Skyjackers, jackals and soldiers: British planning for international terrorist incidents during the 1970s

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On 5 January 1974 a column of 150 British Army troops, supported by armoured vehicles, arrived at Heathrow airport in full battle order, and over the course of the following two weeks they patrolled its runways and the perimeter. These soldiers had been ordered in by Edward Heath's government in response to intelligence reports that the Palestinian *fedayeen* intended to use a portable anti-aircraft missile to shoot down a passenger jet, and the British authorities had already devised contingency plans (codenamed Operation Marmion) to deploy the army in order to deter a terrorist attack at the airport.[1] Marmion was implemented on three further occasions in 1974—in June, July and September—and in each case the troop presence at Heathrow attracted considerable parliamentary and press comment.[2] Some critics argued that in each case the British government was overreacting to the threat at hand, and that the military patrols at Heathrow were essentially intended as a public relations exercise.[3] However, Operation Marmion also had an effect which ministers and civil servants had not intended, as it fed contemporary fears that the British Army and right-wing extremists within the establishment and security services were preparing for a coup.[4]

Much of the discussion about responses to terrorism in Britain focuses on the conflict in Northern Ireland (1969–98),[5] and there is very little scholarly analysis of how the British state responded to the threat of international terrorism from the early 1970s onwards.[6] This is partly attributable to the 30-year rule regulating the

[1] GEN129(74)2, 'Protection of airports in the United Kingdom', 8 Jan. 1974, and GEN129(74)3, 'Terrorist threat at Heathrow Airport', 16 Jan. 1974, CAB130/636, UK National Archives, Kew (hereafter UKNA).

[2] 'Royal flights diverted in Heathrow alert', *The Times*, 27 June 1974; 'Troops and police ring airliner as Israel Prime Minister arrives in Britain', *The Times*, 29 June 1974; 'No plan to extend use of Army on terrorists', *The Times*, 20 Sept. 1974.

[3] 'Army gets its boot in the back door', *Guardian*, 8 Jan. 1974; 'Stolen NATO missiles led to airport alert', *Guardian*, 10 Jan. 1974.

[4] For a particularly alarmist account of coup plotting and military subversion, see 'Wilson, MI6 and the rise of Thatcher', *Lobster*, no. 11, 1986. See also 'Who was plotting an Army coup to get rid of Harold Wilson?', *Daily Mirror*, 16 March 2006.

[5] The Northern Ireland bias can be seen in Paul Wilkinson, ed., *British responses to terrorism* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1981). For an exception, see Rory Cormac, 'Much ado about nothing: terrorism, intelligence and the mechanics of threat exaggeration', *Terrorism and Political Violence* 25: 3, Summer 2013, pp. 476–93.

[6] 'International terrorism' is defined here as the use of lethal violence by an array of non-state groups against several states and societies, in support of anti-systemic objectives, such as the destruction of capitalism or

release of government papers into the UK National Archives, as a consequence of which primary source material from the 1970s has only recently been made available to researchers. Although a considerable amount of primary source evidence remains closed at the time of writing,[7] there is enough declassified documentation on this period for a preliminary study of this topic to be undertaken. An analysis of the counterterrorist policies of this period is of contemporary relevance for two reasons in particular. The first is that many of the planning and bureaucratic processes that are currently in place—notably the establishment of the Cabinet Office Briefing Room (COBR) as the key coordinating body in any crisis—and the procedures for calling in military support for the civil authorities were devised in the 1970s. There are indeed clear parallels between Operation Marmion and the decision by Tony Blair to order a similar deployment of soldiers to Heathrow in February 2003 (and, for that matter, the criticisms that the Labour government subsequently received from the media).[8]

A second point concerns the striking similarities between certain Palestinian and far left non-state groups of 40 years ago and their radical Islamist counterparts today. The first terrorist organization to hijack four passenger aircraft at the same time was not Al-Qaeda on 9/11, but the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) on 6 September 1970 ('Skyjack Sunday'); the crucial difference was that the PFLP's operation led to a prolonged hostage crisis, rather than mass murder.[9] The PFLP leader George Habash, his former subordinate and rival Wadie Haddad, the Baader–Meinhof gang, the Venezuelan gun-for-hire Illich Ramirez Sanchez (better known as 'Carlos the Jackal') and the Japanese Red Army (JRA) may have differed from Al-Qaeda ideologically. Yet they shared a general hostility towards the West and capitalism, which led to a coalescence between them which anticipated John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt's 2001 theory of 'netwar'—of 'dispersed organizations, small groups and individuals [which] communicate, coordinate and conduct their campaign in an internetted manner, without a precise central command'.[10] Furthermore, in much the same way that Al-Qaeda operated worldwide from the time of its inception, the instigators of 'Skyjack Sunday' and the Munich Olympics atrocity in 1972 recognized no geographical restrictions to their operations. The plight of the Palestinian refugees would provide the pretext for a hijacking of a Swissair jet and the killing of Puerto Rican pilgrims by Japanese terrorists in an Israeli airport.[11] The international terrorist threat in the 1970s therefore posed challenges distinct from those posed by the Provisional IRA and

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western hegemony, or the restoration of a caliphate under supposedly pure Islamic principles.

[7] For example, the file dealing with the Heathrow alerts (PREM16/660) remains classified.

[8] Geraint Hughes, *The military's role in counterterrorism: examples and implications for liberal democracies* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2011), pp. 89–90.

[9] One common point is that, as on 9/11, one of the PFLP hijackings was a failure, with the attempt made to take an El Al jet in mid-flight ending in a fiasco. See Mark Ensalaco, *Middle Eastern terrorism: from Black September to September 11* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), pp. 19–23; Michael Burleigh, *Blood and rage: a cultural history of terrorism* (London: Harper Perennial, 2009), pp. 152–62.

[10] John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, 'The advent of netwar (revisited)', in Arquilla and Ronfeldt, eds, *Networks and netwars: the future of terror, crime and militancy* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2001), pp. 1–25.

[11] Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 'The advent of netwar (revisited)'; Jillian Becker, *The PLO: the rise and fall of the Palestine National Liberation Movement* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1984), p. 106.

the Loyalist gangs in Northern Ireland, and the British official response is accordingly worthy of our attention.

This article describes how the British government developed its crisis management procedures to deal with terrorism during the 1970s, and also the contingency plans it prepared to deal with likely emergencies affecting the UK's national interests. It will focus principally on the role that the British armed forces played in counterterrorist preparations, and will also discuss the effect that political decisions had on civil society, most notably with reference to the common fear on the left that anti-terrorism provided a pretext for increased authoritarianism and a possible military takeover. As such, this article not only sets the context for the UK's current counterterrorism strategy,[12] but also highlights the challenges associated with using armed forces as an anti-terrorist tool in respect of both civil–military relations and civil liberties in a liberal democracy.

