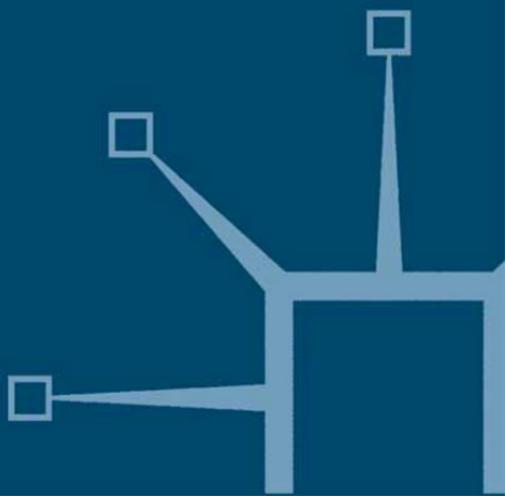


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The West's Road to 9/11

Resisting, Appeasing and Encouraging
Terrorism since 1970

David Carlton



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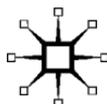
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Resisting, Appeasing and Encouraging Terrorism since 1970

David Carlton

Senior Lecturer in International Studies, University of Warwick

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List of Abbreviations

AIG	Afghan Interim Government (1989)
ANC	African National Congress (South Africa)
BR	Brigate Rosse or Red Brigades (Italy)
CBRN	Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Weapons
CDU	Christian Democratic Union (Federal Germany)
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency (US)
CSU	Christian Social Union (Federal Germany)
DC	Christian Democrats (Italy)
DLK	Democratic League of Kosovo
DTRA	Defense Threat Reduction Agency (US)
EC	European Community
EEC	European Economic Community
EPG	Eminent Persons Group (Southern Africa)
ETA	Euskadi Ta Askatasuna or Basque Homeland and Freedom
EU	European Union
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation (US)
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office (UK)
FMNL	Farabundo Marti National Liberation (El Salvador)
G8	Group of Eight
GIA	Groupe Islamique Armée (Algeria)
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IISS	International Institute for Strategic Studies
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INLA	Irish National Liberation Army
IRA	[Provisional] Irish Republican Army
ISI	Interservice intelligence (Pakistan)
ISODARCO	International School for Disarmament and Research on Conflicts
KFOR	Kosovo Force
KLA	Kosovo Liberation Army
KPD	German Communist Party
MNF	Multinational Force (Lebanon)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NSC	National Security Council (US)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PAC	Pan-African Congress (South Africa)

PCI	Italian Communist Party
PFLP	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine
PFLP-GC	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organisation
RAF	Rote Armee Fraktion or Red Army Faction (Federal Germany)
RENAMO	Resistencia Nacional Mozambicana
SPD	Social Democratic Party (Federal Germany)
UN	United Nations
UNITA	Uniao Nacional para a Independencia Total de Angola
UNOSOM	UN Operation in Somalia
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction
ZAPU	Zimbabwe African People's Union

Preface

I am grateful to the University of Warwick for granting me study leave during 2001–2002. I also wish to thank the staff of the Libraries of the University of Warwick, of the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House) and of the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS). And I am indebted to my editors, Alison Howson and Guy Edwards, for helpful suggestions.

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David Carlton
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Part One

Introduction

In September 1970 I was fortunate enough to be invited to the Twelfth Annual Conference of the Institute [now International Institute] for Strategic Studies (IISS), held that year in Evian, France. Many strategic analysts of distinction were present and formal papers were offered on the theme *Europe and America in the 1970s*.¹ Those I recall being present included Professor Klaus Knorr, Professor Albert Wohlstetter, US Senator Charles Mathias, Dr. Theodor Sommer of *Die Zeit*, M. Michel Tatu of *Le Monde* and Professor (now Sir) Michael Howard (who is one of my former teachers and who had most kindly nominated me for membership of the Institute a few years earlier). In the company I found at Evian I was thus very much a junior figure and was known, if at all, for a recently-published work on diplomatic history,² rather than for having achieved any distinction in strategic studies. So I was, I thought, expected to know my place. And on the whole I did not misbehave. But the Conference coincided with the first major international crisis involving terrorism and this made a deep and lasting impression on me. Just as in September 2001, several airliners were almost simultaneously hijacked, though on this occasion bargaining rather than suicide missions was the objective the terrorists had in view. Three (out of five) ended their journeys at Dawson's Field in Jordan, where 416 passengers were held hostage by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). Various Western Governments were ordered to release Palestinian prisoners or face the possible massacre of the hostages. This crisis was still unresolved when the IISS Conference ended on 13 September; but already negotiations had begun and the prospect of a PFLP triumph was in the air. It seemed to me, with all the assurance of youth, that this was a development of stupendous importance that absolutely cried out to be considered by a

