Chapter 5

Energy Supply as Terrorist Targets? Patterns of “Petroleum Terrorism” 1968–99

Brynjar Lia and Åshild Kjøk

Introduction

Most current assessments of the threat of terrorism to petroleum infrastructure in low-risk countries tend to focus on existing physical vulnerabilities and hence on windows of opportunity for a prospective adversary.¹ There have been few studies of terrorist target strategies, based on historical patterns of terrorist and rebel attacks on petroleum-related targets.² This study is meant to fill that gap. It is primarily a survey study, drawing upon terrorist incidents recorded in ITERATE, a comprehensive database of transnational terrorism.³ From this database of more than 5,000 incidents, there are 262 incidents in which petroleum infrastructure or personnel have been targeted.⁴ Drawing upon these data, the general patterns of “petroleum terrorism” are analyzed with regard to methods, targeting strategies, ideological orientation and motivations. Special attention is devoted to terrorist attacks against petroleum targets on the Arab Peninsula and the Greater Middle East region.

¹ This chapter is a shortened and updated version of a research report (Kjøk and Lia, 2001) originally published by the Terrorism and Asymmetric Warfare Project at the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI).
² One general study of terrorist targeting strategies is Drake (1998). Two Norwegian scholars (Bjørg, 1990 and Heradstveit, 1992) have written on the threat of terrorism to Norwegian petroleum infrastructure. These studies were written a decade ago, however, and none of them systematically analyzed data derived from empirical chronologies of terrorism.
³ ITERATE covers in principle the period from 1922 to 1999, but the collection of data for the pre-1968 period is not systematic.
⁴ The great majority of the incidents in this survey thus occurred in the period from 1968 to 1999, and 14 happened between 1922 and 1968.

Definitions and Methodological Problems

There is no universally accepted definition of terrorism (Schmid and Jongman, 1988; Hoffinan, 1998). In this study ITERATE’s definition is used, which focuses on acts of political violence committed by non-state groups with some degree of transnational ramifications.⁵ Wherever a distinction is made between “rebel” and “terrorist” groups, it is primarily to indicate the scale of the armed conflict with the state (rebel movements operating in a civil war environment), and does not reflect any judgment on the legitimacy of acts of political violence.

For the purpose of this study, “petroleum infrastructure” is defined to include the following:

- production facilities, such as petroleum fields, wells, platforms and rigs
- refineries and gas processing plants
- transportation facilities including pipelines and pumping stations, terminals and tank ships
- oil and gas depots
- administration buildings
- distribution centers/petrol stations
- all personnel on or employed at these installations.

“Petroleum terrorism” is defined simply as attacks by terrorist or rebel groups directed against, or significantly affecting, petroleum infrastructure (Kjøk and Lia, 2001: 42–5).

Any statistics which draw heavily upon databases on terrorism are subject to great uncertainty, partly because of the absence of a generally accepted definition of terrorism, and partly because existing databases give unequal coverage of various geographical areas. A second problem with using statistical data on terrorism is that a statistical approach tends to accord equal importance to incidents of very different nature and gravity. Qualitative assessments may offset this bias partly, but not entirely. A third difficulty is that even though ITERATE is a comprehensive database, it is not complete.⁶ For example, threats are greatly underreported in ITERATE, which is why this study excludes threats.

⁵ The complete definition is “the use, or threat of use, of anxiety-inducing, extra-normal violence for political purposes by any individual or group, whether acting for or in opposition to established governmental authority, when such action is intended to influence the attitudes and behavior of a target group wider than the immediate victims and when, through the nationality or foreign ties of its perpetrators, its location, the nature of its institutional or human victims, or the mechanics of its resolution, its ramifications transcend national boundaries”.

