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Research Note: Hypotheses About Political Terrorism During the Gulf Conflict, 1990–1991

JEFFREY IAN ROSS

Based on a review of the literature and a logical deductive approach, the author develops 12 testable research hypotheses in connection with the possibility of oppositional political terrorism during the 1990–91 Gulf Crisis and War. The article represents the foundation of future research on one of most important anomalies of this political crisis.

The Persian Gulf Crisis and War of 1990–91, hereafter the Gulf Conflict, is one of the most complicated recent political events to analyze. The actors/players (i.e., states, groups, and individuals) were diverse, powerful, and capable of switching sides and ignoring past wrongs for temporary and future strategic gain. Moreover, we had less than perfect information. The news communicated to the West was incomplete, biased, censored and, at times, contradictory. Given the complex nature of the political, social, cultural, and economic infrastructure of the Middle East, there are diverse issues that must be addressed if one is to attempt to decipher the Gulf Conflict. Some of the issues important for understanding this situation include the no less perplexing: Israeli/Palestinian conflict, Arab/Israeli relations, Arab foreign policy, rise and spread of Islamic fundamentalism, Iranian Revolution, Iran/Contra affair, Iran/Iraq War, anti-Americanism, importance of oil in the world economy, the opposing sides' military capabilities and risk potential, the release of the foreign hostages in Lebanon and 'guests' in Iraq, the effect of diplomatic efforts, and, perhaps the most anomalous, the potential for oppositional political terrorism connected to these larger phenomena.¹

Literature Review

Almost from the beginning of the Crisis, President Saddam Hussein of Iraq, as well as leaders and representatives of various terrorist groups throughout the world, warned that they would engage in and/or sponsor

terrorist activities if the United States and coalition allied forces attacked Kuwait or Iraq. Hussein and his allies very cleverly used a form of psychological warfare to threaten their opposition.² In particular, countries and their citizens were worried about the possibility of suicide/kamikaze terrorist acts which cause a large number of deaths.³

Several terrorist groups either threatened to or engaged in terrorism in support of the Iraqi cause.⁴ During the conflict, there were numerous threats of terrorism issued against American and coalition members and their interests by Iraqi government officials, real or alleged terrorist groups, members of the Holy Jihad (holy war), and Arab nationals. Some of these threats were more credible than others. The threats were delivered through credible channels such as reports by Arab and Western national security organizations of various states, statements by terrorists, speeches by Hussein, and newspaper reports detailing information given to reporters allegedly by national security officials.⁵

Coterminously, Iraqi, Tunisian, Jordanian, Algerian, Libyan, Syrian nationals and Palestinians (holding passports of various states), including embassy officials, diplomats, and students, throughout the world were either placed under surveillance, detained, searched, warned, arrested, received travel curbs, ordered to report regularly to authorities, banned from leaving, or in several cases expelled from many countries for a variety of national security reasons (i.e., committing terrorism, plotting terrorist attacks, engaging in espionage, and recruiting others to perform terrorist actions). Otherwise, Iraqi and pro-Iraqi states were asked to reduce the number of their employees in their consulates, embassies, and missions in different countries. Simultaneously, with the expulsions and interceptions, were the arrests of alleged terrorists trying to infiltrate states across borders, or enter countries on airplanes. The discovery of terrorists and terrorist cells was reported in a variety of states throughout the world. In many cases, terrorists were reportedly planning to attack individuals and installations of the US, Britain, France, Kuwait and Egypt.

On the other hand, some of these scares could very well have been disinformation campaigns orchestrated by coalition interests. The fabrication of false information is supported by diplomatic history which is replete with incidents suggesting that allied intelligence forces engage in some terrorist actions and then blame enemy actors. This is done to provoke a more severe response (multinational or otherwise) against the alleged aggressor. Nonetheless, because of the worldwide preoccupation with the drama of the war itself there was a perception that little terrorism was committed to support the threat of it.⁶

Yet the threats of terrorism became a reality in many parts of the

world. Over 100 events of terrorism in connected with the Gulf Conflict were carried out during this period.⁷ The study of terrorism connected to the Conflict is important for four principal reasons which are, from least to most important: (a) it is a unique phenomenon; (b) rarely do states (or their allies) publicly threaten to engage in state-sponsored terrorism;⁸ (c) it allows us to test some recently formulated hypotheses connected to the structural causes of terrorism; and, (d) we might be able to prevent similar acts of terrorism in the future and thereby prevent needless deaths and destruction.