The historical context: the police, the military and anti-terrorism

Since the establishment of the Metropolitan Police in 1829, the British model for internal law enforcement emphasizes that society is policed by consent, that 'the police are the public and the public are the police', and that constables should employ the minimum force necessary in the preservation of law and order.[13] In practice, this meant that the UK did not have a centralized gendarmerie to preserve internal order, and officers in England, Wales and Scotland were unarmed when on routine duties.[14] In practice, by the mid-1970s there were specialized police units on the British mainland authorized and trained to carry arms and use lethal force. These included the Diplomatic Protection Group, the Special Patrol Group and the Firearms Unit of the Metropolitan Police (then known as D11, now SO19);[15] the Ministry of Defence (MoD) Police, formed in 1971 to guard MoD facilities; and the UK Atomic Energy Agency Constabulary, formed in 1955 to guard civil and military nuclear sites.[16] British constabularies therefore did have a capacity to deal with emergencies such as the Balcombe Street siege in London (6–12 December 1975), in which the Metropolitan Police successfully resolved a hostage crisis involving four Provisional IRA gunmen, who were taken into custody at its conclusion.[17]

However, if the civil authorities lack the personnel or means to address a domestic crisis, the British government can request support from the armed forces

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[12] 'Protecting the UK against terrorism', 26 March 2013, https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/protecting-the-uk-against-terrorism, accessed 4 Aug. 2014.

[13] J. C. Alderson (Commandant, Police College, Bramshill), 'The role of the police in society', *RUSI Journal* 118: 4, Autumn 1973, pp. 18–23; Association of Chief Police Officers, *Policing in the UK: a brief guide*, 2012, http://www.acpo.police.uk/documents/reports/2012/201210PolicingintheUKFinal.pdf, accessed 4 Aug. 2014.

[14] In contrast, British colonial police forces had a more coercive role. See David Anderson and David Killingray, eds, *Policing the empire: government, authority and control, 1830–1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991).

[15] P. A. J. Waddington, *The strong arm of the law* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 1–10.

[16] Minutes of meeting at MoD, 24 Nov. 1972, DEFE24/1101, and memorandum by Treasury Solicitor, 25 May 1978, DEFE24/1101 (UKNA).

[17] Robert W. Gould and Michael J. Waldren, *London's armed police* (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1986), pp. 161–5.

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under the rubric of Military Aid to the Civil Authorities (MACA). If the police cannot preserve law and order the armed forces, in particular the British Army, can be required to provide Military Assistance to the Civil Power (MACP).[18] During the 1970s MACP involved not only the prolonged and controversial counter-terrorist campaign in Northern Ireland, but also preparations to use the armed forces—in particular, elite units such as the 22nd Special Air Service Regiment (22SAS) and the Special Boat Service (SBS)—in the event of a terrorist attack in the UK. These provisions were due not only to the stark contrast between the ethos of the British policing model and the potential need to use lethal violence to rescue hostages from terrorists (which the Bavarian police failed to do at Munich in September 1972), but also to the emphasis in police training on containment rather than aggressive counter-action in the event of a hostage crisis, posing a particular challenge if ideologically inspired hostage-takers were unwilling to negotiate a peaceful resolution with the authorities.[19]

The challenge of terrorism was not a new one for the British government, which had experienced insurgencies in its former colonies,[20] and also acts of political violence at home committed by Irish Republicans and political radicals from the early twentieth century onwards; the first example in which the army was called in to fight terrorists in a MACP role was arguably the 'Siege of Sidney Street' on 3 January 1911.[21] Yet the emergence of international terrorism from the late 1960s represented a challenge very different from that of Republican and Loyalist paramilitarism in Northern Ireland during the 'Troubles',[22] and external hostage crises and aircraft hijackings posed unique problems for the UK government. The terrorist threat itself came from multiple groups drawn from the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and its rivals, and also far leftists from Western Europe, Latin America and Japan. The PFLP, the JRA, the Baader–Meinhof gang and other movements trained with each other (notably in Palestinian *fedayeen*-run training camps in Jordan and, after 1970, Lebanon), and also conducted operations in concert or on one another's behalf: prime examples include the JRA's gun and grenade attack against passengers at Lod Airport in Israel (31 May 1972) and the PFLP's hijacking of Lufthansa Flight 181 (13–17 October 1977), which was intended to force the German government to release the Baader–Meinhof's leaders from prison.[23]

Furthermore, the groups involved received training, weaponry and intelligence from state sponsors. The KGB and its Warsaw Pact counterparts supported

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[18] DP18/74(Final), 'The responsibilities of the armed forces for safeguarding the United Kingdom's offshore interests in peace', 18 Oct. 1974, DEFE24/411 (UKNA).

[19] James Salt and M. L. R. Smith, 'Reassessing military assistance to the civil powers: are traditional British anti-terrorist responses still effective?', *Low Intensity Conflict and Law Enforcement* 13: 3, Summer 2005, pp. 227–49; Waddington, *Strong arm of the law*, pp. 273, 281.

[20] David French, *The British way in counter-insurgency, 1945–67* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[21] The siege involved a firefight between the police and a band of Latvian anarchists, in which the former called in a platoon of Scots Guards after they were outgunned. See Gould and Waldren, *London's armed police*, pp. 70–75.

[22] Thomas Hennessey, *The evolution of the Troubles, 1970–72* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2007).

[23] Burleigh, *Blood and rage*, pp. 157–9, 179–82, 238, 249–57; Ensalaco, *Middle Eastern terrorism*, pp. 14–28, 35–7, 111–17.

Palestinian and extreme left European movements, although it is worth noting that the British intelligence services did not subscribe to the conspiracy theory which presented international terrorism as part of a global Soviet plot to undermine the West, ascribing more opportunistic reasons for Soviet bloc assistance to the PLO and other organizations.[24] Of greater importance were Arab sponsors such as Iraq, Syria and Libya, whose provision of sanctuary to hard-line Palestinian groups that opposed peace with Israel presented a serious obstacle to western governments.[25] In Northern Ireland MI5, the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the British Army operated on home ground when it came to running intelligence operations against the Provisional IRA and other paramilitary groups, and also benefited from close cooperation with their Irish counterparts. In contrast, as one senior MI5 officer noted in a letter to the then Home Secretary, Robert Carr, in early September 1972:

We do not control directly the amount or the quality of intelligence we receive about Arab terrorist plans and intentions. The planning of such operations is undertaken in highly secure conditions in the Middle East. Because of this tight security the intelligence we receive from friends and liaison services … is usually imprecise as regards targets, timing and the identities of those involved.[26]

A further problem was that the UK was obliged to be reactive politically. While successive governments were in a position to address the causes of terrorist violence in Northern Ireland through a long-term policy of enacting reforms addressing the institutionalized discrimination against the Catholic community, the factors that encouraged recruits for the movements engaged in international terrorism—the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, US foreign policy, and inchoate anger against 'imperialism' and 'capitalism'—were beyond influence, let alone resolution, by the British government, or indeed any other western power. The comparisons with the causes of Islamist terrorism today require no further comment.