⁶ For example, we have been able to identify 26 additional incidents (excluding threats) from other sources (Anderson and Sloan, 1995; Bjørg, 1990; Heradstveit, 1992). These additional incidents have not been included in the empirical basis of this study, as most of these additional sources focus on particular types of attacks and specific sectors of the petroleum industry. The inclusion of these incidents in the statistical overview could
ITERATE, and hence this study, covers only international and transnational terrorism. This means that a number of terrorist attacks and incidents involving petroleum infrastructure have been omitted. However, as the petroleum industry is predominantly international, this should not invalidate the conclusions of this survey. The great majority of strikes against petroleum installations will have “ramifications that transcend national boundaries”, as specified in the ITERATE definition. Indeed, many if not most recorded incidents are clearly linked to domestic terrorist or rebel groups. One may therefore assume that ITERATE’s underreporting of domestic terrorism is significantly less with regard to attacks on petroleum infrastructure than regarding attacks on other targets. Another possible source of underrepresentation may result from some petroleum companies attempting to conceal or at least downplay minor terrorist incidents against their installations, for fear of losing market confidence. However, it is impossible to estimate the extent of such practices.

A final methodological problem is related to the fact that a few countries have been disproportionately exposed to attacks against their petroleum installations, and this may distort the overall picture. These countries are Colombia, Yemen, Nigeria and Israel, all of which have also suffered from protracted internal violent conflicts. One therefore runs the risk of presenting petroleum terrorism mainly as a reflection of the nature of political violence and terrorism in these four countries, while important aspects of target selection strategies of terrorist and rebel groups might be ignored. Partly for this reason, one subsection will be devoted to the patterns of petroleum terrorism in states that are without internal violent conflicts and that are ruled by democratic governments. A final subsection is devoted to terrorism in the Arab peninsula and the new terrorist threats associated with the al-Qaeda network.

Given the limitations of existing databases with regard to the recording of terrorist incidents and the above-mentioned methodological problems, our results should not be interpreted as scientifically accurate findings. What this study offers are suggestive and tentative results. Further research work is needed, especially towards generating more and qualitatively better data, in order to enable more scientific conclusions. Nonetheless, given the poor state of the art, the present study hopefully makes a good start at describing and outlining the basic patterns of petroleum terrorism.

Manifestations of “Petroleum Terrorism”

Between 1968 and 1999, a total of only 262 incidents of petroleum terrorism were reported. This would indicate that petroleum installations are not a particularly attractive target for terrorist and rebel groups. Terrorist strikes against petroleum installations have represented only about two per cent of international terrorist incidents in recent decades. There was an average of eight terrorist strikes per year from 1968 to 1988, with a certain increase over time – from an annual average of six in the early 1970s to ten by the late 1990s. However, one should not read too much into this increase, as the number of incidents has remained quite small. It probably reflects the global expansion of the petroleum industry and hence the number of targets rather than any significant shift in terrorist strategies of target selection.

The 262 incidents registered occurred in 59 different countries. Many of these countries do not produce oil or gas themselves, but have experienced attacks against traversing pipelines, depots, petrol stations, etc. Conversely, only 29 of the world’s 56 petroleum-producing countries have experienced serious terrorist strikes against their installations, and 13 out of this group have suffered only one or two strikes. Terrorist and rebel attacks on petroleum infrastructure are not necessarily very serious. Only about 11 per cent of the recorded attacks led to temporary shutdowns. About 16 per cent of the attacks resulted in casualties: 25 incidents led to one or two casualties, 13 caused from three to six casualties and only five attacks (out of the total of 262) involved between 10 and 100 deaths.

Terrorist target selection is a complex process involving political, ideological and tactical considerations. When terrorist and insurgent groups choose to target petroleum infrastructure, key determinants appear to be tactical factors such as access to location and available escape routes. Attacks on difficult-to-protect targets such as pipelines and personnel account for more than half of all incidents of petroleum terrorism.
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2001, the Algerian Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (SGPC), a group closely associated with al-Qaeda and Usama bin Laden, made serious threats against the trans-Mediterranean pipelines from North Africa to Europe. The organization said it intended to attack the pipelines carrying liquid gas from Algeria to Spain via Morocco and to Italy via Tunisia, alongside Algeria’s giant refineries on the Mediterranean ports of Arzew and Skikda (Nash, 2001).