gathering of some of the world's leading strategic analysts. But to my surprise, which I did not entirely conceal, the Conference's agenda was not modified and hence no formal discussion of the hostage crisis and appropriate governmental responses took place.

Of course on the social fringes of the Conference the topic was not ignored and I fear that I may have annoyed some of my elders by insisting privately that a resolute stand should be taken against the hijackers, no matter what the cost in passenger lives. And, I hasten to add, I would also have taken this line if the hijackers had been Israelis (or indeed had had any other ethnic or religious identity). For I had not then been converted to the merits of appeasement in general and of its supposedly most outrageous practitioner – something that happened to me during the next decade when I wrote a biography of Anthony Eden and found myself almost invariably won over by the cogent arguments, recorded in letters, diaries and government papers, of Neville Chamberlain.³ At all events, I found few in Evian in 1970 who were anxious to discuss the hostage crisis in a formal session or who would agree privately that to negotiate a deal with the PFLP would lead to long-run catastrophe at least for my generation if not theirs. Most of those with whom I spoke were clearly unimpressed by tired analogies with Munich and echoes from me of Winston Churchill's hyperbole about bitter cups being proffered to us year by year.⁴ I recall being asked by a distinguished American whether I would really allow hundreds of passengers to be slaughtered for a point of principle. What if, for example, a member of my own family had been aboard one of the airliners? What decision, he asked, would I take then? My reply was that in such a case the decision ought not to rest with me. He clearly thought that what he saw as my youthful ruthlessness and what I saw as my clarity of mind did me little credit. And I subsequently moved some way to sharing his point of view. For I see that as early as 1979 I wrote:

The doctrine that no state should ever negotiate with a substate actor...has indeed a majestic simplicity and, if it had been consistently applied, might have prevented contemporary urban terrorism becoming such a vogue. *But it is a counsel of perfection.*⁵

Yet the events of 11 September 2001 (9/11) have led me to wonder whether, after all, my youthful instincts in 1970 were sounder than my 'mature' realism of a decade later.

What I have never doubted since 1970, however, is that terrorism has the potential in the longer run to cause massive problems for gov-

ernments everywhere and that luminaries in the field of strategic studies could not therefore safely treat it as of little central importance. So I was much gratified when I discovered that the IISS Annual Conference of 2001 had been disrupted by terrorism in a way that the one of 1970 had not been. For by chance the 2001 Conference, which I regret to say that I myself did not seek to attend, met in Switzerland between 12 and 15 September. On this occasion the entire pre-planned agenda was scrapped and the 200 distinguished participants apparently did little else but discuss terrorism throughout the entire Conference.⁶ I would have been satisfied with half a day back in 1970.

The IISS did not of course entirely ignore terrorism between 1970 and 2001. But, for example, not a single one of its more than 150 excellent Adelphi Papers published during this period was devoted to terrorism as a global phenomenon – though inevitably some dealt with particular insurgencies as they affected individual countries or regions. And at least until the mid-1990s much the same could be said of issues of *Survival*, its quarterly journal. The IISS, in short, concentrated on other issues, many of them of particular interest to traditional strategic and military planners in NATO Governments, whose sympathisers among academics and opinion-formers are of course rather well represented in the IISS membership.⁷ It seems that to many of these people the subject of terrorism as a broad theme was simply uncongenial. One good reason may have been that no two informed people seemed able to agree about how to define it. Another may have been that some commentators already active in the field were unable to resist the temptation to predict, with perhaps more relish than did them credit, imminent catastrophe – analogous to the apocalyptic way some people had had of looking at the invention of nuclear weapons that had led Alastair Buchan, Michael Howard and others to found the IISS in 1958 as a forum for discussing the implications in a more nuanced and level-headed fashion. Again, many strategic thinkers may find it uncongenial to contemplate the problems posed by terrorists who rely in urban environments on the waging of asymmetric warfare in its most extreme form. In short, those who break all the normal rules may simply irritate and repel those analysts who hitherto have been primarily concerned with war, limited and unlimited, between major powers and, perhaps at the margins, with sub-state rural insurgencies and with appropriate counterinsurgency responses. Howard himself, for many years the IISS's President, may provide an interesting example of such fastidiousness. He has of course written extensively and with great distinction on many subjects related to military history and contemporary strategic studies. But, at least prior to 9/11, terror-