Consequently, the focus of this analysis is to develop a series of research hypotheses on the potential of terrorism connected with the Gulf Conflict.⁹ In particular, it will systematically examine either international actors' potential for experiencing or, in some cases, committing or sponsoring terrorism, and make suggestions as to how to assess the empirical reality of terrorist actions connected to this threat. To this end, the author organizes the present analysis around 12 hypotheses that can be tested either quantitatively or qualitatively depending on the reliability of the available data. Regardless, each proposition demands a slightly different methodology for verification and analysis.

In general, five basic types of literature can be brought to bear on the Gulf Conflict to help us understand terrorism connected to it. These literatures include research on: terrorism, Middle East Politics, terrorism in the Middle East¹⁰, political crises, and the Gulf Conflict.¹¹ This research will help this researcher develop and tailor his investigation.

Research Hypotheses

Despite the pronouncements of media-sanctioned experts, a cautious approach should be taken in analyzing the threat and reality of terrorist events in connection with the Gulf Conflict. Now that it is over, other factors, not considered before, must be taken into consideration. Although the threat of terrorism changed on an hourly basis, with hindsight we can better analyze the events that took place.

Outline of Research Hypotheses

Two types of terrorism took place during the Conflict: those acts connected to it and those independent or tangential to it. Those events of terrorism related to the Gulf Conflict are called *Gulf Related*

Terrorism (GRT) and will serve as this researchers' dependent variable. Extrapolating from a recently constructed structural model of oppositional political terrorism¹², 12 separate factors were identified including: modernization level, geographical location, type of political system, presence of other forms of political unrest, historical and cultural facilitation, anti-terrorist organization failure, organizational split and development, availability of weapons and explosives, support, and grievances. We can condense the majority of these factors into the following four independent variables: geographical location = proximity of Coalition Forces to Battlefield; availability of weapons and explosives and support = Motivated Terrorist Organizations' Capabilities; presence of other forms of unrest = Protest Connected to Commitment of Troops to the Gulf Crisis; and grievances = Supportive of Aggressor.

There are seven additional, but inter-related, independent variables: coalition forces' capabilities, countries' historical experience with terrorism, length of time allied troops were in the Gulf, intensity of protest, support to coalition, security measures and cooperation against GRT, and, terrorists' historical use of terrorism. Twelve research propositions can be derived from the relationships among these independent variables and the dependent variable GRT. These hypotheses can be divided between the aggressor and its allies, and the coalition forces and their supporters (see Table 1). They are also rank ordered, from least to most important, in terms of predicted contribution to the presence of GRT.

First, the greater a coalition *country's historical experience* (CHE) with terrorism (i.e., have they had much terrorism from Middle Eastern terrorist groups?), the higher the likelihood for some form of terrorist action against them or their interests (e.g., embassies) at home or abroad. This hypothesis assumes that the past is a predictor of the future. Therefore,

Hypothesis 1: The higher the CHE, the greater potential for GRT.

Second, the higher the number of *protests* that states experience by their own citizens against committing troops to the Gulf (PROCTOG), the greater amount of (GRT) experience by that country.¹³ This hypothesis assumes that individuals and groups become frustrated with their government's lack of attention to their policy demands motivating those frustrated to engage in terrorism or support individuals predisposed to engage in terrorism. Thus,

Hypothesis 2: The higher the number of PROCTOG, the greater the GRT.

