

Terror Expert Jenkins: 'Command Structure' Unpopular Until A Terror Incident

The following are excerpts from an April 6 interview with Brian Jenkins, Director of Research on International Terrorism at the Rand Corporation. Jenkins was the author of a March 27 Washington Post article which called for a "command organization" under the National Security Council to coordinate U.S. "responses" to terrorism internationally. That command structure would include active representatives from all U.S. military branches, who would be responsible for "Entebbe-styled" military response contingency plans.

Jenkins is a consultant to the State Department Office for Combating Terrorism and attended planning sessions at the State Department right before the National Security Council went into secret sessions to discuss "terrorism" beginning this week.

Q: Your article in the March 27 *Washington Post* outlined the need for a "command organization" under the NSC to coordinate responses to terrorism. I'm interested in the nuts and bolts of how such a structure would be implemented, and what problems you foresee in achieving implementation.

A: I would see the political difficulties, the obstacles, being two. One, simply overcoming bureaucratic satrapies, bureaucratic domains. Because we're talking about something which transcends these jurisdictional boundaries; ... The FAA claims jurisdiction, but if the doors are open and the plane doesn't have power, the FBI claims jurisdiction. All these departments and agencies — everybody says, "it's ours." ...It's just a matter of getting these senior bureaucrats to function together....

The other kind of a problem I'm afraid is one that just has to do with our government, the U.S. government, as is true of most democratic governments; they tend to react to crisis — and they don't really anticipate crisis. Is it going to require a major tragedy or blowing a very important incident before we will actually begin to seriously address the problem? Does it require a "Pearl Harbor" or terrorism in order to get the government to address a problem like this? The "command organization" I want may be to a degree unpopular except right after an episode. There's always a lot of rhetoric that follows any episode: "Gees, we ought to do this thing better," and then it fades into the distance no one does a damn thing, until something really serious happens and then they get around to dealing with the problem....

Now, we have been extremely fortunate thus far. We have not had major incidents of foreign terrorists operating in this country as, say, they had in Munich... Nor have we had any of the domestic incidents or levels of violence that ascend to anything near a major threat to public safety. We don't have in the United States ... a Belfast situation or a Beirut situation or even any group of political extremists that have the capacity of violence possessed by the Baader-Meinhof or the June Second

groups in West Germany. So, in that area we've been relatively free. Third, we haven't had an incident, domestic or foreign, of major consequences, say involving chemical weapons, nuclear devices, whatever.

Q: The high-technology terrorism?

A: We haven't had that....

The consequences of blowing a really serious incident are bad enough that you don't really want to do it and therefore if you can take some preliminary steps now to get your act together....

We have got the pieces, we've got the technology, we've got the capabilities.... What we don't have is our act together.

Q: Who is in a position to "get our act together"?

A: It really has to come out of the White House and the National Security Council. Now, there is the Cabinet Committee to Combat Terrorism, but it's met once. I suppose it could convene for a second time (laughter) and suggest to the President that a Presidential Memorandum on the topic be initiated....Now, any of the Departments or Agencies also could theoretically initiate it, but then we're right back where we started from. Is Defense going to listen to what State initiates? Is the Agency going to listen to what Defense initiates? And, we're right back into the domains, the bureaucratic domains.

Q: Do you foresee opposition to federal intervention plans from local law enforcement?

A: No, not really. The federal intervention... would come only in those cases where clearly the episode had transcended the capabilities of local law enforcement, or where the thing had clear cut national security consequences, and the FBI's involved anyway and they assume jurisdiction....If there's some incident on a federal reservation, or if there is some incident, say, involving nuclear material, again, it's going to be federal involvement in the thing....

Q: What about international agreements, say, between the U.S. and Mexico? Something on that order?

A: What I do see is sort of like-minded cooperation, limited cooperation among like-minded governments....In a sense, certain steps along these lines have already been taken, for example, among the Nine in the European Community — the Common Market countries have gotten together and have signed some agreements to taking joint stands on this thing to extraditing people passing on information as to the whereabouts of certain key people that people worry about. They've already taken steps in this regard. There is of course the intelligence services as well as Interpol. Member nations of Interpol stay on friendly terms, passing along certain kinds of information....

It would be feasible, for example, to have certain acts to have exemption to Interpol's political exclusion...one could say that for certain acts there would be an exemption to the political motivation as in say, for example, seizing hostages ... if not through Interpol, then through the EEC Nine — the European Common Market can cooperate on those if they don't want to pollute the Interpol thing with any political connotation — if they want to maintain it entirely pure, then they have other vehicles. But that can take you so far....

We ought to explore this thing internationally and concentrate on what really is realistic. For example, in the area of nuclear material, hell, it's in nobody's interest that this stuff be loose. In terms of measures to respond quickly to any crisis that may occur involving

this stuff, we probably can get a high level of cooperation and may even consider doing some contingency planning in advance — joint contingency planning with other governments. But, that would be limited to a handful of areas.

Q: What can we expect in the immediate future from terrorists and where?

A: I really wouldn't care to say....

That question is better answered by people who have current, on the bricks, intelligence.... All that one can say safely, I mean by that realistically, that the problem isn't going to go away. It may take new forms, it may go up, it may go down, but it is damn well going to persist....