ism as a highly effective and often transnational 'weapon of the weak' was evidently not something he found it rewarding to contemplate as a possible sub-discipline of international relations. One of his few comments on the subject was in a book review:

[Terrorism is a] huge and ill-defined subject [that] has probably been responsible for more incompetent and unnecessary books than any other outside the field of sociology. It attracts phonies and amateurs as a candle attracts moths.⁸

Phonies and amateurs do indeed figure in a considerable part of the literature on terrorism. But could that in part be due to the fact that for so long not only the IISS but also, for example, the US Council on Foreign Relations, the United Kingdom's Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House) and most of the leading Western journals in the international relations field showed little sustained interest in filling the gap into which charlatans cheerfully stepped? But 9/11 has changed all that. For example, the IISS soon designated Jonathan Stevenson as Senior Fellow for Counter Terrorism; while Howard himself, late in his life, has sprung vigorously into action on terrorism and its impact, writing, with his usual clarity, in *Foreign Affairs*⁹ and even in a variety of newspapers. And of course every other relevant institute and journal has also responded in one way or another. But will future historians wonder why they appear for the most part to have been so far behind rather than ahead of developments?

Here again Howard's line may be illuminating. For his reaction to 9/11 was to acknowledge its great importance in that it changed the United States irrevocably but to deny that it was remotely foreseeable: 'The cause of all the trouble is of course 9/11 – that diabolical fluke, the odds against the success of which were almost astronomical, which transformed the mindset of the American people, much as had Pearl Harbor 60 years earlier.'¹⁰ From this it would appear to follow that he had not been at all shaken by the fact that in 1970 four airliners had been hijacked simultaneously; by the earlier attempt to topple the Twin Towers in 1993; by the sarin attack on the Tokyo subway system in 1995; and by the bombing in Oklahoma City, also in 1995. In this sense Howard may resemble the many people in 1914 who were stunned by Europe's tumble into all-out war and who afterwards, ignoring the earlier crises relating, for example, to Bosnia (1908) and Agadir (1911), offered such explanations as: '...if only Franz Ferdinand had taken a slightly different route through the streets of Sarajevo all

would have been well'. It is also possible, however, that they were right to focus only on the Archduke's assassination; or, alternatively that A. J. P. Taylor's later similarly reductionist line was correct when he claimed that Russian railway timetables drove a fatal mobilisation of the Great Powers that would otherwise not have occurred. Given the line I took in 1970, I myself am naturally now reluctant to embrace reductionism with respect to 9/11. All the same, in seeing no 'Gathering Storm' concerning terrorism, Howard may actually have been on sounder ground than any alarmists on the basis of such sketchy evidence as was then available. For those who forecast outlandishly apocalyptic events are rarely vindicated; and when they are, they may indeed be merely beneficiaries of a fluke. Certainly historians of the future will need to reflect on this perspective before condemning institutes like the IISS for decades of supposed myopia.

But even if the verdict on reductionism with respect to 9/11 should turn out to be generally negative, I myself am actually in a weak position to criticise the Western World's strategic studies and international affairs 'establishment' for its long neglect of terrorism. For although I may claim to have been prescient in 1970 in grasping how important the subject could become, I then did not devote as much of my time to it over the next three decades as I had once thought it deserved and thus threw away any chance I had to carve out a major niche for myself in this area before 9/11.