Blasting of pipelines has caused the third largest number of incidents that have resulted in deaths (five out of 43 lethal attacks). In some cases, single pipeline bombings or acts of sabotage have killed a large number of people. Several incidents illustrate the potential lethality of this kind of attack. An extremely bloody incident took place in October 1998 in Nigeria, when more than 1,000 people burned to death after a ruptured pipeline caught fire (Anderson, 1998). Most of the victims of the inferno had been trying to collect leaking oil when there was an explosion, apparently set off by a spark from either a cigarette or a motorbike engine. According to the pipeline company, the fuel leak itself had been caused by sabotage. This and other incidents demonstrate the potential lethality and the ecological consequences of sabotage attacks against pipelines. Fortunately, such highly lethal attacks represent exceptions rather than the rule: 39 out of 44 pipeline bombings did not cause any injuries.

The reason why pipeline blasting is a common type of petroleum terrorism is probably tactical. It is easy to carry out, as there are long stretches of unguarded pipelines; since pipelines are relatively easy to repair, oil companies have often invested little in their protection. It should be noted that none of the registered attacks have targeted offshore pipelines. Technically, such operations would have been more difficult. Although all continents have experienced attacks against their pipelines, some regions have been more exposed than others. It is probably no surprise that a considerable portion of the incidents recorded have taken place in the Middle East, many as a result of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Also Colombia has been extremely exposed, as a result of the civil war between the government and radical leftist guerrillas. More surprisingly, Western Europe has also suffered a significant number of pipeline attacks (12 incidents), mainly from radical domestic leftist

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7 As a result of two protracted bombing campaigns in Colombia which single-handedly represented at least 307 incidents, we have for methodological reasons registered these campaigns as two incidents only in the ITERATE database (Kjøk and Lia, 2001).

8 The threat was issued by SGPC leader Hasan Hattab, following the arrest in late September 2001 in Spain of six SGPC members after a British intelligence tip-off, for their role in a plot to blow up the US embassy in Paris. The message sent to the Algerian media named France, Germany, Britain and Belgium as the "European countries that persecute Islamists and cooperate with the US in their struggle against Bin Laden". Hasan Hattab attended a recent meeting in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, with associates of Mr bin Laden, and one of the suspected September 11 hijackers, according to a CIA video of the meeting (Nash, 2001).

9 Another example: On October 18, 1998, over 70 persons died and more than 100 were injured when a Colombian rebel group, The National Liberation Army (ELN), bombed the Ocensa crude oil pipeline. The powerful bomb caused major damage when the oil spills caught fire and set ablaze houses and part of the conduit in Machuca, near Segovia in the Antioquia Province. Between 20,000 and 40,000 barrels of crude oil were spilled in the attack.
groups. The statistics for Western Europe reflect the large number of active terrorist groups over the past decades, the relative density of petroleum production and transportation infrastructure in Europe, and perhaps also an over-representation of anti-Western attacks in the ITERATE database.

Sabotage against pipelines (excluding blasting) is far less common than blasting, accounting for only 13 incidents. The number of such strikes decreased somewhat in the course of the 1990s. None of the attacks have caused any injuries, but as many as four resulted in closedowns and another four involved considerable economic losses. In Europe, the only recorded incident of pipeline sabotage other than blasting took place in Germany on February 22, 1972, when the radical Palestinian group Black September sabotaged an ESSO pipeline near Hamburg, accusing the company of aiding Israel. In the Gulf region, pipeline blasting and sabotage have occurred perhaps most commonly in Yemen, primarily by tribesmen protesting against the negligence of the central government.

Kidnappings and Armed Attacks on Petroleum Company Personnel

Kidnapping has become increasingly widespread in recent decades, and petroleum company personnel have suffered to a substantial degree from this. Like pipeline blasting, kidnapping is usually easier than direct attacks on well-guarded petroleum production plants, refineries and terminals. This may account for the high frequency of this type of action. Kidnappings of petroleum company personnel are not necessarily fatal, however. Hostages have often been released without physical injuries, usually after a relatively short time, although at least eight cases of kidnapping fatalities have been recorded. Employees have usually been abducted from their workplace or during work journeys. By and large, kidnapping has been geographically confined to a handful of countries, in particular Yemen, Nigeria and Colombia.

During the 1990s there were several hundred incidents of kidnapping and carjacking annually in Yemen. A small number of these incidents involved foreign petroleum company employees.