Furthermore, the tactics employed by international terrorists—the hijacking of passenger jets, airport attacks and hostage crises—took advantage of the communications revolution of the late twentieth century, exploiting both the increasing affordability of air travel and also the growth of televisual media. This meant that major terrorist incidents (such as Skyjack Sunday, Munich 1972, and the seizure of OPEC ministers at their summit in Vienna in December 1975) gained the perpetrators a global audience, put public pressure on governments to respond to crises in which their citizens were under threat,[27] and also made terrorism a source of popular fascination, evident in sensationalist press reports, and also in films and novels inspired by real-life events.[28] Aircraft hijackings were not a new

[24] Joint Intelligence Committee note signed by Antony Acland (chairman), 'The current threat to the United Kingdom from terrorism', 28 March 1980, CAB186/30, UKNA.
[25] Daniel Byman, *Deadly connections: states that sponsor terrorism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
[26] Christopher Andrew, *The defence of the realm: the authorised history of MI5* (London: Penguin, 2010), p. 613.
[27] GEN129(72)5, 'Report to ministers', 17 Oct. 1972, CAB130/616 (UKNA); 'Riding shotgun', *The Economist*, 12 Jan. 1974.
[28] Examples of films include *Juggernaut* (1974), *The taking of Pelham 123* (1975), *Black Sunday* (1977) and *North Sea hijack* (1979). For novels, see Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö, *The terrorists* (New York: Random House, 1975); Gerald Seymour, *The glory boys* (London: Collins, 1976); Frederick Forsyth, *The devil's alternative* (London: Hutchinson, 1979); and Tom Sharpe, *The Wilt alternative* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1979).

phenomenon; there had been a spate of incidents in the 1960s in which passenger jets were taken over either by criminals or by armed dissidents fleeing their own countries.[29] Yet whereas in previous instances crew and passengers were usually released once the plane had landed, practitioners of skyjacking such as the PFLP would hold hostages and threaten to execute them if their own demands were not met. Hijackers also tended to divert captured planes either to states where the host government was sympathetic to their cause, as was the case with Entebbe in Uganda in 1976, or to a location where a hostage rescue operation would be hampered by diplomatic and political factors.[30]

British officials did nonetheless benefit from the increased cooperation between western states and other governments (notably those of Japan, Israel and pro-western Arab states) during the course of the 1970s, most notably in the form of intelligence-sharing and the dissemination of tactics and techniques related to counterterrorist operations.[31] To take one example, the information that provoked the January 1974 Heathrow alert appears to have been provided by a Middle Eastern intelligence service which had close ties with its British counterparts. The likelihood is that this was either the Israeli Mossad or the Jordanian Mukhabarat, either of which would have had more effective informants among the Palestinian *fedayeen* than either MI5 or the Secret Intelligence Service would have possessed.[32]

COBR and Pagoda: 1972–9

Prior to September 1972 the British authorities did not treat international terrorism as an urgent problem. This was due in part to the Conservative government's reluctance to increase military involvement in domestic security (particularly given the industrial disputes affecting the country at that time), but also to a belief that the PFLP and allied groups were a problem for Israel rather than the UK.[33] In retrospect, the 1970 skyjacking crisis—in particular, the seizure of a British airliner en route from Mumbai to London on 9 September—should have brought home to Heath and his ministers the realization that hijackers no longer respected national boundaries, particularly because Britain was forced to release a PFLP cadre, Leila Khaled, from police custody. While there were contingency plans to send troops to UK airports in the event of a gun attack against a plane, and MI5 was tasked with reviewing airport security after the Lod massacre, the British government took no measures to prepare for a major attack before the Munich Olympics.[34]

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[29] Timothy Naftali, *Blind spot: the secret history of American counterterrorism* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), pp. 19–23; Bruce Hoffman, *Inside terrorism*, 2nd edn (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), pp. 63–4.

[30] Burleigh, *Blood and rage*, p. 153; Randall Law, *Terrorism: a history* (Cambridge: Polity, 2009), p. 221; Ensalaco, *Middle Eastern terrorism*, pp. 17–27, 33–4.

[31] S. Pollard (MoD) to K. Ghosh (Maritime, Air and Environmental Department (MAED) (FCO), 16 Nov. 1977, FCO76/1763 (UKNA).

[32] The author infers this from a letter received from J. Keeling (Cabinet Office), dated 13 Feb. 2012, explaining the government's refusal to meet a Freedom of Information Act Request to declassify PREM16/660. On MI5's liaison relationships with the Israelis and Jordanians, see Andrew, *Defence of the realm*, p. 613.

[33] General Sir Peter de la Billière, *Looking for trouble* (London: HarperCollins, 1995), pp. 280–81; Andrew, *Defence of the realm*, pp. 600–601; memorandum from MI5, 1 Oct. 1970, PREM15/203 (UKNA).

[34] GEN10(70), 'Acts of violence against civil aircraft', n.d. [Sept. 1970], PREM15/202 (UKNA); J. P. Tripp (FCO)

The taking of Israeli athletes by 'Black September' on 5 September 1972[35]—and the disastrous failure of the German hostage rescue attempt the following morning—caused widespread alarm in Whitehall, and early the following month the Cabinet Office established its Working Group on Terrorist Activities to devise a cross-governmental strategy for dealing with a similar incident in the UK. The working group was chaired by the Home Office, and incorporated representatives of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), MoD, MI5, the Department of Trade, and both the Metropolitan and Essex police forces (respectively responsible for the security of Heathrow and Stansted airports). Its task was to learn lessons from Munich and other atrocities, prepare contingency plans for terrorist incidents in Britain, devise crisis management procedures and delineate departmental areas of responsibility in advance, and resolve any legal and tactical challenges that might arise from police or military intervention. Two days after Munich, the commanding officer of 22SAS, Lieutenant-Colonel Peter de la Billière, received a telephone call from the MoD's Director of Military Operations, Major-General Bill Scotter, relaying an enquiry from the Prime Minister about the army's capacity for counterterrorism. De la Billière's adjutant, Captain Andrew Massey, had already produced a paper recommending that 22SAS set up a specialist hostage rescue unit, and this provided the basis for the regiment's anti-terrorist troop, codenamed Pagoda.[36]

One of the key conclusions that both MI5 and 22SAS drew from Munich was that the Black September gunmen were able to massacre their hostages because the Bavarian police were completely untrained and unequipped to mount a rescue operation.[37] For the working group and the army, the key lesson was that in an analogous situation where terrorists were holding captives in a fixed location and were threatening to kill them, any military raid to rescue the latter had to be conducted with speed, aggression and overwhelming force. As Massey frankly noted in his report: 'The use of shock tactics [to free hostages] is certain to produce violent scenes abhorrent to the public eye, and likely to provoke unfavourable press reaction.' There was therefore a clear understanding in Whitehall that the SAS would shoot to kill hostage-takers in the event of a Munich-style crisis, and that the role of a police cordon would be not just to contain the incident and prevent terrorists from escaping, but to ensure that any inquisitive members of the press or public did not get to see the grisly aftermath of a military assault.[38]

Contingency plans for hostage rescue represented just one aspect of the government response, as did the preparations to send regular troops to Heathrow and

to D. Greenhill (Permanent Undersecretary of State, FCO), 27 Sept. 1970, PREM15/203 (UKNA); Andrew, *Defence of the realm*, p. 609.

[35] The 1999 documentary film *One day in September* provides an authoritative account of the Munich attack.

[36] GEN129(72), 1st and 2nd meetings, 2 Oct. and 10 Oct. 1972, CAB130/616 (UKNA); de la Billière, *Looking for trouble*, p. 281; 'Obituary: Brigadier Andrew Massey', *Independent*, 14 Sept. 1998. 22SAS is divided into four squadrons, and within this regiment a 'troop' usually consists of around 16 soldiers.