I did not, however, entirely forget about terrorism during the first decade after Dawson's Field. For example, I served as Associate Editor of *Terrorism: An International Journal* between 1977 and 1980. I was also partly instrumental in launching two international conferences that dealt with terrorism held in Italy in 1974 and 1978. The host on each occasion was the International School on Disarmament and Research on Conflicts (ISODARCO), whose Director, Carlo Schaerf, edited with me two resulting volumes which reflected the diversity of opinion on the subject already emerging among academic analysts.¹¹ And I helped to organise two academic conferences on the subject held in London in 1976 and 1977. The upshot was the publication in 1979 of a book entitled *Terrorism: Theory and Practice*. My co-editors were Yonah Alexander and Paul Wilkinson, who were both already on their way to being accepted as pre-eminent authorities on terrorism in the United States and the United Kingdom respectively.¹²

To this latter collection, moreover, I contributed an essay entitled 'The Future of Political Substate Violence', an attempt to ask where this phenomenon was heading in what remained of the Twentieth

Century. On revisiting it, I am struck as much by how myopic I was as by some examples of my having discerned trends correctly. For example, I did not anticipate the emergence of large numbers of terrorists willing to commit suicide – a development that has greatly complicated the task of counter-terrorist forces. Nor did I foresee the collapse of the Warsaw Pact or the dissolution and fragmentation of the Soviet Union. This meant that I took it as given that the international system would retain strong bipolar features that would militate against increasing cooperation among sovereign states against terrorism – an assumption that proved broadly correct for the 1980s but not for the years that have followed. I also greatly underrated the potential for what we now call ‘peace processes’. I contended ‘that it is impossible for states, particularly in the post-colonial era, to pursue policies that will, except in rare instances, remove many of the grievances, real or imagined, that motivate terrorists’. Exceptions that I envisaged were limited to developed states, for example by governments using readily-available funds to improve conditions in Higher Education in Italy or West Germany as a means of reducing the appeal of left-wing ideological terrorists lacking mass support. But peace processes in Northern Ireland and Sri Lanka have also had some impact, at least temporarily and maybe permanently, on insurgencies based on identity rather than ideology. And the peaceful handover of South Africa to the African National Congress (ANC) constituted an unambiguous triumph for negotiations between a ruling elite and a formidably strong group of former terrorists. Admittedly, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict looks more intractable. But even in this case a peace process of a kind flickers into life from time to time.

On the other hand, some of my other predictions were not so wide of the mark. In particular, I saw no likelihood that terrorism in general would diminish in importance. As I wrote: ‘...contrary to George Orwell’s expectations, many states, even those of the advanced Marxist-Leninist variety, are simply not proving able to maintain the degree of physical control over potentially violent dissenters, let alone exercise the total “thought control” on the scale necessary to guarantee that the threat of terrorism will fade away.’ At the same time I was sceptical about the prospect of terrorists at any early date engaging in apocalyptic mass slaughter. ‘We may indeed,’ I wrote, ‘enter a new Dark Age. But so far this seems to be an extremely remote possibility.’ And I forecast that ‘there will be many more nuclear-weapon states before a substate actor joins the club’. In the longer run, however, I saw growing vulnerabilities for the sovereign state, not least as ‘a

result of the growing use of computers'. And when I asked myself back in 1979 whether 'the terrorist scene will look much the same at, say, the turn of the century as it does now', I judged that 'no such conclusion can be safely drawn'. I contended:

...there is likely...to be a gradual, largely unplanned evolution in a direction that will make terrorism a problem of increasing seriousness to governments....First, the rapid evolution of technology and the increasing availability of sophisticated weaponry may put temptation in the way of terrorist movements that might never have consciously gone out of their way to escalate the levels of violence. Secondly, once a particular inhibition has gone, it will not be easily restored.¹³

