



New York State Counter Terrorism Bulletin

Strategic Analysis Series - October 5, 2012

Subject: Historical Pre-Election Terrorist Attacks: Brief Overviews

In light of the upcoming 2012 US presidential election, NYSIC is providing a snapshot of four historical cases where terrorists conducted attacks in conjunction with upcoming local or national elections, including the tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP) used and how the attacks met or failed to meet the terrorists' goals of altering the outcome of the election.

Studies have highlighted possible theories, most often supported by historical cases, of why terrorists attempt to use attacks to influence the outcome of the election¹:

- Terrorist attacks greatly increase the probability that the incumbent government will lose re-election.²
- Rightist parties are viewed as less conciliatory toward terrorist demands, while leftist parties are viewed as more likely to negotiate or give concessions. In general, relative support for rightist parties is expected to increase after terrorist attacks and to decrease after periods of inactivity.³

Historically, terrorist violence has been used more often to extract direct concessions through negotiations after an attack. One such example is the February 9, 1996, Docklands Bombing in Northern Ireland: the Irish Republican Army (IRA) put an end to its 17-month ceasefire experiment by detonating an explosives-laden truck near a plaza where three office towers, a light-railway station and a hotel converge. The bombing successfully forced the British government back to the negotiating table without the precondition that the Provisional Irish Republican Army decommission all its weapons.⁴

In 2004, al-Qa'ida was able to indirectly extract concessions from the Spanish government by influencing the election outcome after the Madrid train bombings, securing a Spanish withdrawal of troops from Iraq.⁵

Implications for New York:

At this time, there is no known credible intelligence suggesting an attack against New York State during the 2012 election period. However, considering the overall security environment, threats could emanate from a variety of actors wanting to influence US policy, including: al-Qa'ida and affiliates; state-sponsored groups; homegrown violent extremists; or anti-government domestic terrorists. Law enforcement and first responders throughout New York State should remain vigilant and consider proactive outreach regarding suspicious activity at or near potential targets in their jurisdictions, including campaign facilities, upcoming political event venues, and previously targeted locations such as shopping centers, recruiting centers, transportation hubs, and social/recreation venues.

In advance of the election, Hofstra University in Hempstead, NY will host the second of three presidential debates on October 16th.

The following pages contain historical examples of pre-election terrorist attacks and their outcomes.

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Incident #1

Date: March 11, 2004

Location: Madrid, Spain

Group Responsible: Al-Qa'ida. Abu Dujan al-Afghani, a purported spokesman for Al-Qa'ida in Europe, appeared in a videotape claiming responsibility a few days after the attacks.

Target: Rush-hour commuter trains in Madrid

TTP: Seventy-two hours before the Spanish general elections, ten backpack bombs exploded on four morning rush-hour commuter trains in Madrid, killing 191 people and injuring more than 1,800 others.⁶

Election Outcome: In a result which defied most predictions, the opposition Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) won a plurality of seats in the Congress of Deputies over the governing People's Party. The PSOE received more votes than expected as a result of the incumbent administration's handling of the train bombings. This resulted in a positive outcome for the al-Qa'ida movement as the newly-elected Spanish government withdrew all troops and its support for the War in Iraq.⁷

Incident #2

Date: February-March 1996

Location: Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, Israel

Group Responsible: Hamas

Target: Israeli general population

TTP: A series of suicide bombings carried out in market places and on buses.

Election Outcome: A number of suicide bombings in Israel aided in the election of Benjamin Netanyahu over incumbent Shimon Peres in the election for Prime Minister on May 29, 1996. Peres began the electoral process with a 20% lead over Netanyahu. The strong rhetoric from Netanyahu regarding the suicide bombings propelled him ahead of Peres to win the election by 1%.⁸ The election of a rightist government gave Hamas their desired outcome, as it ended any potential for progress in Israeli-Palestinian peace talks.

Peres' leftist Labor Party also lost a number of seats in Parliament, although they held a two-seat lead over Netanyahu's rightist Likud Party. Israel often experiences an increase in terrorist attacks before an election; however, the attacks prior to the 1996 election clearly influenced the outcome of the election.⁹ One study has noted that there was an increase in terrorist attacks in Israel during leftist governments and a decrease in terrorist attacks during rightist governments, as election time approaches in order to keep right-wing obstructionists in power.¹⁰

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Incident #3

Date: 1991 and 1995

Location: Turkey

Group Responsible: Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkaren Kurdistan, PKK)

Target: Turkish Security Forces

TTP: Small-arms and bomb attacks against military outposts, on security forces, and on civilian targets.