[37] GEN129(72)3, 'The Munich incident', 12 Oct. 1972, including Capt. A. C. Massey (22SAS), 'Comments on the tactical aspects of the handling of the Munich massacre', 12 Sept. 1972, and D. G. C. Sutherland (MI5), 'Terrorism at Munich airport—September 1972', 13 Sept. 1972, CAB130/616 (UKNA).

[38] GEN129(73)7, 'Counterterrorist tactics', 20 Feb. 1973, CAB130/636 (UKNA); Massey, 'Comments'.

other airports to deter terrorist attacks. Initially known as Marmion, by 1979 these provisions included two separate plans for military intervention at Gatwick (Black Diamond) and Heathrow (Trustee).[39] The main task of the Working Group on Terrorist Activities was to ensure that in the event of a major incident the British authorities would be prepared in advance, rather than having to follow an improvised process of crisis management similar to that which had failed at Munich. The working group's plans, which were endorsed by ministers, made the Home Secretary the lead official in managing the counterterrorist response, using COBR both as a command post and as a means of coordinating the various government departments. In the event of a hostage crisis, the processes of negotiating with the terrorists and planning for a rescue were to be conducted separately but concurrently. The police were in charge of containing the incident, cordoning off the terrorists and their captives, and also keeping the media clear of the scene (another lesson from Munich, where camera crews filmed officers preparing to storm the Israeli quarters in the Olympic Village, compromising the effort to rescue the captive athletes in the process). Both MI5 and the police were tasked with intelligence-gathering, while the Chief Constable could, with the Home Secretary's approval, call in the SAS Pagoda troop as part of MACP if negotiations reached an impasse and the lives of the hostages were threatened. These plans initially concentrated on managing terrorist incidents at British airports (with plans to call in support from 22SAS being codenamed Operation Snowdrop),[40] but provided the template for resolving similar emergencies across the British mainland, and the COBR model of crisis management remained unaltered despite the changes in the political complexion of government occurring during this period (with Labour gaining office in March 1974 and the Conservatives returning in May 1979).[41]

   Declassified records show that COBR first ran an 'alert procedure exercise' in February 1973, dealing with a simulated hijacking of a passenger jet flying into UK airspace. The first simulation to rehearse the government's 'response to a full-scale terrorist incident', codenamed Icon, was held at Stansted airport on 10 April 1973, and the following January COBR held another unnamed exercise, the contingency being the takeover of an embassy in London.[42] These simulations enabled the Cabinet Office to identify potential flaws in advance, most notably by preparing a communications plan (known as Orcades) that would link police and military commanders on the ground, and also the various government departments concerned.[43] In conjunction with COBR's preparations, the SAS's

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[39] GEN129(74), 1st, 2nd and 3rd meetings, 7, 9 and 15 Jan. 1974, CAB130/636 (UKNA); OD(T)(79)3, 'Counter-terrorist arrangements', 11 Oct. 1979, CAB148/185 (UKNA).
[40] GEN129(72)5, CAB130/616 (UKNA); GEN129(73)7, CAB130/636 (UKNA); note by D. R. J. Stephen (MoD), 13 March 1973, DEFE25/282 (UKNA).
[41] TM(75)2, 'Counterterrorist arrangements—guidelines for decision-taking', 4 March 1975, CAB134/3973 (UKNA).
[42] GEN129(73), 1st, 2nd and 3rd meetings, 23 Feb., 3 July and 8 Oct. 1973, GEN129(73)4, 'Terrorist incidents', 7 Feb. 1973, GEN129(73)15, 'Terrorist exercises', 2 April 1973, and GEN129(73)24, 'Exercise Icon', 2 Sept. 1973, CAB130/636 (UKNA).
[43] COS3/80, 'Arrangements for the employment of forces in maritime counterterrorist operations in peacetime', 18 Feb. 1980, DEFE5/205 (UKNA).

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Pagoda troop repeatedly trained to storm a series of targets—aircraft, buses, train carriages and buildings—according to a variety of likely hostage-taking scenarios. In contrast with the financial austerity affecting other government expenditure, including defence, 'money was no problem' as far as the establishment and training of the Pagoda troop was concerned. Yet 22SAS was overstretched by its commitment of manpower to the counter-insurgency war in Dhofar, Oman, and also (after January 1976) by its deployment to Northern Ireland. By 1979 Pagoda consisted of two troops (20 men in total) in addition to a small command group.[44] There was also considerable disquiet within the Home Office and police forces about using 22SAS in domestic interventions, to which Lieutenant-Colonel de la Billière responded by inviting English, Scottish and Welsh chief constables to the regiment's headquarters near Hereford, beginning a process of briefing and liaison which helped ease police–military relations. As far as domestic intelligence-gathering was concerned, MI5's F Branch provided the lead; however, the Security Service's priorities involved combating Soviet bloc espionage and supporting the military effort in Northern Ireland, and the official history of MI5 estimates that the Middle Eastern and related terrorist threat absorbed only 3 per cent of the service's efforts.[45]

Before the Iranian Embassy siege of 30 April–5 May 1980 COBR was not tested in earnest, and while the Provisional IRA did conduct a mainland bombing campaign in the mid-1970s there were comparatively few terrorist incidents connected to Palestinian or international far left groups. Exceptions included the attempted assassination of Joseph Sieff (vice-president of the British Zionist Federation) by Carlos on 30 December 1973, and the hijacking of a British Airways flight from London to Brunei, which was diverted to Tunis (21–25 November 1974); this crisis was resolved by the Tunisians, ending with the skyjackers' surrender. A domestic flight from Manchester to London was hijacked on 7 January 1975, but the gunman involved was a mentally unstable Iranian émigré rather than a hardened terrorist, and he was quickly arrested after the plane was diverted to land at Stansted.[46] However, the authorities had to plan for the likelihood of attacks on British soil not just because of the threat that Palestinian groups and their sympathizers posed to Israeli and Jordanian targets (such as embassies, aircraft and commercial facilities) and the British Jewish community (as demonstrated by the attempt on Sieff's life), but also because internecine feuds between rival Palestinian factions—notably Fatah and the Abu Nidal organization—and their patrons, Syria, Iraq and Libya, could lead to internecine feuds being prosecuted within the Arab émigré and diplomatic community in the UK. Foreign 'spectaculars' such as

[44] Ken Connor, *Ghost force: the secret history of the SAS* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1998), pp. 208, 221; Geraint Hughes, 'A "model campaign" reappraised: the counter-insurgency war in Dhofar, Oman, 1965–1975', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 32: 2, April 2009, pp. 271–306; MISC115(76), 1st meeting, 6 Jan. 1976, CAB130/908 (UKNA); OD(T)(79)3, CAB148/185 (UKNA).

[45] GEN129(72)14, 'Contingency plans', 19 Dec. 1972, CAB130/616 (UKNA); de la Billière, *Looking for trouble*, pp. 282–3; Andrew, *Defence of the realm*, pp. 615–16.