A typical incident was the abduction of Steve Carpenter by al-Sha‘īf tribesmen near the Yemeni capital of San‘aa on October 30, 1997. Carpenter was the American director of a Yemeni company that subcontracts to the US-based Hunt Oil. The tribesmen demanded the release of two fellow tribesmen who had been arrested on smuggling charges. The group also demanded that several public works projects allegedly promised to them by the government should commence. Carpenter was freed unharmed on November 27. In most other countries, however, the most important motivation is probably ransom, not demands for more government spending on public works.

In line with the increase in kidnappings, armed assaults on petroleum company personnel became more common during the 1990s, although far less frequent than abductions. Such attacks are by their very nature extremely dangerous, and not surprisingly, all attacks except one resulted in casualties. Rebel movements operating in civil war situations have carried out most of the armed attacks on petroleum company personnel, obviously as part of their wider insurgent strategy to weaken the economic basis of the central government.

With regard to the assailants’ ideology, the predominance of Islamist insurgent and terrorist groups is significant. Islamist groups have probably been responsible for more than half of the recorded armed attacks on personnel — which also indicates that terrorist or insurgent groups motivated by religion are often far more lethal than their secular counterparts. Many of these attacks have taken place in the context of the Algerian civil war, which has been extremely brutal, with the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) employing massacres and assassinations of civilians as a major mode of operation. Its insurgent strategy seems to have been linked to the particular conditions of the Algerian civil war in the mid-1990s, when the disruption of all foreign support for the Algerian regime was seen as a critical precondition for victory on the battlefield (Lia and Kjek, 2001). The physical petroleum infrastructure, however, does not seem to have been singled out as a particularly favored target, perhaps due to its remote and well-protected location.

Bombing of Petroleum Company Offices

Bombing of petroleum company offices is the third most frequent type of attack, accounting for 25 incidents alone. Such incidents have occurred throughout the period, but were especially common during the 1980s. Only one incident caused very serious material damage, however. Offices are usually easy to attack, as they are often located in city centers. The commonest way of attacking is simply to

10 The 11 incidents coded as armed attacks on personnel consisted of direct attacks on people. However, i: is often difficult to determine whether an attack is directed specifically at personnel, material infrastructure or vehicles. Personnel can be targeted indirectly, for instance through an attack on their transport vehicles. Some rebel groups have proved capable of bringing down helicopters and aircraft. One such attack happened on March 8, 1995 in Burma, when three military helicopters carrying French and Burmese employees working on a pipeline project were shot down by the separatist Karen National Union (KNU). Five people were killed and 11 were injured.

11 A typical incident took place in Algeria on July 11, 1994, when four Russians and one Romanian were shot dead in a morning attack near the Oued Ouchayeh tunnel, east of Algiers. They were shot after Islamist gunmen at a fake roadblock had stopped their state-owned Sonatrach Oil Company bus.

12 12 attacks in the 1980s, as compared to five attacks in the 1990s and seven in the 1970s, plus one in 1968.

13 Two examples: On May 8, 1989, the offices of three foreign oil companies in Angola, ESSO, French company Petromar and the Japanese Sumitomo Corporation, suffered severe damage by a bomb that exploded during the night. The local Sumitomo Corporation Director was slightly wounded. Another incident occurred in Cyprus on March 14, 1985, when a midnight bomb explosion occurred in front of the ESSO oil company of-
place a bomb in front of the office entrance. The reason for targeting petroleum company offices is most likely that they are important symbols of such companies, as well as of the countries and interests they represent. Political terrorist groups tend to see violence as a means of political communication, a form of "armed propaganda" where targets are chosen for their symbolic value rather than their military significance. Many petroleum office bombings have occurred at night, probably indicating that these are deliberate attempts to inflict material damage without causing human casualties.

That attacks on symbolic targets such as offices rank third after pipeline attacks and kidnapping may suggest that attacks on petroleum infrastructure are normally the work of insurgent and rebel groups, while political terrorists lacking well-defined territorial or military objectives are inclined to avoid such targets. This conclusion is partly supported by the observation that attacks on petroleum infrastructure are far more common in countries that are already involved in armed conflicts. By contrast, attacks on offices have occurred relatively more frequently in Western countries, which host a large share of the world's terrorist groups but have had very few militarily strong rebel movements in recent decades.  