Although I wrote little else about terrorism after 1979, I nevertheless kept in touch with the relevant, rather modest academic scene. During the 1980s, moreover, I was beginning to ask why so few Americans acknowledged that George Washington could be considered to be a terrorist; and why in Central America regimes in El Salvador and Guatemala were held by supporters of President Ronald Reagan to be victims of terrorism while Nicaragua was held by the same people to be wickedly resisting those noble freedom fighters, the Contras. I did not, on the other hand, throw my lot in either with, say, the radical Noam Chomsky, whose sympathies in Central America seemed to me to be the exact reverse of the Reaganites. Possibly I had reached the stage when I was bored by the predictable and by all those who seemed to me to embrace double standards in using the labels terrorism and terrorist. In addition, I had also become impatient with those who predicted the *imminent* emergence of catastrophic terrorism involving, for example, so-called Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). And it was in that spirit that at the University of Warwick during the 1990s I offered a course, initially available to both graduates and undergraduates, entitled 'Terrorism: The Growth of Politically-motivated Sub-state Violence since 1945'. But still I had no plans to write anything of substance about terrorism. Then came 9/11, which coincided with the beginning of a year of sabbatical leave granted by my University chiefs. So at last I was stimulated to concentrate my research time on the subject I had been following, with inexcusable fitfulness, since the days of Dawson's Field. This book is the result.

Mine is of course not the only work to explore the background to 9/11. But most others focus quite narrowly on al-Qaeda and on the

degree to which the Administrations of Bill Clinton and George W. Bush could be or could not be justly criticised for failing to take steps to prevent it from perpetrating 9/11. This approach seems to me to be far too circumscribed. Consider, for example, the celebrated *Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States* published in July 2004.¹⁴ The work of a bipartisan panel of ten experienced American politicians who had taken evidence from 1,200 witnesses in ten countries and had access to 2.5 million pages of documents, it went into great detail about the US Government's response to the threat from al-Qaeda during Clinton's second term. But it had little to say about the rising salience of terrorism in the international system generally or about the possibly portentous significance of the events in Oklahoma City and in the Tokyo subway system in 1995 that were not remotely linked to al-Qaeda or even Islam. Nor was there any verdict on the wider implications, for example, of the Clinton Administration's essentially friendly line towards the terrorists of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) in 1999. Such a blinkered approach seems all the more inadequate when we consider the response to 9/11 of the US Administration with the broad support of Congress. This was of course to declare a war not on al-Qaeda alone but at least rhetorically to attempt to lead a universal 'War on Terror'. The present work, by contrast, offers a longer-term perspective than is currently fashionable. It also presents a canvas that embraces the West as a whole rather than just the United States and examines many different terrorist groups rather than concentrating only on those with an Islamist connection.

I stated earlier that no two informed people seem able to agree about how to define terrorism. But readers are surely entitled to know what I have in mind when I employ this term. For me it is simply the use of *politically-motivated sub-state/non-state violence*. Motives and justifications are irrelevant to my definition. And so too are the precise methods used or the locations or the targets. In short, so-called guerrillas operating in non-state uniforms in rural areas and targeting only the armed forces of a sovereign state, like the rebels led by Washington against the British Crown, are for me terrorists no less and no more than snipers or bombers targeting civilians in an urban context.¹⁵ An attempted *coup d'état* involving bloodshed is also a terroristic event. But of course if the perpetrators are successful they cease to be terrorists – a point grasped long ago by Sir John Harrington when he wrote: 'Treason doth never prosper, what's the reason? For if it prosper none dare call it treason.' Sovereign states, on the other hand, cannot, according to my definition, commit acts of terrorism against their own citizens. They may of course

behave brutally and create a widespread climate of fear, as with the Committee of Public Safety in Revolutionary France (whose activities from my perspective were most unhelpfully called the Reign of Terror), the KGB and the Gestapo. But the perpetrators concerned, being employees of a state and operating within it, should not in my opinion be conflated definitionally with non-state actors – though they may be at least as worthy of condemnation from an ethical standpoint. I do, however, refer in the following pages to state-sponsors of terrorism. What I have in mind here is when sovereign states provide assistance *beyond their own borders*, to independent terrorist groups as, for example, when during the 1980s the United States provided Stinger missiles to Islamic terrorists seeking to overthrow Afghanistan's pro-Moscow regime (with which at the same time the United States had diplomatic relations). On the other hand, what on a strict view do not count as state-sponsorship of terrorism are the activities of state-employed irregulars operating in other countries as if they were genuine non-state terrorists when they actually are not. For example, during the early 1980s the Libyan Government sent its own personnel to assassinate individuals in Paris, Rome and London and these were widely seen as terrorist deeds – though in fact they were acts of low-intensity international warfare on Libya's part. Also excluded from my definition of terrorism would be violent deeds committed, with or without foreign support, during what I define as a genuine civil war – that is a conflict within a country where two functioning governments with identifiable capital cities come into existence, as in Spain during the late 1930s or in the United States during the 1860s. On this test neither Afghanistan nor Nicaragua nor El Salvador experienced a civil war during the 1980s. Instead, there was in each case a single widely-recognised government facing a serious terrorist insurgency backed to a greater or lesser extent by outside state-sponsors. Of course I am conscious that, as with any attempted definition of terrorism, grey areas remain. For example, how does one precisely define violence? And where does political motivation end and Mafia-style criminality begin? But I hope that readers will nevertheless conclude that I use the term 'terrorism', as I have here rather arbitrarily defined it, with a fair degree of consistency in the pages that follow.