[46] Ed Moloney, *A secret history of the IRA* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2003), pp. 126–7; 'Police in London break up a suspected Arab guerrilla unit', *The Times*, 3 Jan. 1974; TM(75)1, 'Counterterrorist arrangements', 4 March 1975, CAB134/3973 (UKNA).

the gun attack on passengers at Rome's Leonardo da Vinci airport (17 December 1973) and Carlos's rocket attack against aircraft at Orly, Paris (13 January 1975) also indicated the potential for similar acts against UK targets.[47]

However, during the course of the decade it became evident that there were two gaps in counterterrorist planning that needed to be addressed. The first involved crisis management measures for maritime emergencies, most notably the oil and natural gas facilities in the North Sea. The second—as demonstrated by the hijackings of Air France Flight 139 (27 June 1976) and Lufthansa Flight 181 (13 October 1977)—concerned the UK's ability to respond decisively to an overseas crisis in which the lives of its citizens were at stake, even if this meant conducting hostage rescue missions similar to those carried out by the Israeli Sayeret Matkal and the German GSG-9 on foreign soil in, respectively, Entebbe and Mogadishu.

Maritime counterterrorist planning

The perceived risks of attacks against British shipping led the Royal Navy to prepare contingency plans (codenamed Mendon) for searching vessels in UK ports for explosives; and on 17 May 1972 a team of SBS marines and an army ordnance expert were dropped by parachute into the Atlantic near the *Queen Elizabeth II* to search the liner in response to a bomb threat (which subsequently proved to be a hoax).[48] Intelligence warnings of an impending attack on the *QEII* during its cruise to Israel in April–May 1973 (to mark the 25th anniversary of Israeli independence) prompted the Heath government to authorize the deployment of a 'response force' of Royal Marines in plain clothes during the vessel's voyage. The *QEII*'s trip to Israel proved uneventful, which was presumably a source of considerable relief to those FCO officials fretting about the possible diplomatic implications of a shootout between marines and Arab hijackers.[49]

The British authorities also felt obliged to plan for a potential terrorist attack directed against a key UK economic asset, the oil and gas fields of the North Sea. This proved to be a far more complicated process than the contingency preparations for an emergency on land. The first problem was to decide which government agency had primary oversight for the safety of the oil and gas sites. The Department of Energy was ultimately responsible for their oversight, the Department of Trade for maritime trade safety, the Home Office for coordinating counterterrorist responses (MI5 for liaising with the energy companies about their security arrangements), and the MoD for MACA and also defence against external attack. The Scottish Office also had an institutional interest in the northern fields, while Norway was responsible for the protection of rigs and pipelines in its own

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[47] Ensalaco, *Middle Eastern terrorism*, pp. 66–7, 80, 80–82; GEN129(73)7, CAB130/636 (UKNA); OD(T)(79)2, 'Terrorism in Britain', 11 Oct. 1979, CAB148/185 (UKNA).

[48] GEN129(72)5, CAB130/616 (UKNA); John Parker, *SBS: the inside story of the Special Boat Service* (London: Headline, 2004), pp. 249–59.

[49] GEN144(73), 1st and 2nd meetings, 22 Jan. and 13 Feb. 1973, GEN144(73)1, 'Cruise of the QE2 to Israel', 25 Jan. 1973, and GEN144(73)3, 'Report to ministers, 22 Feb. 1973, CAB130/676 (UKNA).

territorial waters.[50] The second challenge was to determine what type of response the UK government needed to make to a largely hypothetical threat. The Joint Intelligence Committee's assessment of the risks of attack (by an Arab group, or the Provisional IRA, or the somewhat ineffectual 'Tartan Army' of Scottish nationalists) stated that '[because] of difficulties of access, including adverse weather conditions, the installations [at sea] will generally be less attractive than onshore installations', although it highlighted the vulnerability of pipelines and unmanned gas plants to sabotage.[51] With 570 economic key points to protect across the UK, and the national economy in a parlous state, total defence was impossible.[52]

Whitehall faced a difficult decision in determining where responsibility for protecting the oil and gas fields from terrorist attack ultimately lay. The Home Office insisted that the English and Scottish constabularies with North Sea shore-lines did not have the capacity to police or patrol the oil and gas platforms, lacking the ships, helicopters and specialist training required. Its officials also insisted that, despite the terms of the 1964 Police Act and the 1974 Continental Shelf Act, constabularies were not under any statutory obligation to extend their jurisdiction offshore.[53] The MoD, for its part, argued that the three armed services were overstretched, and senior civil servants and military officers alike suspected that the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force (RAF) in particular could find their vessels and aircraft—notably search and rescue helicopters—being repeatedly called upon under MACA rules to deal with minor incidents (such as accidental damage or industrial disputes) which fell well short of a terrorist incident. In legal terms, the MoD also argued that only the police had the authority to gain access to oil and gas installations when 'dealing with serious crime or public order', and that unless there was specific intelligence justifying a deployment it was illegal to permanently commit soldiers or marines to the defence of North Sea rigs. The military chiefs of staff also emphasized that the SAS Pagoda troop was too small to be committed to both land and maritime anti-terrorist interventions, and that in the context of budget cuts expected in the 1975 defence review the MoD could ill afford an extended domestic counterterrorist role.[54]

This debate was eventually resolved on 17 December 1975 at a meeting of the Ministerial Committee on Terrorism, chaired by the then Home Secretary Roy Jenkins. It involved established MACA/MACP procedures, making coastal constabularies responsible for the protection of onshore and offshore facilities, and also implementing the same processes of crisis management via the Home

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[50] A. S. Baker (Home Office—HO) to H. F. T. Smith (Cabinet Office), 20 Nov. 1974, DEFE24/411 (UKNA); memorandum by Sutherland (MI5), 29 July 1974, DEFE24/410 (UKNA); Cormac, 'Much ado', p. 487.
[51] JIC(74)25, 'Threat to the United Kingdom's offshore fuel installations', 2 Sept. 1974, DEFE24/411 (UKNA).
[52] OD(T)(79)4, 'The protection of economic key points', 11 Oct. 1979, CAB148/185 (UKNA); Andrew, *Defence of the realm*, pp. 654–55, 695.
[53] Minutes of meeting at Department of Energy, 2 Aug. 1974, and HO memorandum, 13 Aug. 1974, DEFE24/410 (UKNA).
[54] Memorandum by General Sir Peter Hunt (Acting Chief of the Defence Staff) to Roy Mason (Defence Secretary), 15 Aug. 1974, and minute by R. Byers (MoD), 28 Aug. 1974, DEFE24/410 (UKNA); DP18/74(Final), 'The responsibilities of the armed forces for safeguarding the United Kingdom's offshore interests in peace', 18 Oct. 1974, DEFE24/211 (UKNA).