*) Attacks on Depots, Refineries and Petrol Stations

The remaining types of attacks – bombing of oil and gas depots, refineries and petrol stations and hijacking or seizure – have been far less common. Only 13 incidents of bombing of oil and gas depots have been recorded. Half of these had no serious material consequences, and only two resulted in casualties. Still, oil depots and liquefied gas tankers can cause extremely serious material damage and extract heavy human tolls if set ablaze by a terrorist group determined to cause maximum damage. Separatist groups were accountable for nearly half the attacks on depots. Six of the depot bombings took place in Western Europe and three in the Middle East. One recent incident involving Palestinian militants in Palestine/Israel illustrates the potential destructiveness of such attacks. An explosive device was successfully planted on a diesel fuel tank car during the course of its daily delivery route. The device was detonated by remote control while the driver was taking on a load at the country’s largest fuel terminal, the Pi Giliot gas storage facility just north of Ramat Aviv, outside Tel Aviv. The resultant fire was brought under con-

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14 Western Europe and the USA have suffered six bombings each, while the figures for other regions are Asia (6), Southern America (4), Middle East (2) and Africa (1). The Philippines is a special case in this regard, with as many as four attacks alone.

15 The IRA carried out between two and four strikes against petroleum depots in England, and two attacks on terminals. The IRA also claimed credit for a February 1993 attack when three bombs were set off, destroying two huge natural gas tanks in Warrington, 15 miles west of Manchester. No injuries were reported, but about 100 people were evacuated from their homes.

16 The seven-page letter indicated where one of the bombs was and said four others were easily found. Police detonated one of the bombs harmlessly by firing a water cannon at it and found the other four bombs. The last five bombs were found when the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agreed to free a suspect’s wife in return for information as to their location.

17 Colombia, India, Iraq, Israel, Mozambique, Namibia, Singapore and South Africa. The ninth country was Poland. One example: a bomb explosion occurred in Jerusalem on August 24, 1980, when a bomb hidden in a trash can exploded at a Jerusalem gas station, killing a station attendant and wounding several tourists. The Palestine Liberation Organization was blamed for the attack.

18 One example from Europe: On June 16, 1986, anti-apartheid militants, critical of Shell’s ties to South Africa, firebombed three Shell petrol pump stations in Amsterdam during the night. Damage was estimated at US$ 420,000. Several other stations were also damaged in Groningen.
These operations were initially meant to be part of the 9/11 attacks, but al-Qa'ida reportedly returned to these plans in 2002 (Newsweek, 2003).

ITERATE has recorded ten instances of seizure of petroleum infrastructure facilities, accompanied by hostage-taking. These incidents include hijackings of helicopters, seizure of production plants, a flow station, an office, a housing complex and other oil company facilities. These are usually serious attacks with grave consequences.19 Such seizures bear a certain resemblance to kidnapings, with three countries – Nigeria, Colombia and Yemen – accounting for most attacks. Motivations are also similar, with ransom and political-economic concessions from the central government being most common. Since such incidents involve the capture of a potentially large number of people, and enable the terrorists to control the petroleum facilities, they tend to generate more media attention. On the other hand, hijackings and seizures are quite difficult to accomplish and offer fewer escape opportunities. These are probably the reasons why this form of terrorism is so infrequent.

Attacks against oil platforms, oil tankers, and offshore installations have been exceptionally rare – good news for producer countries whose petroleum production facilities are situated largely offshore. There have been only a few attacks on oil platforms, nearly all of them in Nigeria, and very few incidents of seizures of offshore oil installations, again in Nigeria.20 This pattern may well shift, as new terrorist organizations have emerged with greater capabilities and more ambitious targets than were previously associated with terrorism.