TABLE 1
COUNTRIES INVOLVED IN GULF CRISIS

Aggressor	Supportive of Aggressor	Neutrals	Supportive of Coalition	Directly Participating Coalition Forces
Iraq	Algeria	Iran	Soviet Union	Afghanistan
	Jordan	Lebanon	Germany	Argentina
	Libya		Israel	Australia
	Mauritania		Japan	Bahrain
	Sudan			Bangladesh
	Tunisia			Belgium
	Yemen			Britain
				Canada
				Czechoslovakia
				Denmark
				Egypt
				France
				Greece
				Hungary
				Italy
				Kuwait
				Morocco
				Netherlands
				New Zealand
				Niger
				Norway
				Oman
				Pakistan
				Philippines
				Poland
				Qatar
				Romania
				Saudi Arabia
				Senegal
				Sierra Leone
				Singapore
				South Korea
				Spain
				Sweden
				Syria
				Turkey
				UAE
				USA

Third, closely connected to Hypothesis 2, one might assume that protest alone is not as important as the nature and characteristics of the protest. Therefore, the previous hypothesis can be extended to suggest that the higher the intensity (I) of PROCTOG, the greater the amount of protest. Predictably,

Hypothesis 3: The greater the (I) of PROCTOG, the higher the GRT.

Fourth, the previous two hypotheses are probably dependent on the length of time that troops are stationed in the Gulf. Consequently, the *longer the time the troops are in the Gulf*, or Time in Gulf (TIG), the greater the I of PROCTOG protest, and thus the possibility of GRT. Therefore,

Hypothesis 4: The greater the TIG, the higher the GRT.

Fifth, the closer a coalition country is geographically to the actual battlefield/war zone [hereafter called *proximity* (PC)], the greater the likelihood that GRT would be committed against them at home or close to the battlefield, or their interests in other countries. Consequently,

Hypothesis 5: The greater the PC, the higher the likelihood of GRT.

Sixth, the greater the *support* (SC) a state gives to the coalition, the higher the likelihood of it being attacked. With this proposition, supportive states are divided into three types: directly participating, supportive of coalition, and neutral. In other words, the closer a state is to one of the allies/coalition forces, (measured in terms of trade, number of foreigners living in that country, support of initiatives proposed at the United Nations, or other measures of exchange), the greater the likelihood that it will be subjected to terrorist attacks both against its citizens and institutions in its own country and abroad.¹⁴ For example, Canada historically supports most American military measures (e.g., the 1986 retaliation against Tripoli) but it has also sought a traditional peacekeeping role thereby diminishing its international image as an aggressor. Thus, if this hypothesis holds true, Canada would be a likely victim of GRT. Therefore,

Hypothesis 6: The greater the SC, the higher the GRT.

Seventh, one might suggest that the higher the *coalition forces capabilities* (CFC), that is, the amount of resources, such as finances, troop commitments, availability of troops, weapons (e.g., tanks, air-planes, ships etc.), and intelligence sophistication¹⁵, the greater the potential for GRT against their forces. Mack¹⁶ observes that the relative strength of the contending parties determines the outcome of conflict, and that in terrorism strength depends on the group's political and military capabilities. It follows from this observation, that the loss of either of these capabilities leads to the decline of terrorist campaigns. CFC leads to the perception that states with high capabilities are treated as a threat by terrorists and must be dealt a psychological blow through terrorist actions. Thus,

Hypothesis 7: The better the CFC, the higher the probability of GRT.

On the former point, terrorists and the groups they belong or claim membership to are generally rational actors, that is, they will most likely strike targets that are the most vulnerable or with the greatest lapse in security. Moreover, the attractiveness of these targets continuously changes due to either the amount of security, current interest on a past target, etc. Therefore, a country's commitment to engage a certain number of personnel and weapons in the Gulf does not necessarily make that country impervious to future terrorist efforts. The point here is that by attacking those countries with the higher capabilities, the possibility that it will send a psychological and demoralizing message to that country increases (e.g., the 1983 bombing of the US Marine barracks in Lebanon).

Eighth, during the Gulf Conflict, most states throughout the world increased their vigilance over suspected terrorists and potential targets. This increased security included more border patrols and better screening of individuals both entering and exiting countries. Thus, increased *security measures and cooperation* (SMC) pre-empted and deterred many who would have otherwise engaged in terrorist actions. Consequently,

Hypothesis 8: The greater the SMC, the lower the GRT.

