentiveness to the issue. []

The net result, however, was that for the remainder of the 1970s, and even beyond, the DO, without challenge, became the dominant CIA element on terrorism. It was the DO that generally provided the CIA representation on task forces and working groups and often presented CIA views on terrorism. []

DO officers became the chief representatives of the DCI to the policy and intelligence communities. In August 1976, Lawrence S. Eagleburger, deputy under secretary for management at the State Department, asked DCI Bush to appoint someone to serve as a central point of contact at the Agency for intelligence matters

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Growth of a Discipline

The DO correctly saw itself in the mid-1970s as the dominant element on terrorism in the Agency, including playing an analytical role.

relating to terrorism. On 18 August, Bush wrote him to say that he was appointing Cord Meyer Jr., a former ADDO, to that position.³⁰ [redacted]

Soon after being named as the Agency point of contact, Meyer exercised his authority over all the offices actually or potentially engaged in research on the topic in the DI or the Directorate of Science and Technology (DS&T). These included OPR, the Office of Medical Services (OMS), the Office of Scientific Intelligence (OSI), the Office of Technical Services (OTS), and the Office of Research and Development (ORD). In a memo to the directors of those offices on 5 October 1976, Meyer asked each to give him descriptions of any existing research projects and any planned projects for which they had committed funds [redacted]

ment on terrorism in the Agency, including playing an important analytical role. [redacted]

In May 1979, DDCI Frank C. Carlucci issued Headquarters Notice HN 50-6, which made explicit the DO's dominant role in the field of terrorism:

The key organizational elements of the US government's program to combat terrorism are the Executive Committee and the Working Group on Terrorism, established under the NSC Special Coordination Committee. They meet regularly to formulate Government-wide policies and procedures for dealing with terrorism and to ensure smooth coordination among the thirty Federal departments and agencies having some concern with the problem. CIA's designated member on both the Executive Committee and the Working Group on Terrorism is [redacted]

As such, he is the Agency's principal representative and spokesman with other US gov-

ernment departments and agencies on terrorism matters.³³ [redacted]

DO dominance continued in other symbolically important ways, even ones involving the presentation of terrorism analysis to policymakers. For example, in June 1978, when CIA was scheduled to give an overview of international terrorism to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, it was [redacted] who substituted for the DDCI rather than someone from the DI—even though a DI terrorism analyst had prepared the draft testimony. [redacted]

In addition to its enhanced collection and its IC role, the DO put in place some of the information resources necessary for a more effective counterterrorism program. One of those was a tool for basic analysis and information sharing, the publication of the Agency's first serial publication on terrorism, the *Weekly Situation Report on International Terrorism (WSRIT)*. It made its debut in November 1972 to a limited readership. Its primary audience, according to its preface, was the CCCT and the Working Group supporting it. [redacted]

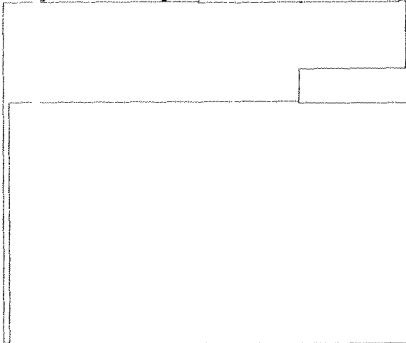
Which component of the DO had responsibility for the publication and how many people were involved are uncertain [redacted]

Until its transfer to the DI in October 1982 and its renaming as the *Terrorism Review*, the DO

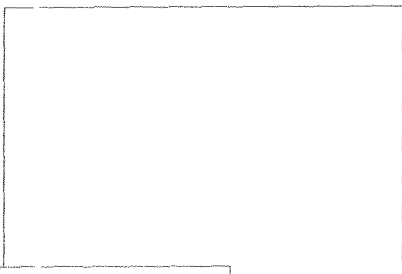
The DO correctly saw itself in the mid-1970s as the dominant ele-

retained full editorial control over the publication. [redacted]

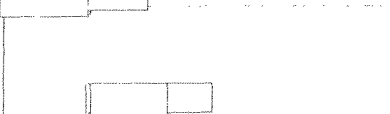
The initial issues contained brief reports on topics [redacted]



