

Chapter II Major Characteristics and Developmental Trends in Current International Terrorist Activities

Contemporary international terrorism, which emerged in the 1960's, underwent some new changes in the 1990's. In 1999, a well-known United States think tank, the Rand Corporation, proposed for the first time the concept "new terrorism" in a special report studying the issue of counter-terrorism, and pointed out that since the 1990's, terrorism had been transformed from traditional terrorism to the "new terrorism" of the information age.

Following the "9·11" Incident, some overseas researchers referred to the incident as a watershed in international terrorist activities, heralding a new stage in the development of international terrorism, that is, the advent of "new terrorism". Its "newness" is mainly reflected in its tendency towards global expansion, the mode of its transnational activities, its unprecedentedly profound influence and the networked organizational structure, among other factors.¹ It has been said that "'Al Qaeda' and its activities are a typical example of the 'new terrorism'".² These views undoubtedly point out objectively the new changes in international terrorism during the recent decade. However at the same time, we should also see that regardless of from the perspective of the root causes for, motives for or organization and mode of activities of terrorism, at present and for the near future, international terrorism over the long term will still be a combination of the "new" and the "old," and an alternation of the "new" and the "old"; or as counter-terrorist experts at RAND Corporation have put it vividly, "new terrorism" with "old roots".³ This chapter will briefly describe the characteristics of the activities of and future developmental trends for international terrorist forces after the "9·11" Incident.

Major movements and characteristics of current international terrorist activities

From a comprehensive perspective, since the "9·11" Incident, international terrorist activities have displayed the following prominent characteristics:

I. Seen from the actors of terrorist activities, the main trend for the development of international terrorist forces is towards becoming "Al Qaedaized", globalized, and networked.

First is the "Al Qaedaization" of organizational backgrounds. The activities of international terrorist forces after the "9·11" Incident have shown that religious extremist forces such as "Al Qaeda" are still the backbone of international terrorist forces. In particular, though "Al Qaeda" suffered from heavy losses in the Afghanistan war, its residual forces have adopted the practice of breaking up the whole of the organization into parts and of avoiding the enemy's main forces and striking at its weak points. Besides some forces still putting up a desperate struggle inside Afghanistan, they have stepped up their efforts to transfer and infiltrate into other regions in the world and keep collaborating with local terrorist forces and anti-government armed forces to jointly produce many incidents of terrorist attacks. Some experts have pointed out that most of the

¹ See related chapters and sections in [US] Ian Lesser et al, *Countering the New Terrorism*, translated by Cheng Kexiong (Xinhua Publishing House, 2002). Andrew Tan, Kumar Ramakrishna, *The New Terrorism, Anatomy, Trends and Counter-Strategies* (Eastern University Press, Singapore, 2002), PP. 1-9, PP. 234-236.

² [Spain] Anthony Giddens, "New and Old Terrorism", *La Vanguardia* of Spain, December 27, 2004.

³ Ian Lesser et al, P. 56.

major incidents of terrorist attacks in the world at present have “Al Qaeda” as their background. Some have been directly organized and planned by “Al Qaeda”, and some have been funded and ordered by “Al Qaeda,” while being carried out by its local “agents”. Therefore, “Al Qaeda” has the tendency of evolving into a certain kind of “spiritual leader” for international terrorist forces. Various terrorist organizations in the world either consciously establish contact with “Al Qaeda” to seek funding and personnel support or imitate the means of terrorist attacks used by “Al Qaeda,” carefully structuring its organization and planning, carrying out series of explosions and pursuing the effectiveness of the “Al Qaeda” brand of terrorist activities. Rohan Gunaratna, terrorism consultant to the US President, specializing in the study of “Al Qaeda”, has clearly pointed out, “‘Al Qaeda’ has turned from an organization into a movement.” Bin Laden has successfully transmitted his ideology and given birth to new native organizations.⁴ Some experts also say that “‘Al Qaeda’ has not only spread its fame widely but also established a strong brand that can call on many “amateurs” to take action in its name”.⁵

Secondly, terrorist activities have spread to all over the world. Since the early 1970’s, the international contact among terrorist organizations has been increasingly close, gradually developing from mutual support in weapon and intelligence in the beginning to joint training and united implementation of terrorist acts. In this way, they become international terrorist organizations in a true sense. Since the beginning of the 1990’s, with the acceleration of developments in transportation, communications and information technology and the process of globalization, terrorist activities have also been rapidly spreading all over the world, with transnationalism becoming stronger and stronger. According to the international investigations of the United States after the “9-11” Incident, an integrated international network exists between “Al Qaeda” and terrorist organizations all over the world. Some experts have pointed out that currently the network of international terrorist organizations centered around “Al Qaeda” is spread out in over 60 countries throughout the world.