In particular, Syria claimed that its participation in the Conflict helped to diminish the potential of GRT. If Syria shackled terrorist groups from participating in terrorist events then the historical facilitative relationship Syria has had with different terrorist groups, the number of terrorists living in Syria, and the fact that it had a lot more to gain from restraining terrorist activities were important factors. One can then argue that Syria actually helped to keep terrorism activity in check. Therefore,

Hypothesis 9a: Syria shackled terrorists most likely to engage in terrorism.

This hypothesis may be further clarified by,

Hypothesis 9b: The greater the number of terrorists living in Syria + historical support, the better was Syria's control on terrorists' ability.¹⁷

On the other hand, it is also possible to construct hypotheses about groups, organizations and states that would most be likely to commit or sponsor terrorist actions. Initially, *prima facie* logic suggests that Middle Eastern *terrorist* groups, organizations, and states which have the highest *historical experience* of engaging in terrorism (HET), would

have engaged in GRT.¹³ HET might be measured as the number of terrorist attacks launched by a particular organization over the past ten years based on the ITERATE IV, database. Therefore,

Hypothesis 10: The greater the HET, the higher the GRT.

Next, and more important, a strong relationship (e.g., politically, militarily, economically) with Iraq or its allies, should be the principle motivator for terrorist organizations to participate in GRT. This factor, also known as *supportive of aggressor* (SA), should be necessary for a group, organization, or state to engage in GRT. Predictably,

Hypothesis 11: The higher the SA, the greater the GRT.

Finally, high *motivated terrorist organization capabilities* (MTOC) should most likely facilitate terrorist or states to engage in terrorism. Such experience is connected to the number of active members in an organization, amount and quality of training, and sophistication of weaponry and explosives. This proposition most suspects Middle Eastern terrorist organizations or those who have ties to Iraq. Consequently,

Hypothesis 12: The greater the MTOC, the higher the GRT.

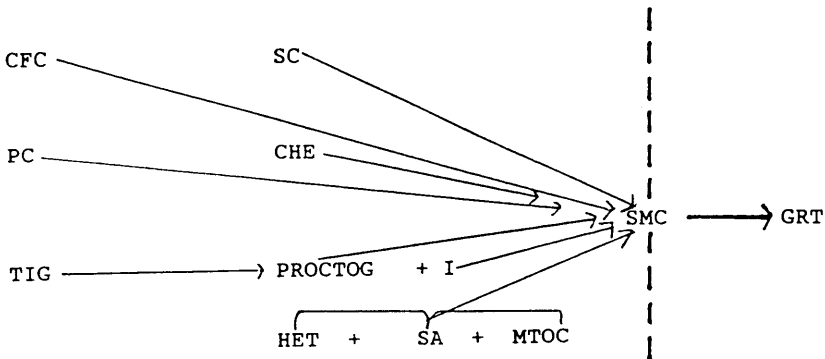
The proceeding hypotheses can now be combined into a larger function which specifies additional relations (see Figure 1). These 12 hypotheses can be analyzed and/or tested empirically.

Conclusion

The above stated propositions with the dependent variable, GRT, obtained from a reliable data set such as ITERATE IV and other sources. This analysis would cover the period from the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait (i.e., 1 August 1990) to the signing of the peace accord (i.e., 10 March 1991). The relationships can be tested over the entire time period and broken down into three periods which would include the United Nations deadline for Iraq's withdrawal (15 January), the start of Operation 'Desert Storm' (the bombing raids) (16 January), and the start of the ground war into Kuwait (24 February, 1991).¹⁸ This type of analysis should lead to the construction of additional necessary data bases. For example, to analyze the protest hypotheses, a compilation of protest events called Protest Connected to Gulf Crisis (PROCTOG) should be prepared covering the same time period as GRT.