Secretary and COBR that had been devised to deal with an onshore crisis. As far as initial jurisdiction was concerned, the Home Office ruled that the response to any incident 'should come from the [constabulary] responsible for the port from which the [threatened] installation is operated'. In the event of a land-based terrorist incident, the chief constable concerned was in a position to request assistance from the Pagoda troop.[55] Both the navy and the air force were also specifically allotted deterrence roles to complement their existing duties of territorial defence, the RAF's Nimrod maritime reconnaissance aircraft incorporating overflights of the North Sea rigs into their normal patrolling duties, complemented by movements of the navy's five Island-class patrol vessels and nine Ton-class minesweepers. The SBS's own training in combat diving, parachuting, and covert insertion by small boat or submarine made it the obvious choice for any operations to recover either a hijacked vessel in UK territorial waters or a British-flagged ship captured by terrorists in international waters. The Royal Marines were also tasked with establishing a specialist unit to recapture any oil rig held by armed opposition; this unit, known as Commachio Company, was operational by 1980.[56]

As was the case with land-based scenarios from Icon onwards, the declassified documents show that COBR ran exercises combining 'command post' simulations and live training for military units. On 5–6 July 1976 COBR ran Purple Oyster, which incorporated both an interdepartmental war game involving the MoD, MI5, the Scottish Office, FCO and Grampian Police, and a live exercise to scale an oil rig for the SBS and marines. Until 1979 at least one Purple Oyster exercise was held annually, alongside three Prawn Salads (involving training for a helicopter assault by the Royal Marines on a captured platform) and one Pink Mussel (in which SBS divers practised covert insertion techniques from a submarine).[57] These exercises were particularly important for the SBS, not only to provide practice in scaling and storming a target at sea, but also to mitigate the considerable risks involved in combat diving, in which carelessness or equipment failure could lead to an operative's death.[58]

Liaison and planning for external interventions

The challenges of counterterrorism could be mitigated by international cooperation, and the British and Norwegian governments coordinated security measures for the protection of the North Sea. The Federal German counterterrorist squad GSG-9 had close ties with 22SAS and, during the seizure of Lufthansa 181 by the PFLP, GSG-9's founder and commander, Colonel Ulrich Wegener, was invited by the Prime Minister, James Callaghan, to meet senior SAS officers at 10

[55] TM(75), 1st meeting, 17 Dec. 1975, CAB134/3973 (UKNA); A. S. Baker, 'Arrangements for dealing with terrorist incidents on offshore installations', 25 March 1977, FCO76/1755 (UKNA).
[56] COS3/80, DEFE5/205 (UKNA); OD(T)(79)4, CAB148/185 (UKNA); C(81)11, 'Statement on the Defence Estimates', 16 March 1981, CAB129/211 (UKNA); Hughes, *The military's role in counterterrorism*, pp. 45–6.
[57] Exercise instructions for Purple Oyster, 1 July 1976, and minutes on counterterrorist exercises by Cdr E. T. Butterworth (Royal Navy), 24 May 1977, 21 Sept. 1977 and 22 April 1978, FCO76/1755 (UKNA).
[58] Duncan Falconer, *First into action: a dramatic personal account of life in the SBS* (London: Sphere, 2001), pp. 150–68.

Downing Street on 14 October 1977.[59] When the German commandos successfully stormed Flight 181 and freed its passengers at Mogadishu airport four days later, they were accompanied by two soldiers from 22SAS armed with concussion ('stun') grenades which were used to disorientate the Palestinian gunmen during the assault.[60] Owing to the UK government's concerns over retaliatory hijackings against British commercial aircraft 22SAS's assistance to the Germans remained secret,[61] but this did not prevent the MoD's being subsequently inundated with requests from foreign governments for assistance and training.[62]

The MoD insisted that it could not meet every request from allied governments for assistance in training their special forces while also keeping the Pagoda troop operational, and that 22SAS could provide the personnel required for just six overseas training missions. EEC member states were given priority for training, and both the Italians and French sent delegations to Hereford, while the Netherlands special forces were invited to use the British Army's close quarter battle range at Lydd and Hythe (the Dutch also had considerable expertise responding to terrorist attacks in the Netherlands from which the British were keen to learn). The MoD also developed liaison relationships with the US Army (which established its Delta Force in 1978), and Commonwealth partners Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Lesser priorities included Japan, Portugal and Greece, the latter two of which were both new democracies and potential EEC members, and Arab allies such as Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates. It is worth noting that British officials concluded that sharing tactics and weaponry—particularly the 'stun grenades'—with foreign special forces units was of minimal utility without advice on crisis management procedures, negotiating techniques, police command and control, and also guidance on how to process intelligence and manage communications in an emergency situation. The Home Office in particular stressed that 'it is in our interests to respond helpfully to requests for assistance, though not to tout for custom or set ourselves up as world experts in counterterrorism', not least because the UK lacked the resources to do the latter.[63]

There was also one other potential partner which possessed considerable practical expertise in counterterrorism, but with whom cooperation was politically sensitive. Following the Sayeret Matkal's successful rescue of 102 Israeli and Jewish hostages from Entebbe in Uganda on 4 July 1976, 22SAS requested that one of the Israeli commandos—or a planner involved in the operation—visit Hereford. The MoD and FCO approved the request, although both were concerned lest the visit be made public. The Entebbe operation was contentious because the Ugandan

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[59] OD(T)(79)4, CAB148/185 (UKNA); Bernard Donoughue, *Downing Street diary: with James Callaghan in No. 10* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2008), entry for 18 Oct. 1977, p. 248.

[60] C. F. Miller (FCO) to HE Thomas Matussek (Ambassador, Federal Republic of Germany), 1 Nov. 1977, FCO33/3186 (UKNA). The two SAS soldiers were apparently assigned to train an anti-terrorist unit in the United Arab Emirates, and joined the German commandos at Dubai. See Burleigh, *Blood and rage*, p. 255.

[61] A. M. Goodenough (MAED) to David Owen (Foreign Secretary), 24 Oct. 1977, and minute by R. L. Facer (MoD), 17 Nov. 1977, FCO33/3186 (UKNA).

[62] P. A. Robertson (MoD) to K. Ghosh, 16 Nov. 1977, and minutes of meeting at FCO, 17 Nov. 1977, FCO76/1763 (UKNA).

[63] S. Pollard (MoD) to K. Ghosh, 29 Nov. 1977, G. L. Angel (HO) to M. J. Culham (MoD), 6 Dec. 1977, and minute by Angel, 21 Dec. 1977, FCO76/1763 (UKNA).

dictator Idi Amin had colluded with the West German and Palestinian terrorists, and the Israeli rescue operation was fiercely condemned by the Organization of African Unity (OAU).[64] It also obliged the UK government to consider the possibility that a British aircraft could be hijacked in analogous circumstances.

By December 1977 an interdepartmental Working Group on Overseas Incidents was set up to prepare plans (codenamed Pulpit) for a British military intervention similar to Entebbe or Mogadishu. These preparations also involved setting aside a budget of £600,000 to fund satellite communications for the negotiators and a 22SAS hostage rescue team.[65] The group's recommendations were that in the event of an overseas crisis the foreign secretary should chair COBR, although if a hijacked airplane were flown to a UK dependency the British governor was theoretically in charge; the Crown colony of Hong Kong had already raised its own police anti-terrorist unit in 1974 with SAS assistance.[66] Operation Pulpit was based on the assumption that—as was the case with the Somalis in Mogadishu— the host government would accept external intervention, which as far as British planning was concerned involved sending both a minister in charge of managing negotiations with the terrorists and an SAS contingent of up to 40 soldiers ready to recover hostages by force. The problem was that potential hijackers were likely to order the air crew of a captured plane to land in a state hostile to the UK, and while the British armed forces had the capability to mount an operation similar to Entebbe, the political and diplomatic consequences of intervention would be potentially insurmountable. FCO officials observed that Kenya—which had granted the Israelis access to their airspace for their raid into Uganda—was being ostracized by the OAU as a consequence, and neighbouring states subsequently refused to allow overflight rights to RAF aircraft carrying arms to the Kenyans. A mission to rescue British citizens held by terrorists overseas could be thwarted not only if a regime like Amin's collaborated with the hijackers, but if other states refused to give the UK permission to use their airspace.[67]

During the late 1970s the British conducted at least two exercises to prepare for an overseas emergency (one using the sovereign base areas in Cyprus), but in reality any crisis similar to Entebbe would have posed an insoluble dilemma. The government would have faced public condemnation if it were shown to be unable to rescue British hostages; but, as one senior Cabinet Office official noted, 'there are probably only a few places where intervention would be acceptable on political terms and realistic and practical in terms of our capacity to intervene'.[68] The UK and other western states were dependent almost entirely on the policies (and often the whims) of national authorities as far as hijacked aircraft were concerned.