Thirdly, the structure of terrorist organizations has been networked. Some experts have pointed out that as a result of the rapid popularization of information technology, changes have also taken place in the structure of terrorist organizations, which no longer have the vertical organizational structure and strict hierarchy of traditional terrorist forces. Often, they are patched together by some semi-independent terrorist organizations, with decision-making power highly dispersed and without subordinate relationships with one another. However, because of their resort to the latest technology to transmit information and coordinate action, their mutual relationship has become closer, their organizational ability stronger, and actions more flexible. Though they carry out battles separately, they can work in concert, which has added great difficulty to the campaign against terrorism.⁶ Further, according to some analysts, the “Al Qaeda” which perpetrated the “9-11” Incident no longer exists, and there has appeared in its former sphere of influence a more undetectable enemy, a loose network connected by a common militant ideology, the Internet and

⁴ [US] David Kaplan and Kevin Whitelaw, “Terror’s new soldiers: US tactics have hurt al Qaeda but fuel a menacing movement”, *US News and World Report*, a weekly, November 1, 2004.

⁵ Michael Clark, “The Turning Point of Terrorism” *World in 2005* publication of the UK, quoted in the English news of the Xinhua News Agency in London on December 3, 2004.

⁶ Andrew Tan, Kumar Ramakrishna, PP. 6-7. And also [Spain] Anthony Giddens, “New and Old Terrorism”, *La Vanguardia* of Spain, December 27, 2004 and US] Ian Lesser et al, *Countering the New Terrorism*, translated by Cheng Kexiong (Xinhua Publishing House, 2002).

radical Islamic Sunni beliefs.⁷

II. Seen from the standpoint of the regions of terrorist activities, the regions with high incidence of international terrorist activities are still regions traditionally plagued with wars or conflicts. Iraq has become or is becoming the “second Afghanistan”. The “Middle East—Central Asia—South Asia—Southeast Asia Arc” has become “the heavily hit disaster area” of international terrorist activities. After the “9·11” Incident, because the United States strengthened its own defenses, and in particular, because the US Army carried out severe retaliatory attacks in Afghanistan, international terrorist organizations such as “Al Qaeda” have adjusted their strategies to avoid primary enemy forces and strike at the weak points of the enemy, spreading the “main warfront” to other countries. However, major incidents of terrorist attacks still mostly take place in the region which has traditionally had a high incidence of terrorist incidents. In Saudi Arabia, 3 explosions took place west of its capital, Riyadh, on November 9, 2003, resulting in over 20 deaths and injuries to over 100 people. In Turkey, the explosion which took place in Istanbul on November 15, 2003 targeting Turkish Jews and two other incidents of large-scale terrorist explosions which took place on the 20th caused over 60 deaths, over 700 injuries and damages to over 200 buildings including the Consulate General of the United Kingdom. In Afghanistan, “Al Qaeda” and the residual members of the Taliban have become active again, attacking such targets as the Afghanistan authorities, international security forces and international organizations in Afghanistan under the banner of resistance against the US Army, resulting in heavy casualties.

What is particularly serious is that Iraq, occupied by the US Army, is also becoming a new source of terrorist activities. After the conclusion of the main war in Iraq, a large number of international terrorists flocked into Iraq, and continuously perpetrated terrorist acts with local resistance organizations. The organization and planning of their attacks have become closer, and the scale and targets of their attacks continue to expand, not only against the occupation forces from the US and the UK but also against international organizations and personnel assisting in Iraq, as well as the new Iraqi political organizations and personnel under the support of the United States, and even including ordinary Iraqi civilians. Their methods of attack are being continuously updated, and the number of casualties inflicted continues to rise. For example, an attack launched by a suicide car bomber in the south of Bagdad on February 28, 2005 killed at least 115 and wounded 140.⁸ Various terrorist organizations keep spreading the threat of terror in an attempt to interfere with and destroy the efforts of the United States’ forces in terms of stabilizing the political situation in Iraq. The US authorities have stated that it is more and more difficult to distinguish resistance activities from terrorist activities in Iraq.

III. Seen from the methods used in terrorist activities, the traditional “suicidal bombing” is still a major means of attack used by international terrorist forces, and the use of bomb attacks with more and more destructive power has always been the main means of attack used by international terrorist forces. According to statistics, among over 600 terrorist incidents taking place in 2004, the proportion of bombing attacks was almost as high as 70%,⁹ resulting in heavy casualties and

⁷ [US] David Kaplan and Kevin Whitelaw, “Terror’s new soldiers: US tactics have hurt al Qaeda but fuel a menacing movement”, *US News and World Report*, a weekly, November 1, 2004.