**Petroleum Terrorism on the Arab Peninsula: Recent Developments**

Regarding terrorist threats to the oil industry in Saudi Arabia, there have long been recurrent, minor incidents of attacks and sabotage of oil facilities, primarily in the Eastern Province, and mostly attributed to elements from the disaffected Shi‘i minority in the country (Cordesman, 2001, pp. 43, 65). These and other incidents of political violence and unrest in the Saudi Kingdom are usually shrouded in secrecy. According to one study, “a large number of Saudi attacks on Saudi and Saudi targets, both by Sunni extremists and Saudi Shiites, go unreported” (Ibid., p. 59). Hence, very few incidents have been recorded in the ITERATE chronology, which is based on open sources. While terrorist groups have targeted the US military presence in Saudi Arabia (US office at the Saudi National Guard in November 1995 and the Khobar Towers in June 1996) and representatives of the regime, oil facilities and foreign civilian workers appear to have become a more important target over the last few years. For example, the Saudi Kingdom has recently witnessed a number of car bombings and armed attacks targeting Western foreigners. In 2000–2002, there was a spate of attacks on Western citizens mainly in Riyadh and al-Khobar, killing at least five and injuring more than a dozen, by late October 2002 (Stratfor.com, 2002). Official Saudi statements, underpinned by reportedly forced confessions by several detained suspects, that the incidents stemmed from “Iraq wars” involving the illicit liquor trade, have been deemed not credible. More likely, the perpetrators were Islamic militias, enjoying the protection of powerful patrons in Saudi society. Al-Qa'ida has a significant following in Saudi Arabia. 15 of the 19 hijackers on September 11 were Saudi citizens. Some 125 Saudis were among the approximately 650 detainees at Guantánamo Bay.

Recently, there have been credible reports of al-Qa'ida plots against the sprawling Ras Tanura complex, probably the world’s largest oil facility. A vital artery for global oil exports, Ras Tanura daily delivers five million barrels of oil to tankers, more than six per cent of the 76 million barrels produced worldwide each day. During the summer of 2002 the planned terrorist strike on the terminal complex, as well as pipelines that serve it, was averted by a series of arrests in the Kingdom. Subsequent media investigation into the plans revealed that several employees with access to the sites had been involved. The discovery of al-Qa'ida sympathizers inside Saudi Aramco, the world’s largest oil company, was a worrisome trend. According to an assessment by US officials in early 2003, al-Qa'ida sympathizers “are sprinkled throughout the Saudi government” (The New York Times, 2003). In February 2003, media sources reported fresh intelligence suggesting that al-Qa'ida would make new attempts at striking Ras Tanura and other key oil facilities in the Saudi Kingdom as well as Kuwait. A devastating attack on the Saudi oil industry would serve a dual purpose. It would undermine the Saudi monarchy, and it would directly affect the United States because of the tight oil market and its dependence on Saudi oil exports (ABCNews.com, 2003; The New York Times, 2003; Associated Press, 2002).

Until mid-2002 al-Qa'ida had specifically refrained from attacking petroleum facilities in the Gulf region. By decree, bin Laden had banned any assaults on oil, stating it is the heritage of the Arab nations. The planned assault on Ras Tanura and the attack on the Limburg oil tanker (see below), therefore, signalled a shift in al-Qa'ida target selection strategy whereby economic targets would receive higher priority.

Given the relative rarity of terrorist assaults (not piracy) on maritime commercial traffic, the terrorist attack on the French-registered oil tanker Limburg, carrying nearly 400,000 barrels of crude oil off the south-eastern coast of Yemen in early October 2002, represented a new development. There had been several forewarnings of such attacks after the US warship USS Cole was hit by a seaward suicide
bombers in Aden in October 2000 and following the arrest of an al-Qaeda cell in Morocco, planning attacks on US and British warships in the Straits of Gibraltar. The terrorist weapon used against Limburg was a small fishing vessel, filled with explosives and directed by a 23-year-old Yemeni suicide attacker. It blew a hole in the new, double-hulled ship, causing a fire in which one Bulgarian crew member was killed and 12 others were hospitalized. The incident caused 50,000 barrels of crude oil to seep into the sea. An al-Qaeda affiliated group, the Aden-Abyan Islamic Group, claimed responsibility for the operation, stating that Limburg was targeted because of its mission “to supply the 5th Fleet [based in Bahrain] for striking the brothers in Iraq” (Washington Times, 2002). The attack was meant to be supplemented by a simultaneous car bomb attack against a hotel in al-Sanaa, used by US military and intelligence officials.