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[64] A. J. H. Ward (MoD) to E. Clay (Defence Department, FCO), 24 Aug. 1976, and minute by Clay, 2 Sept. 1976, FCO46/1422 (UKNA).
[65] Note by R. A. Burrows (Chairman of Working Group on Overseas Incidents), 7 Dec. 1977, and minute by A. S. Brown (MAED), 14 Dec. 1977, FCO76/1765 (UKNA).
[66] Minute by S. Pollard, 16 Nov. 1977, FCO76/1763 (UKNA), and minute by W. E. Quantrill (Hong Kong Department, FCO), 30 Dec. 1977, FCO76/1765 (UKNA).
[67] Memorandum by A. M. Goodenough, 30 Dec. 1977, FCO76/1765 (UKNA).
[68] C. Rose (Deputy Secretary, Civil Contingencies Unit, Cabinet Office) to Merlyn Rees (Home Secretary), 27 Sept. 1977, and P. J. Fowler (Cabinet Office) to Rees, 20 Feb. 1979, CAB165/1095 (UKNA).

The Somali President Siad Barre invited GSG-9 to Mogadishu because he had broken alliance ties with the Soviet bloc as a consequence of Somalia's invasion of Ethiopia in July 1977, and was desperate to curry favour with the West. Had Lufthansa 181 been hijacked prior to the Somali–Ethiopian war, it is likely that Barre would have refused to assist the Germans with their rescue mission.[69]

Domestic political implications

During the mid-1970s profound concerns were expressed in parliament and the press regarding the consequences of counterterrorism for both civil liberties and the constitutional order. The increased prominence of armed police aroused fears that mainland constabularies were evolving into a 'third force', or a gendarmerie, while the opaque role of Special Branch units in 'counter-subversion' also raised the prospect that the anti-terrorist effort could end up targeting non-violent political activists.[70] Concerns over the military's increased role in domestic security were more prominent among left-leaning Labour MPs, journalists and trade unionists.[71] Officials in Whitehall misjudged the extent to which measures justified as protecting the British public from terrorist atrocities could be interpreted in a less benign manner. Civil servants on the Working Group on Terrorist Activities confidently noted in October 1972 that, after Munich:

There would be a positive advantage in letting it be known that special precautions were being taken against terrorism … It would be a novelty in Great Britain for soldiers to use armed force in aid of the civil power in this way. But a clear distinction can be drawn between the use of military power to suppress civil disorder and the use of troops against terrorists, and we think that the latter would be generally accepted and welcomed by public opinion.[72]

Yet for some there was no 'clear distinction' between anti-terrorism and domestic repression, particularly in the context of the political and economic turmoil of the 1970s. The worsening conflict in Northern Ireland, the furore arising from 'Bloody Sunday' (30 January 1972), the industrial disputes and the economic recession that followed the Yom Kippur war and the Arab oil embargo of October 1973, and Harold Wilson's sudden resignation as prime minister in April 1976 all aroused fears that British democracy was under threat, and that the UK could suffer a military takeover similar to those in Greece (1967) and Chile (1973).[73] The army's apparent estrangement from civil society, and the publication in 1971 of *Low intensity operations* by General Frank Kitson (who subsequently commanded 39 Brigade in Belfast), aroused fears even within the moderate left that the military tactics used against both the Provisional IRA and

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[69] Raymond Garthoff, *Détente and confrontation: American–Soviet relations from Nixon to Reagan*, 2nd edn (Washington DC: Brookings Institution, 1994), pp. 695–719.
[70] F. E. C. Gregory, 'The British police and terrorism', in Wilkinson, ed., *British responses to terrorism*, pp. 107–23.
[71] Hew Strachan, *The politics of the British Army* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 187–9.
[72] GEN129(72)5, CAB130/616 (UKNA).
[73] Andy Beckett, *When the lights went out: Britain in the 1970s* (London: Faber, 2010); Dominic Sandbrook, *State of emergency: Britain 1970–1974* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2011).

demonstrators in Northern Ireland could be employed against 'subversives' on the mainland.[74]

The repeated implementation of Operation Marmion therefore provoked press discussion in the summer of 1974 on whether the army was preparing for a military takeover; and the fact that Lord Chalfont, a former Labour minister, expressed such sentiments showed that coup talk was not confined to the political fringe.[75] The political activities of Colonel David Stirling, the founder of the SAS, and General Sir Walter Walker, the former commander-in-chief of allied forces in northern Europe, fuelled rumours of 'private armies' training for a putsch. Walker's own claims to the press about the scale of support for his 'civil assistance' movement—and his bombastic references to communist subversives undermining Britain from within—led even Wilson to wonder if there was support for a coup within the armed forces. Roy Mason, the Defence Secretary, wrote to the Prime Minister in early September 1974 to assure him that Walker did not speak for serving officers, and certainly not for the Chief of the General Staff, General Sir Peter Hunt.[76] Given Wilson's own well-documented paranoia about right-wing plotting,[77] it is possible that he did not accept Mason's assurances, or for that matter General Hunt's.

There were more sober appraisals suggesting that the British Army was unlikely to follow the example of Augusto Pinochet or the Greek colonels. Adam Roberts, lecturer in International Relations at the London School of Economics, noted that among the soldiers he had met in his research on civil–military relations he 'encountered no sign of a movement of opinion tending to advocate or tolerate direct political intervention in domestic affairs'. The officer corps were certainly conservative in character, but were also scornful of retired 'blimps' like Walker, and in any case involvement in a coup would have involved violating the oath of attestation that soldiers swear to the Crown. Whatever army officers felt about trade unionists and industrial action, there was also no appetite for involvement in strike-breaking.[78] As the decade progressed, the coup fears of the mid-1970s gradually faded, inspiring the kind of mockery seen in the 1976 television comedy *The Fall and Rise of Reggie Perrin*.[79] Nonetheless, even today, in conditions of comparative constitutional stability, there are pronounced concerns over the implications of militarizing the police, and of involving the armed forces in domestic security.[80] In the turbulent political and socio-economic conditions of

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[74] 'Senior army officers concerned about "subversive forces"', *The Times*, 23 May 1972; General Frank Kitson, *Low intensity operations* (London: Faber, 1971).

[75] 'Could Britain be heading for a military takeover?', *The Times*, 5 Aug. 1974; 'It would not take a coup to bring British troops onto the streets', *The Times*, 16 Aug. 1974.

[76] 'Rightists trying to "save Britain"', *New York Times*, 1 Sept. 1974; 'General Walker's ideas described as dangerous', *The Times*, 4 Oct. 1974; Roy Mason to Harold Wilson (Prime Minister), 2 Sept. 1974, PREM16/450 (UKNA).

