31. INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM

Background

Since 1985 international terrorism has become a major policy concern for Western governments, partly because of a general increase in terrorist attacks and also as a result of the US-Libyan confrontation in the spring of 1986.

Throughout 1985 there were a great many violent incidents, bombings, highjackings of both planes and a cruise ship (the Achille Lauro), and attacks on airports. The most frequent targets were the United States, particularly US servicemen, and Israel. The incident, however, which involved the greatest loss of life was that of the Air India flight originating in Canada which exploded in mid-air on 22 June 1985. Several groups claimed responsibility for these various incidents, among them, the Shi-ite Amal militia of Lebanon, the Palestinian Abu Nadal group, and Communist activist groups in Belgium, Germany and Portugal (For further details see last year's Guide).

In response to this wave of attacks, the UN General Assembly unanimously adopted a landmark resolution on terrorism on 9 December 1985. The resolution "unequivocally condemns, as criminal, all acts, methods and practices of terrorism wherever and by whomever committed".[1] After repeated US entreaties for concerted action on terrorism, the European Economic Community agreed, on 28 January 1986, to ban all arms sales to states clearly implicated in supporting terrorism.

In early 1986 Libya became the focus of Western and particularly of US concern over terrorism. US-Libyan hostilities peaked with the bombing of a discotheque in West Berlin on 5 April 1986 and the US retaliatory attacks on two Libyan cities on 14 April.

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[1] UNGA, Fortieth Session Resolutions, Resolution 40/61, pp.607-609.