A bin Laden audio tape published shortly after the attack hailed the Limburg bombers and promised more attacks:

We congratulate the Muslim nation for the daring and heroic jihad (holy war) operations which our brave sons conducted in Yemen against the Christian oil tanker and in Kuwait against the American occupation and aggression forces. [...] By striking the oil tanker in Yemen with explosives, the attackers struck at the umbilical cord of the Christians, reminding the enemy of the bloody price they have to pay for continuing their aggression against our nation [...] (Reuters, 2002).

The investigation into the Limburg attack revealed the existence of a network of al-Qaeda supporters and operatives encompassing Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Yemen, involved in various aspects of the operation (The New York Times, 2002).

Who are the “Petroleum Terrorists”?

The Predominance of Domestic Groups

According to our data, domestic groups have been responsible for most terrorist strikes against petroleum infrastructure. Foreign groups (“foreign” in terms of the dominant nationality of the perpetrating group members) have carried out only six per cent of the attacks recorded. Moreover, throughout most of the period 1968–99 there has been a significant increase in the number of attacks performed by domestic groups. This reflects the gradual expansion of the petroleum industry into regions hosting active rebel and terrorist groups. Recall that ITERATE is a database that focuses on terrorist attacks with international ramifications, so that the actual predominance of domestic groups is likely to be even greater than the data indicate. This is an important finding, as it suggests that countries with little or no domestic terrorism are unlikely to be exposed to attacks on their petroleum installations. On the other hand, it has also been suggested that globalization has led to a process of transnationalizing terrorism, in which terrorist groups – their ideas, weapons, funds and personnel – move across national borders more easily now than in the past. However, our survey tends to indicate the converse: there was in fact a decrease in strikes committed by foreign groups in 1970–94, albeit with a slight rise in 1995–99 (see Figure 5.2 below). The number of attacks perpetrated by foreign groups is small, and alterations over time may be caused simply by coincidence or changes in the strategy of a few groups. For example, Palestinian groups perpetrated nearly all recorded “petroleum” attacks by foreign groups in the early 1970s; after 1995, Colombian guerrillas operating across the borders into neighboring countries were responsible for three out of four foreign attacks targeting petroleum infrastructure and personnel. Islamist groups have also carried out attacks on petroleum infrastructure outside their home country, whereas, to our knowledge, this has never been the case with right-wing extremists and militant environmental groups.

![Figure 5.2 Domestic and foreign group involvement in petroleum terrorism](image)

As to target selection and methods, there are some differences between domestic and foreign groups. Domestic groups have targeted personnel more often than have foreign groups, while the latter have shown a greater propensity to attack refineries. Indeed, our data show that refineries and personnel are the most common targets

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21 The terrorists’ nationality was unknown in 15 per cent of the incidents. However, in most of the uncertain cases, the perpetrators were probably domestic groups, judging by circumstances and available information about these strikes.

22 In 1970–74, domestic and international groups were responsible for 48 per cent and 26 per cent of the strikes respectively, whereas in 1990–94, the figures were 95 per cent and 0 per cent.
for foreign groups. This might indicate a preference for high-profile strategic targets on the part of foreign groups. On the other hand, this study has found no attacks on depots and production plants by foreign groups. For other targets, there are only minor differences between domestic and foreign groups. One may also discern differences between foreign and domestic groups regarding methods of attack. Foreign groups seem to prefer blasting (61 per cent), and have never carried out any armed attacks. This may indicate that foreign groups have a smaller range of capabilities and operational modes than have domestic groups. Importantly, foreign groups have thus far never succeeded in carrying out any seizures or armed attacks on petroleum installations, nor have their attacks ever caused any shutdowns. This trend is probably about to change. As already alluded to, the rise of al-Qaeda and its network of affiliated Islamist groups has contributed to increasing the possibility of spectacular attacks on a global scale, using new and innovative methods of attack.