Notes

- 1 The text of some of the presentations was later published. See Institute for Strategic Studies, *Europe and America in the 1970s: I: Between Detente and Confrontation*; and *II: Society and Power*, Adelphi Papers, nos 70 and 71, London, 1970.

- 2 David Carlton, *MacDonald versus Henderson: The Foreign Policy of the Second Labour Government*, London, 1970.
- 3 David Carlton, *Anthony Eden: A Biography*, London, 1981.
- 4 On 5 October 1938 Churchill said in the House of Commons in the aftermath of the Munich settlement in which Czechoslovakia had been dismembered: 'And do not suppose that this is the end. This is only the beginning of the reckoning. This is only the first sip, the first foretaste of a bitter cup which will be proffered to us year by year unless by a supreme recovery of moral health and martial vigour, we arise again and take our stand for freedom as in the olden time.' *Hansard*, vol. CCCIX, cols 359–74, 5 October 1938.
- 5 David Carlton, 'The Future of Political Substate Violence', in Yonah Alexander, David Carlton and Paul Wilkinson (eds), *Terrorism: Theory and Practice*, Boulder, Colorado, 1979, p. 219. Italics supplied.
- 6 International Institute for Strategic Studies, *Newsletter*, Winter 2001, p. 1.
- 7 Of course the IISS is independent of all governments and takes no official position on any issue. But its membership and its Council, especially during the Cold War era but also since, have tended to be dominated by friends of the West.
- 8 Quoted in Bruce Hoffman, 'Current Research on Terrorism and Low-Intensity Conflict', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, vol. XV, no. 1, 1992, p. 25.
- 9 Michael Howard, 'What's in a Name?: How to Fight Terrorism', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. LXXXI, no. 1, January/February 2002, pp. 8–13.
- 10 Michael Howard, 'The Bush Doctrine: It's a Brutal World, So Act Brutally', *The Sunday Times*, 23 March 2003.
- 11 David Carlton and Carlo Schaerf (eds), *International Terrorism and World Security*, London, 1975; and David Carlton and Carlo Schaerf (eds), *Contemporary Terror: Studies in Sub-State Violence*, London, 1981.
- 12 Alexander, Carlton and Wilkinson (eds), *Terrorism: Theory and Practice*.
- 13 Carlton, 'The Future of Political Substate Violence', pp. 201–30. My reference to a new Dark Age was prompted by the speculation of the Rand Corporation's Brian Jenkins, who had written in 1975: 'If governments cannot protect their citizens, as terrorists seem to be demonstrating will governments as we know them become obsolete? The historical growth of national governments in the first place depended in part on national leadership, often a monarch, being able to monopolize the means of organized violence. If the military-power relationships are altered drastically in favor of small groups that obey no government, will we enter an era of international warlordism in which the people of the world and their governments are subjected to the extortion demands of many small groups?' Brian M. Jenkins, 'International Terrorism: A New Mode of Conflict', in Carlton and Schaerf (eds), *International Terrorism and World Security*, p. 228. My recognition of the vulnerability of computers to terrorists derived from Bertil Häggmann, 'Slaves that threaten the Masters?', *Security World*, May 1977.
- 14 *Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States*, Washington, D.C., 2004.
- 15 A recent US Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, takes a different view on this point. In her memoirs she recalled that Middle Eastern leaders had