WSRIT clearly helped fill a gap, and customers—including some in the DI—welcomed its appearance. The ICS reported to the NSC that WSRIT “fills a real need for the blending of current and intermediate coverage.”³⁷ DI terrorism specialist [redacted] [redacted] four years after WSRIT’s initiation, characterized it as “the single most useful source of material on terrorism.” [redacted]



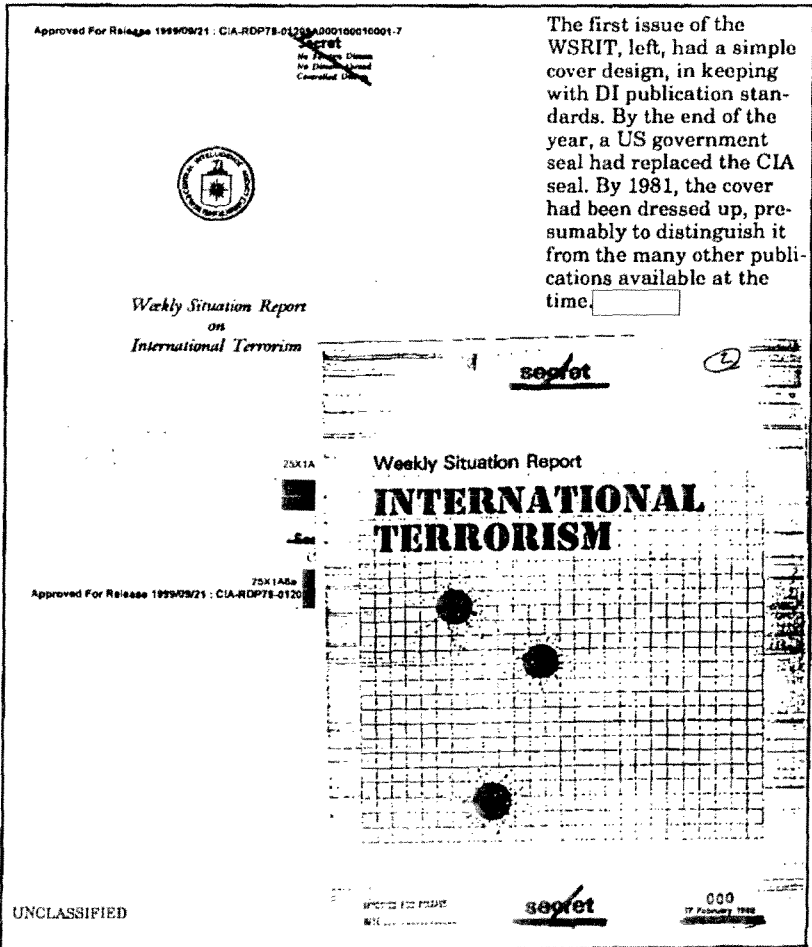
The publication itself contains no information identifying its origins except for the seal of the CIA.



The WSRIT’s adopted a format that was compatible with a DI style, doing both reporting and analysis.

The DI and DO probably did not recognize at the start that WSRIT could best be done in the DI, but gradually the notion must have become apparent, especially as DI analysts began to make contributions to it.³⁹ Its creators immediately adopted a format that was compatible with a DI style, doing both reporting and analysis, and distinguishing the latter from the former by enclosing it in parentheses and preceding it with the underlined

word “Comment.” The ICS in 1976 described WSRIT in terms appropriate to an analytic product. It said it was a publication that “details current terrorist activities and usually provides the only follow-up analyses and perspectives of terrorist actions on a continuing basis.” [redacted]



The first issue of the WSRIT, left, had a simple cover design, in keeping with DI publication standards. By the end of the year, a US government seal had replaced the CIA seal. By 1981, the cover had been dressed up, presumably to distinguish it from the many other publications available at the time [redacted]

No single event marked a turning point in DI work on terrorism. An accumulation of factors most likely caused an increase in activity.

