

The strategy of hijacking

How terrorists subvert technology to gain power

By Gordon Hilton

TERRORISM CAN be described as the controlled use of physical intimidation for political ends. There are basically three forms.

First, there is repressive terrorism, used by the state against its own people to control possible rebellious tendencies. Stalin added much to our knowledge of this. Second, there is defensive terrorism, used to maintain an existing order by a group within a society. The Ku Klux Klan used this form.

Finally, there is offensive terrorism. The most recent example was provided last week by the hijacking and ultimate destruction in Libya of a Japan Air Lines jumbo jet. In addition to acts by Palestinian guerrillas, the I. R. A. has been active in Northern Ireland. The aim of the terrorist in this situation is to create a perception of powerlessness and vulnerability within the enemy and its population.

TECHNOLOGY AND progress are constantly blamed for the ills of our complex societies. Environmental decay, psychological malaise, and general dehumanization have all been seen as resulting from technological ability. But it is becoming increasingly evident that the most severe disadvantage of technological prowess is that it renders society vulnerable to acts of terrorism.

Technology is a great leveler of opposing forces with disparate military might. It operates in two ways at the

same time; not only does it work to make the powerful vulnerable, but it also makes the weak more potentially dangerous.

One of the potential gains of terrorist acts is that they keep a particular cause constantly in the public eye. Modern communication technology, such as satellite television, aids in this process.

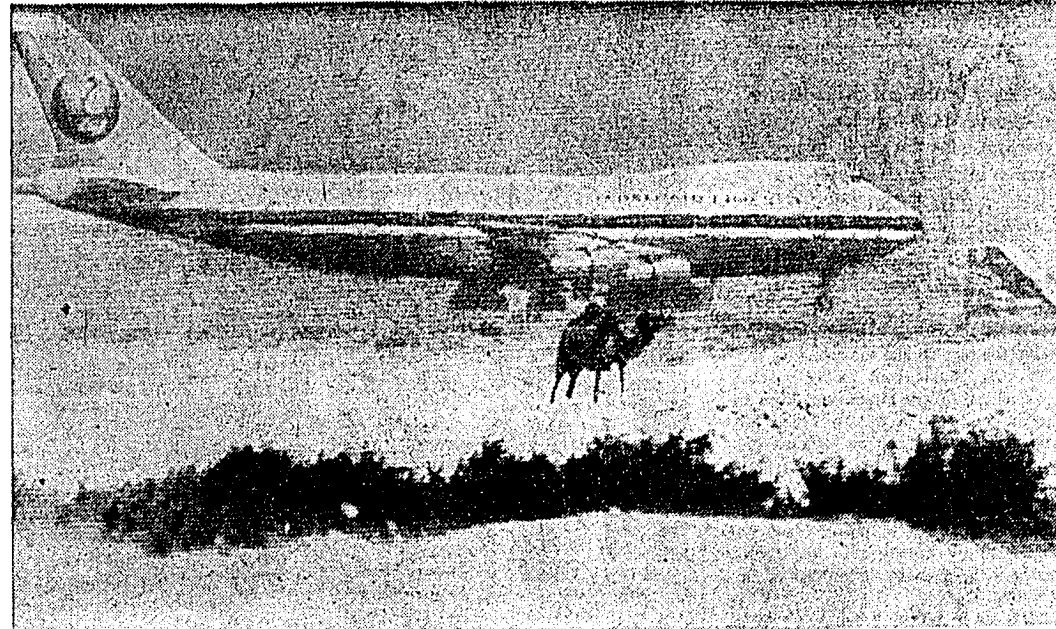
Military inferiority appears to be an essential condition for guerrilla group formation and subsequent terror tactics. Such military inferiority limits the number of strategies open to any group seeking to change society. Full-scale conventional warfare is impossible and they must depend upon manipulating the psychological state of the target nation, as well as systematically eliminating many of the important leaders.

Since a military inferiority produces terrorist acts, why then do those who have the superiority not use it to prevent such acts? After all, they have the power. Or do they?

SUPPOSE WE discard the usual definition of power and replace it by one which balances various amounts of uncertainty in situations. So let us define power as the ability to create uncertainty in the lives of other people.

Looking at the Munich Olympics tragedy, we can use this redefinition of power to explain the seeming powerlessness of the militarily mighty when confronted with terrorist actions.

The Palestinian guerrillas acted during the Olympic games and thus produced tremendous uncertainty in the West German government which was



At one point, last week's terrorists ordered their Boeing 747 to land in remote Dubai.

anxious to organize a successful and peaceful Olympics series. Added to this uncertainty was that accruing from the targets of the action, the Israeli team. For obvious reasons, the Germans were particularly vulnerable to this threat.

There was only a handful of guerrillas against the insuperable power of the German army and police force. The guerrillas effectively reduced the Germans' power by eliminating the maxi-

mum uncertainty in their own lives — they were prepared to die. Once the Germans were persuaded of this, their power was gone.

The Germans could have regained the power balance by convincing the guerrillas that they were unconcerned about the fate of the Israeli victims. But this was unlikely. The Germans' concern for the Israelis made them vulnerable.

The second strike capability of guerrillas is another consideration of a nation forced to deal with them. Germany was very aware that if it forced the deaths of the Palestinian guerrillas in Munich, it would not be long before another group would enter Germany and perhaps put German nationals at risk. And, indeed, this happened when another group hijacked a Lufthansa jet-

liner to Zagreb and forced the release of all Palestinians arrested in Germany after Munich.

TERRORISM IS relatively cheap and very effective. No nation wants to become a constant target for such acts.

There will come a time when the government of the target nation is perceived as either overacting with repressive measures or underacting and being regarded as weak. This will produce a feeling of crisis within the target population. The social fluidity created can only work for the guerrilla group.

But, can terrorism be combatted? I would answer probably not—if defensive measures only are taken. It is just far too costly to make every U. S. diplomat secure, for example. Perhaps if nations take offensive action such as the penetration of the various groups this might blunt the attack.

BUT ONE of the most effective moves might be to look into the conditions which cause such groups to form. It's got to be more than coincidence that so many of the Palestinian guerrillas so far captured or killed were born and raised in refugee camps.

As long as we dismiss terrorists as psychotic killers and render analysis of their actions entirely to the hands of psychologists and psychiatrists, we are absolved of the obligation of searching to find the causes of this form of activity.

Guerrillas who perpetrate acts of terrorism are not necessarily insane. And if we were to look, as the United Nations recently suggested, into the justifications they themselves give for their actions, we might learn something.