⁸ “Iraq was attacked by car bombing, over 100 people died”, Reuters, news from Iraq, February 28, 2005.

⁹ Source of data: Research Center of Counter-Terrorism in the China Society for International Strategies

social panic. In particular, “suicidal” terrorist attacks such as “car bombings” and “human bombings” have become the conventional means of attack used by terrorists because they can be well concealed, are powerfully destructive, and cause a strong impact on public psychology, among other factors. For example, in the Moscow subway bombing on February 6, 2004, the serial bombings in London on July 7, 2005 and many terrorist attacks taking place in Iraq, terrorists all used suicidal bombings to launch attacks which caused heavy casualties.

Car bombings are also highly explosive and destructive and are mostly used by terrorists to attack such “hard targets” as important buildings. For example, in the Chechnya government building bombing on December 27, 2002, terrorists drove a “Kamaz” truck to rush through three armed cordons and ignited the dynamite in the truck before the government building, killing 80 people, wounding over 150, and seriously damaging the government building. According to the estimates of experts, this explosion was equivalent to at least the detonation of one ton of T.N.T. On August 19, 2003, the UN office building in Iraq was hit by a suicidal car bomb attack, killing at least 20 people, wounding over 100 and causing the front part of the office building to collapse. According to experts, the total weight of the dynamite used by the terrorist was about 220 kg. On September 15, 2003, in the bombing of the headquarters of the Ingush Republic Security Bureau in Russia, the car bomb used by the Chechnyan terrorists was equivalent to the detonation of about 300 kg T.N.T.

As human bombs are small and can be well concealed, they are used by terrorists mostly to attack “soft targets” such as places with heavy concentrations of people, for example, residential areas, transportation hubs, public transit tools and large restaurants and places of entertainment, civilian facilities where defense is weak and people are heavily concentrated. The “vest bomb” used by suicidal bombers is normally loaded with 0.5 - 2 kilograms of a highly explosive compound and mixed with a large amount of iron nails or steel balls, which can cause heavy casualties in places with high concentrations of people. For example, in the explosion taking place in Chechnya on May 14, 2003, a female terrorist disguised as a reporter ignited a vest bomb loaded with 2 kilograms of highly explosive material, mixed with a large amount of iron nails and steel balls in a crowd, killing 30 people and wounding 150. In the Arbil terrorist incident in Iraq on February 1, 2004, two terrorists ignited explosives tied to their bodies, killing 101 people and wounding over 130.

IV. Seen from the techniques of terrorist activities, the activities of the international terrorist forces are becoming more covert, various, flexible and variable. Pressured by countries strengthening their efforts in counter-terrorism and strengthening of cooperation in the campaign against terrorism, international terrorist forces are more careful, covert and flexible in planning, organizing and carrying out terrorist attacks in order to ensure a high “success rate” of terrorist attacks. For example, when raising funds and recruiting members, international terrorist organizations often do not appear directly but make use of transnational organized criminal groups. Seen from the major terrorist incidents in 2003, before each incident, there were traces of illegal funds in operation. In April 2003, a court in the United Kingdom convicted two Algerians of raising funds and recruiting members for “Al Qaeda”, and the two people were sentenced to 11 years in prison. In the planning of the terrorist attacks, only a very small number of people

participated in order to strictly control the number of people knowing the inner details of the attack, keeping the planning highly confidential, and concealing actions so as to ensure the abruptness of the act. For example, when transferring explosives, usually a car's gasoline tank is converted to containing half gasoline and half explosives; or a car bomb is disguised as a vehicle transporting cement or agricultural materials, and sprinkled with pungent chemicals to delude their scent from police dogs at checkpoints. In the course of directing communications, various means are adopted flexibly according to the needs of different phases. For example, in the planning phase, wireless or wired communications are seldom used and mostly secret contact or transmission of information by a special person is used to avoid being detected; in the operations phase, mobile phone contact is usually used to ensure effective and flexible direction over the operatives. In the course of a terrorist attack, usually several operations teams are dispatched, each formed by 4-5 people, with one directing the site, 1-2 people responsible for escort, and 1-2 operatives responsible for the explosives. The operations teams mostly typically escape immediately after detonation. On March 11, 2004, under very stringent monitoring conditions and close counterterrorism and terrorist prevention measures of European countries, the international terrorist organizations still succeeded in carrying out large-scale attacks in Madrid, the capital of Spain, with shocking casualties and destructiveness, resulting in tremendous impact on the public psyche.