The DI's Emergence

The pressure to mount a more extensive terrorism analysis effort in the DI took hold more slowly, but it gradually increased in the first half of the 1970s as the number of terrorist incidents and the number of people wounded and killed remained at high levels compared to earlier years.

No single event marked a turning point for the DI in the way the Munich Olympics attack marked a transition for the DO. Instead, the heightened DI activity may have resulted from an accumulation of factors, among them the growing number of terrorist incidents—a substantial portion of which were directed against Americans—and increased policymaker and congressional interest.



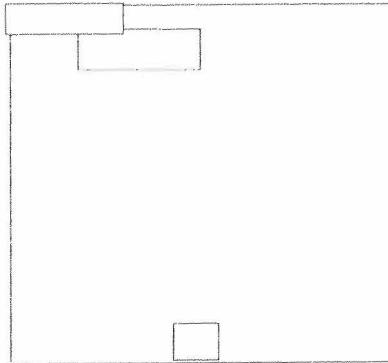
The program began [redacted] DI analysts. [redacted] located in the Office of Political Research (OPR).



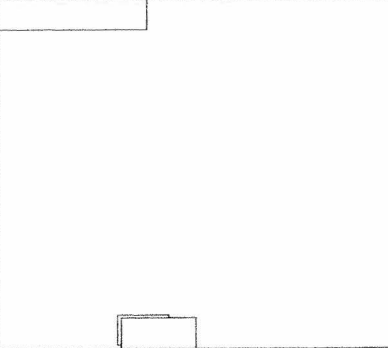
Their work focused on fundamental building blocks of analysis and depended at first on the work and concepts of academic scholars.



* In 1976 the DI abolished OPR and OCI and established the Office of Regional and Political Analysis (ORPA). In December 1979 the DI renamed it the Office of Political Analysis (OPA).

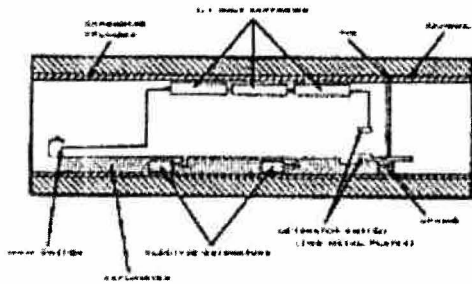


[redacted] analysts, concentrated on conceptualizing international terrorism and projecting its likely future development.



APPARATUS OF THE Mechanism

When the journal is unwrapped, the spring pushes the pin through the hole in the cardboard cylinder, thereby closing the detonator switch and setting off the explosive charge by means of the electric detonators.



An example of an operationally oriented article—details of an explosive device to be wrapped inside a journal—from a declassified, 1972 issue of the WSRIT.

Lacking agreement on the definition of terrorism in the scholarly community

he struggled to come up with his own definition. At the same time, sought to look into the future, and his prognostications were sometimes prescient. He asserted, for example, that state-sponsored terrorism "seems unlikely to pose much more of a threat to world order or

The evidence is mixed on whether the DI was satisfying customer requirements for analysis on international terrorism.

US interests in the decade ahead than it does today." The outlook for non-state sponsored terrorism, however, "is considerably less encouraging." [redacted]

Moreover, [redacted] raised the enduring threat of terrorist use of weapons of mass destruction, writing that while "the prospect of nuclear-armed terrorists can, in fact, no longer be dismissed," the difficulties of developing and using nuclear weapons "made it less probable than chemical, biological, and radiological agents of mass destruction." Looking into the future, he said that in coming years international terrorism could "evolve in ways that could pose a more substantial threat to US interests—and under certain circumstances, to world order—than in the recent past." [redacted]

[redacted]

The DI issued *International Terrorism in 1976* in both classified and unclassified versions and gave it broad circulation, send-

ing it to eight congressional committees plus selected members of Congress. Moreover, the Agency sent copies of the unclassified version to the State Department for circulation to US corporations with overseas operations and to the Library of Congress for distribution to the general public. Friendly foreign intelligence services also received copies. [redacted]

[redacted]

Overall, however, the DI moved cautiously in expanding its counterterrorism effort [redacted]

[redacted]