As with the data on country capabilities, data on the number of members

FIGURE 1
MODEL OF GULF CONFLICT RELATED TERRORISM



- CFC = Coalition Forces' Capabilities
 CHE = Countries' Historical experience with terrorism
 GRT = Gulf Related Terrorism
 HET = Terrorists' Historical use of terrorism
 I = Intensity of Protest
 PC = Proximity of Coalition forces to Battlefield
 PROCTOG = Protest Connected to Commitment of Troops to the Gulf Crisis
 SA = Supportive of Aggressor
 SC = Supportive of Coalition
 SMC = Security Measures and Cooperation
 MTOC = Motivated Terrorist Organizations' Capabilities
 TIG = Length of Time Allied Troops are in the Gulf

in each motivated terrorist organization as well as the type of capabilities that these groups have are difficult to obtain. Figures available are, in general, inaccurate, and unreliable (i.e., based on self-reports and subject to inflation for propaganda purposes). This will require the intensive analyses of case studies of terrorist groups possibly derived from Jongman and Schmid's database.¹⁹ Each hypothesis should be tested quantitatively or qualitatively. The relative strengths of the results from the tests of each proposition should then be compared.

Achieving a comprehensive picture of the threat of terrorism in connection with the Gulf Conflict from public sources is difficult. First, there are a plethora of sources to choose from. Second, some are perceived to be biased. Third, and most important, most source material is not readily accessible in order to create an events data base. Therefore, using several newspapers and their respective indexes is preferable. All items listed in these indexes dealing with acts of oppositional political behavior (e.g., protests) should be listed and incorporated into a master chronology.²⁰ Each case should be coded on

a series of variables that are relevant to the hypotheses in question. For data on terrorism, the ITERATE IV data base could be utilized.

Semi-structured face to face interviews with people currently and formerly responsible for intelligence and decision-making in the counter-terrorist policy arena located for example, in Washington, DC should also be conducted. A minimum of a week should be spent by researchers at the research site in a effort to interview sources, and gather other documents and citations unavailable at the researchers' home base. All people interviewed should be granted anonymity unless they request or agree, to attribution.

Results from past research plus logical deduction support the inclusion of the previously outlined variables and hypotheses into a model of Gulf Conflict related terrorism. However, as with any analysis, there is always an error associated with the computation and hence prediction. In this case, prediction is far from perfect and, in fact, the analysis may be excluding some other important factors that are unknown to researchers until progresses.

NOTES

An earlier version was presented as a paper at the Annual Meetings of the Canadian Political Science Association, 8 June 1993, Ottawa. This article has benefited from the helpful comments and criticisms of William Moul, and my wife, Natasha J. Cabrera.

1. The author uses a modified version of Schmid's definition. See for an example of this modification Jeffrey Ian Ross, 'The Nature of Contemporary International Terrorism', in David Charters (ed.), *Democratic Responses to International Terrorism* (Ardsey-on-Hudson, NY: Transnational Publishers, 1991), pp.17–42.
2. Besides human costs incurred during the war, the Conflict had steep economic costs for both advanced industrialized democracies, transitional states, and Arabic states. For instance, large sums of money were lost in salaries of guest workers in the Gulf states; and similarly great losses in revenues were incurred due to disruptions in tourism, trade and shipping earnings.
3. If terrorist organizations do in fact engage in mass-based terrorism, then Jenkins' much cited observation that terrorists want a lot of people watching and not a lot of people dying would need to be revised. For an analysis of the connection between terrorism, fanaticism, and suicide see Maxwell Taylor and Helen Ryan, 'Fanaticism, Political Suicide, and Terrorism', *Terrorism: An International Journal* 11/1 (spring 1988), pp.91–111.
4. See, e.g., Joel Brinkley, 'Israelis Assert Palestinians Plan Terror Attacks for Iraq', *New York Times*, 18 Aug. 1990, p.5; Alan Cowell, 'Egypt Raises its Guard Against Iraqi terrorism', *New York Times*, 17 Sept. 1990, p.A12; Reuters, 'PLO vows to hit US when first shot fired', *Globe and Mail*, 15 Jan. 1991, p.A7. On the other hand, Edward N. Luttwak suggested that the threat to US troops in the Persian Gulf, to Israel and to Western cities (through terrorism) was exaggerated (*New York Times*, 13 Jan. 1991, IV, 19:1).
5. On 9 Oct. 1990 a report in a British newspaper said that the Kuwaiti newspaper *Al-Qabas Al-Duwali* reported that a series of terrorist threats took place, see Edward Mickolus, *Chronology of Terrorism, 1988–1991* (Wesport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993).