[77] Andrew, *Defence of the realm*, pp. 627–43; Ben Pimlott, *Harold Wilson* (London: HarperCollins, 1993), pp. 697–723.

[78] Adam Roberts, 'Why a coup in Britain is not a serious prospect', *The Times*, 14 Aug. 1974; 'Britain's reluctant colonels', *Observer*, 18 Aug. 1974.

[79] See the dialogue between Reggie Perrin (Leonard Rossiter) and Jimmy Anderson (Geoffrey Palmer), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8nxoofS2VMM, accessed 4 Aug. 2014.

[80] 'London rooftops to carry missiles during Olympic Games', *Observer*, 29 April 2012; Hughes, *The military's role in counterterrorism*, pp. 1–7, 105–7.

40 years ago, the government's response to Munich and similar atrocities aroused genuine fears for the future of British democracy.

Conclusions

The counterterrorist planning of the 1970s was tested when six ethnic Arab gunmen took over the Iranian Embassy in London on 30 April 1980. In retrospect there is little to fault in COBR's crisis management, the Metropolitan Police's containment and negotiation process, or 22SAS's assault on the building, although critics have questioned whether excessive force was applied during an attack in which five of the hostage-takers were killed.[81] However, the Iranian Embassy siege was a domestic event, in which the British authorities were able to control the course of events, rather than an overseas one similar to the hostage crisis involving TWA Flight 847 in Beirut (June 1985) or the *Achille Lauro* hijacking (7–8 October 1985).[82] The UK was therefore not really tested during this period by similar emergencies that could have exposed shortcomings in both contingency planning and national military and police capabilities, in much the same way that Britain today has yet to experience an equivalent of the Mumbai attack of November 2008 or the Nairobi shopping mall atrocity of September 2013.[83]

The enduring relevance of the counterterrorist planning of the 1970s can be seen in the coordinating role that COBR played during the Al-Qaeda attack on the Algerian gas facilities at In Amenas in January 2013 (where British citizens were among those taken hostage), and also in the creation of the RAF's Quick Reaction Force of fighter jets, placed on standby not only for traditional air defence patrols, but for a scenario similar to 9/11. In the latter case, COBR has run rehearsals to prepare ministers for the likelihood that they may have to authorize the shooting down of hijacked passenger planes to prevent suicide attacks similar to those which struck New York and Washington DC on 11 September 2001.[84] Operation Marmion and other plans to deploy troops as a deterrent against a terrorist attack also established a precedent for the use of the British armed forces in a security role during the London Olympics of 2012. The use of the military to pre-empt an Al-Qaeda attack on the Games was criticized as an overreaction to terrorism, but it also highlighted a point that the *Times* journalist Robert Fisk offered after the Heathrow deployments 40 years ago: when a state repeatedly calls out the troops to protect public buildings and public events, how does it de-escalate its security measures?[85]

[81] *SAS: embassy siege*, BBC2 documentary, broadcast 25 July 2002.
[82] Ensalaco, *Middle Eastern terrorism*, pp. 157–66.
[83] Angela Rabasa, Robert D. Blackwill, Peter Chalk, Kim Cragin, C. Christine Fair, Brian A. Jackson, Brian Michael Jenkins, Seth G. Jones, Nathaniel Shestak and Ashley J. Tellis, *The lessons of Mumbai* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2009); 'Nairobi siege: how the attack happened', BBC News, 18 Oct. 2013, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-24189116, accessed 4 Aug. 2014.
[84] 'Stark option in frontline terror flight', BBC News, 18 Oct. 2005, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4351622.stm, accessed 4 Aug. 2014; Hansard (Commons), 12 June 2103, col. 112WH, http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmhansrd/cm130612/halltext/130612h0002.htm, accessed 4 Aug. 2014.
[85] 'London 2012: security measures', BBC News, 30 April 2012, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-17896225, accessed 4 Aug. 2014; 'Dangers of the military precedent set in Ulster', *The Times*, 7 Jan. 1974.

Some of the contingency plans that followed the Munich massacre overemphasized the nature of the international terrorist threat, particularly as far as maritime counterterrorism was concerned. As was tragically demonstrated on 9/11, passenger jets can be easily hijacked if airport security at departure is lax enough to permit skyjackers to smuggle weapons aboard a plane, and if there are two or more armed individuals willing to take the passengers and crew hostage. An operation to capture a liner or a merchant vessel is a more complicated endeavour, and the capture of an oil or gas rig in particular would need the type of training and equipment (such as helicopters or trained divers) often associated more with a military special forces unit than with non-state actors. This is why maritime terrorist attacks (as opposed to acts of piracy, such as those witnessed off the coast of Somalia) are far rarer than aircraft hijackings or attacks on land. Duncan Falconer, an ex-SBS operative who served during the 1970s, later noted in his memoirs that 'it would take a particularly insane terrorist to try to capture a North Sea oil platform', given not only the fact that the rig would be a larger and more complex target to take over than a plane in mid-flight or a building, but also because the 'roughnecks' who worked on them would be truculent hostages.[86] Yet as far as officials in Whitehall were concerned, the intrinsic value of the North Sea oil and gas fields to the British economy justified the planning and exercises initiated to prepare for a contingency that their own intelligence assessments classed as improbable.

Finally, it is worth noting that there are parallels between the political conditions of the 1970s which shaped the British government's counterterrorist preparations and the contemporary environment. The sensitivity surrounding clandestine contacts with Israel shows how diplomatically contentious international cooperation can be, and even though the 'coup' rumours of 40 years ago seem absurd in retrospect, it is still important for a democratic state to have a frank debate about what role its armed forces should—and should not—play in counterterrorism, given that the military can deal with the symptoms of this problem (notably with hostage rescue and deterrence operations) but not its causes. Home Office officials at that time were also right in stating that tactical aspects of counterterrorist assistance (such as training and equipment for hostage rescue units) lacked utility without overarching advice on crisis management and contingency planning.

There are, however, two issues more pertinent today than four decades ago. The first is whether the decision-making machinery in COBR is flexible enough to deal with mass casualty suicide attacks similar to those of 9/11 or in Mumbai, where the short timespan involved means that terrorists can seize the initiative from the authorities, forcing the latter to be as reactive as the Federal German and Bavarian governments were at Munich in September 1972. The second is that today radicalized religion—rather than radicalized politics—provides the ideological foundation for the transnational terrorism of Al-Qaeda and its affiliates. The far left groups of Europe and Japan represented a fringe within their societies, while the PFLP and Abu Nidal had a weaker support base within the Palestinian

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[86] Cormac, 'Much ado', *passim*; Falconer, *First into action*, p. 322.

population than Fatah, which renounced terrorist attacks against western countries (although not Israel) in 1974.[87] In contrast, the British and other governments have a far harder task in ensuring that the fight against Al-Qaeda does not radicalize the domestic Muslim community. In these two respects, the current challenges of anti-terrorism are distinctly different from those which inspired the establishment of COBR and the Pagoda troop, and the various contingency plans drafted four decades ago.

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[87] Hoffman, *Inside terrorism*, pp. 74–8. On Palestinian politics, see Yezid Sayigh, *Armed struggle and the search for state: the Palestinian national movement, 1949–1993* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).