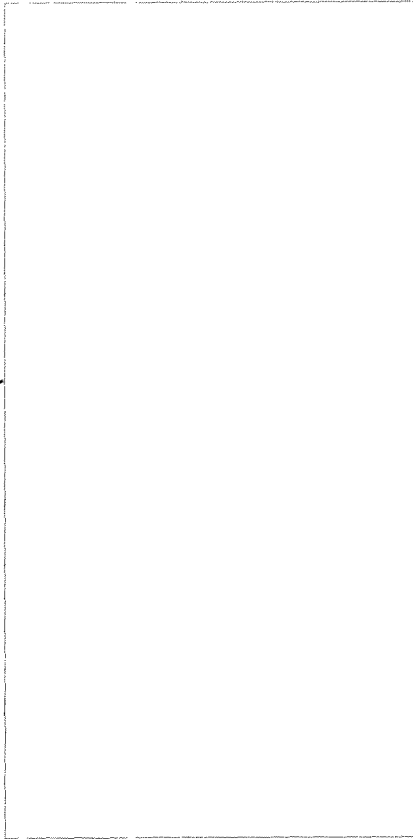
The evidence is mixed on whether the DI was satisfying customer requirements for analyses on international terrorism, but it tilts in the direction of suggesting that customer needs and expectations were going unfulfilled. On the one hand, although the ICS told the NSC in December 1976 that the number of reports produced by the IC for consumers concerned with terrorism was "modest" and that "longer term analysis of terrorism is not yet adequate," it asserted that the reports produced, including the DO's *WSRIT*, were "well-received."⁵⁰

[redacted]

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Growth of a Discipline

Analysts on terrorism quickly came to appreciate the difficulty of the analytical problem.

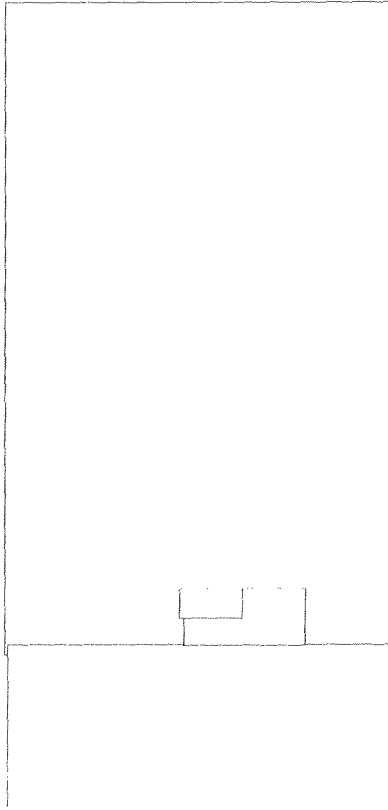


ogy." [redacted]
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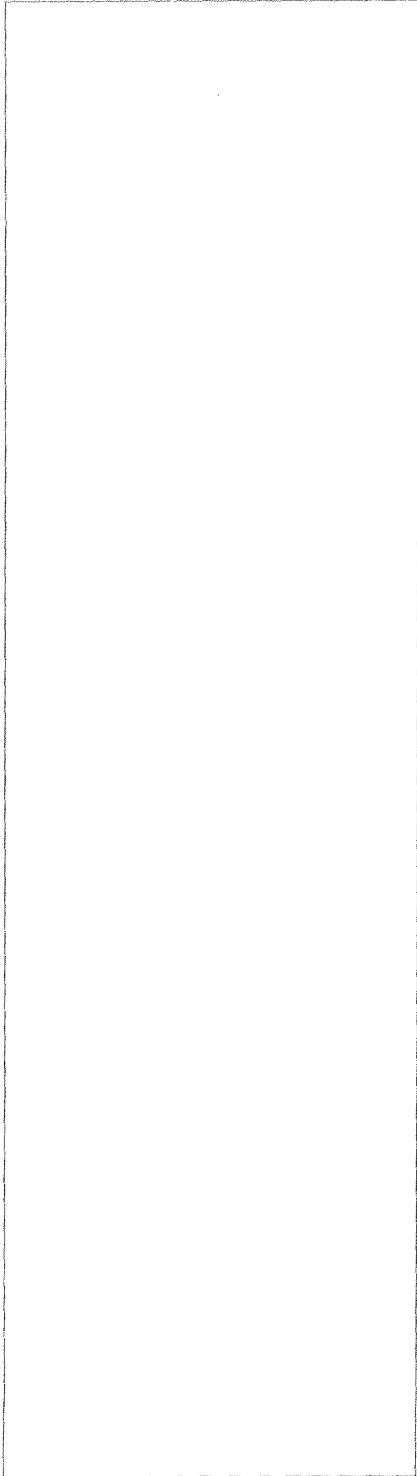
Early Analytical Challenges