6. According to the *Washington Post*, 3 March 1991, p.A1, A26-A27, 'the threat of major terrorist attacks against allied interests . . . was effectively neutralized with the help of countries such as Syria.'
7. The ITERATE IV chronology was coded on a total of 14 variables (i.e., linkage to Gulf Conflict, type of terrorism, type of event, date, month, year, day in conflict, primary target, secondary target, country or organization targeted). Of the 364 acts of terrorism that took place during this time period, 101 (27 percent) were linked to the Gulf Conflict, 161 (44 percent) were not, and in 102 (29 percent) of cases it was unknown. In addition, while 99 cases could be classified as events of international terrorism, 2 are more appropriately labeled domestic thus calling into question Mickolus (note 5) *et al.*'s inclusion criteria. Further iterations could test six months before and six months after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.
8. Most states that engage in state-sponsored terrorism like to conceal the responsibility of their actions.
9. These hypotheses build upon those identified by Bueno De Mesquita, *The War Trap* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1981); Jack S. Levy, 'Alliance Formation and War Behavior: An Analysis of the Great Powers, 1945-1975', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 25/4 (Dec. 1981), pp.581-614; A.F.K. Organski and Jacek Kugler *The War Leader* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1980); Harvey Starr and Benjamin Most, 'The substance and study of Borders in International Relation Research', *Int. Studies Quarterly* (1976), pp.581-620 and idem, 'A Return Journey: Richardson, "Frontiers" and wars in the 1946-1965 Era', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 22/3 (Sept. 1978), pp.441-467 in their quantitative research on war.
10. See Asaf Hussain, *Political Terrorism and the State in the Middle East* (NY: Mansell, 1988) and A. Taheri, *Holy Terror: The Inside Story of Islamic Terrorism* (London: Century Hutchinson, 1987).
11. See Samir al Khalil, *Republic of Fear: The Politics of Modern Iraq* (Los Angeles and Berkeley, CA: Univ. of California Press, 1989) John Bullock and Harvey Morris, *Saddam's War* (London: Faber 1991); Adel Darwish and Gregory Alexander, *Unholy Babylon* (NY: St Martin's Press, 1991); Judith Miller and Laurie Mylroie, *Saddam Hussein and the Crisis in the Gulf* (Toronto: Times Books/Randon House, 1990).
12. This hypothesis builds on Jeffery Ian Ross, 'Crisis Publishing: A Review Essay', *Low Intensity Conflict and Law Enforcement* 2/2 (Autumn 1993), pp.382-96 and idem, 'Structural Causes of Oppositional Political Terrorism: Towards a Causal Model', *Journal of Peace Research* 30/3 (Aug. 1993).
13. Ibid,
14. E.g., Germany and Japan did not commit troops as their constitution restricts them from sending soldiers beyond their country. For a reasonable review of the European response see Jasker Mortimer, 'Shambling into Line', *Middle East* (Oct. 1990), pp.15-17. An alternative way of conceptualizing support is those states that supported the US efforts at the UN.
15. Organski and Kugler (note 9), pp.4-8.
16. Andrew Mack, 'The Utility of Terrorism', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, Vol.14 (1981), pp.197-224.
17. In the interests of parsimony this hypothesis is not catagued in Figure 1.
18. This hypothesis negates the necessity of having one for proximity. Simple proximity to the battlefield or coalition countries would seem too myopic as there are both terrorist organizations and states which sponsor terrorism who have an antagonistic relationship with the aggressor and its allies.
19. Ross (note 1).
20. For chronologies of the events see *Journal of Palestine Studies* 78/20 (Winter 1991), pp.202-32; and Appendixes in Darwish and Alexander (note 11); and Bulloch and Morris (note 11)
21. See Jeffrey Ian, Ross 'Attributes of Domestic Political Terrorism in Canada, 1966-1985', *Terrorism: An International Journal* 11/3 (Fall 1988), pp.213-33 for an example of this type of research.