Election Outcome: Attacks by the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, a Kurdish separatist organization based in Turkey, resulted in votes for hardliners against terrorism, not concessionists, which proved counter-productive to the PKK's political goals. The PKK has been waging an insurgency campaign in Turkey since August 1984. The PKK is an armed Kurdish guerilla organization that has been fighting the Turkish government for an autonomous, Kurdish state, Kurdistan, and for greater cultural and political rights for Kurds in Turkey. To date, PKK terrorists have killed over 30,000 Turkish citizens.¹¹

Incident #4

Date: August 29 – October 10, 1984

Location: Wasco County, Oregon, United States

Group Responsible: Rajneesh cult

Target: Local population

TTP: A bioterror attack through the deliberate contamination of salad bars at ten local restaurants with salmonella. A total of 751 people suffered salmonella poisoning in the first and only bioterror attack on US soil.

Election Outcome: During the fall of 1984, the Rajneesh, an Oregon-based Indian mystic cult, hoped to prevent a large enough number of the population from voting in an upcoming election, by poisoning salad bars, so that their candidates would win the county elections. The result was the opposite of what the Rajneesh wanted. The residents of Wasco County, realizing that their town was in danger, registered and voted en masse against the Rajneeshee candidates. The number of voters in the November 1984 elections was, proportionally, the highest in the history of Oregon. The Rajneeshee candidates were defeated overwhelmingly; however, it took more than a year to discover the origin and motivation of this mass poisoning.¹²

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As always, observance of suspicious individuals and activities should immediately be reported to the New York State Intelligence Center - Counter Terrorism Center, Terrorism Tips Line at 1-866-SAFE-NYS (1-866-723-3697).

¹ Hoffman, Bruce, Terrorism Trends and Prospects, *Countering the New Terrorism*, 7-38.

<http://public.gettysburg.edu/~dborock/courses/Spring/int-sec../docs/hoffman-terror-trends-ch2.pdf>

² Montalvo, Jose, Voting after the bombing: Can terrorist attacks change the outcome of democratic elections?, Department of Economics, Universitat Pompeu Fabra, 2006, 1-33.

<http://www.econ.upf.edu/docs/papers/downloads/1000.pdf>

³ Deloughery, Kathleen, A Joint Examination of Country Policies and Transnational Terrorism, 2009.

<http://etd.ohiolink.edu/view.cgi/Deloughery%20Kathleen%20Loretta.pdf?osu1249578944>

⁴ Wallace, Bruce, "IRA Bomb Shatters the Peace," *Canadian Encyclopedia*, February 1996

<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/articles/macleans/ira-bomb-shatters-the-peace>

⁵ Madrid Train Bombing, *Global Security*

<http://www.globalsecurity.org/security/ops/madrid.htm>

⁶ Unknown, In Depth: Madrid Train Attacks, *BBC News*, February 14, 2007.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_depth/europe/2004/madrid_train_attacks/

⁷ Associated Press, "Timeline: The 2004 Madrid bombings," *The Guardian* newspaper, October 31, 2007.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/oct/31/spain.menezes>

⁸ Sadler, Brent, "Suicide bombings scar Peres' political ambitions," CNN, May 28, 1996.

<http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/9605/28/israel.impact/index.html>

⁹ Berrebi, Claude, and Esteban F. Klor. 2004. On terrorism and electoral outcomes: Theory and evidence from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 50

(December): 899-925. http://dataspace.princeton.edu/jspui/bitstream/88435/dsp0176537134t/1/480_IRS-version.pdf

¹⁰ Jaeger, David and Paserman, M. Daniele, 2006, Israel, the Palestinian Factions, and the Cycle of Violence, *The Economics of National Security* 45-49.

http://typo3-8442.rrz.uni-koeln.de/fileadmin/wiso_fak/cmr/pdf/Jaeger_Publication_List/aer200605.pdf

¹¹ Kibris, A, , Funerals and Elections: The Effects of Terrorism on Voting Behavior in Turkey, 2010, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 1-53.

https://research.sabanciuniv.edu/16485/1/Funerals_and_Elections_2.pdf

¹² Elmer-Dewitt, Philip, "America's First Bioterrorism Attack," *TIME* Magazine, September 30, 2001

<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,176937,00.html>