[redacted]

The developmental path of terrorism analysis was anything but easy. The difficulties came from the nature of the topic itself, and the paucity of resources devoted to it. [redacted]



The increase of [redacted] staffing the DI suggested hardly seemed adequate to meet this level of production. Still, little by little—and apparently more quickly than other analytic organizations in the IC—the DI began to work more concertedly on terrorism, even if it was not commonly viewed as an area around which to build an analytic career. As [redacted] a manager of terrorism analysis in the 1980s, wrote, until the mid 1970s, terrorism among analysts "was commonly regarded as largely the province of . . . researchers in abnormal psychol-



[redacted]

At this stage, analysts also were generally unfamiliar with problems like terrorism and uncertain how to approach them. As one prominent counterterrorism analyst and manager wrote recently:

The transnational problems of terrorism, trafficking in narcotics, proliferation of advanced weapons, and organized crime . . . presented qualitatively different intelligence challenges from the issues associated with the Cold War, Vietnam, or wars in the Balkans or the Middle East. The kind of "wars" involving transnational threats are not fought against a single arch-enemy, do not have identifiable front lines, and seldom have clear beginnings and ends.

[redacted]

In addition, the IC had difficulty organizing itself to handle terrorism. [redacted] the community's overall program was "a fragmented effort, neither tightly organized nor closely coordinated in either its collection or analytical aspects." [redacted]

Ready for Prime Time? Not Quite [redacted]

The formative period for terrorism analysis—during which the latter rarely occupied the limelight—drew to a close with the end of the Carter administration. Terrorist incidents contin-

The Agency and its analysts were unprepared for the dramatic elevation in the priority of the counterterrorism effort that came with the arrival of President Reagan and DCI Casey.

ued to demonstrate the worldwide nature of terrorism and its diverse origins—from radical leftists, right-wing nationalists, various strains of separatists, and a mixture of Islamic militants. [redacted]

Major terrorist incidents during the last 14 months of President Carter's term included the seizure of the Grand Mosque in Mecca by Islamic terrorists on 20 November 1979, with the death of about 250 people; the assassination by right-wing militants of the Roman Catholic archbishop of El Salvador in March 1980; the death of 84 people in Bologna, Italy, as a result of a right-wing terrorist group bombing at a railway station on 2 August; and a Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) bombing of a hotel in Nairobi, Kenya, on 31 December. Over the 13-year period from 1968 to 1980, attacks against Americans were a major aspect of international terrorism, resulting in American casualties in more than 50 countries, with 140 different terrorist groups claiming responsibility.⁶⁰ [redacted]

In the face of this onslaught, terrorism analysis per se had earned a place as a priority topic, but only barely. It was still mostly a stepchild to the major emphases within the DI and the DO, which continued to be, first of all, the Soviet Union and its allies. [redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

The consequence of this relatively low level of activity and effort in collection and production was that the Agency and its analysts were unprepared for the dramatic elevation in the priority of the effort that came with the inauguration of President Ronald Reagan and the appointment of Alexander Haig as secretary of state and William J. Casey as DCI in 1981. This elevated priority, combined with the propensity of the White House to see the Soviet Union's hand behind international terrorism, imposed a sudden demand for more terrorism analysis to answer administration requests and to bolster new policies and positions. It was a combination that would produce extraordinary turbulence for the DI and ultimately contribute to pressure to form a Counterterrorist Center in 1986. [redacted]

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