**Ideological Orientation**

Terrorist and rebel groups that have been involved in strikes against petroleum infrastructure belong primarily to one of two ideological trends: either nationalist with separatist goals, or some variant of leftist Marxist-Maoist ideologies.

![Figure 5.3 Distribution of groups responsible for terrorist attacks](image)

Religious “fundamentalist” groups have carried out six per cent of the incidents, nearly all of which can be ascribed to militant Islamists (15 incidents in total – 14 by Islamists). By contrast, attacks by militant environmentalists and right-wing extremists account for one and two attacks respectively from the total of 262 incidents. The remaining strikes can be attributed to mentally disturbed individuals, criminals or unknown groups, although circumstances surrounding the “unknown actor” incidents indicate that most of them were also probably the work of leftist and ethno-separatist groups.

Naturally enough, the general ideological orientations of “petroleum terrorists” have changed over time, reflecting the evolution of old terrorist and insurgent movements and the emergence of new groups. In the 1970s many attacks were attributed to Palestinian and Arab groups, who alone accounted for 16 attacks; then the level of petroleum attacks by these groups declined during the 1980s, reflecting the transformation of the PLO to a major political non-state actor. The 1990s witnessed a considerable rise in ethno-separatist strikes against petroleum infrastructure, caused by the upsurge of inter-tribal conflicts in Yemen and Nigeria, in addition to a certain increase in other ethno-separatist attacks that reflected the general upsurge of intra-state ethno-nationalist conflicts in the early post-Cold War period. This was caused partly by the collapse or weakening of former Soviet client regimes around the world.

With regard to the predominant role of leftist groups in petroleum terrorism during the 1980s, most of these incidents occurred during the civil war in Colombia (19 out of 32 attacks). But even if one excludes the Colombian incidents, one finds a notable increase in leftist attacks from the 1970s to the 1980s and 1990s. A few Western European Communist or left-wing groups were particularly active in targeting petroleum infrastructure during the mid-1980s, accomplishing as many as ten out of the 13 attacks carried out by non-Colombian groups, including several attacks on NATO oil pipelines in Europe. This might be explained by increased Soviet support for Communist revolutionary groups in the West, following the collapse of the détente of the 1970s, President Reagan’s “Star War” program, his “Evil Empire” rhetoric, and importantly, the US Administration’s covert and overt support of anti-Communist rebel and terrorist organizations in Nicaragua, Afghanistan and elsewhere.

Since 1979 there has been greater involvement of Islamist organizations in petroleum terrorism. This seems to be a by-product of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, and the Iranian regime’s commitment to exporting the revolution and supporting radical Islamist, and in particular Shi’i, groups abroad. Most Islamist attacks have occurred during armed conflicts in which Islamist groups were one of the belligerent parties. Only three out of a total of 14 recorded Islamist attacks happened in countries not involved in internal armed conflicts or inter-state war. This trend will probably change as militant Islamist groups increasingly subscribe to al-Qaeda’s doctrines of a global jihad.

The remarkably low number of incidents involving environmentalist and right-wing groups is an interesting finding that clearly demonstrates the relative margin-

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23 Each represents 22 per cent of the attacks from foreign groups.


25 The figures are uncertain due to the number of incidents by the “unknown” groups. At least two or three of the attacks committed by “unknown” groups during peacetime appear to have been perpetrated by Islamist groups.
ality of "Green terrorism" and right-wing extremists as a threat to petroleum production facilities. This "inactivity" on the part of militant environmentalists may well stem from a fear of inflicting additional environmental damage, a major risk when attacking petroleum infrastructure.

With regard to target selection strategies, methods and capabilities, one finds that ideological orientation does make a difference. Our statistical results suggest that attacks by ethnic-separatist groups cause more material and economic damage than those of leftist groups. This may have ideological causes. Leftist radicals have often used terrorism as a kind of "armed propaganda," a theater conveying a political message to the government and a wider audience. Ethno-separatists, however, seek to weaken the physical and military capability of the central government as a step towards independence. Islamist distinguish themselves from other groups by the lethality of their attacks, using armed attacks on personnel as their primary method. Islamist groups have also been involved in blowing up a refinery and a terminal, and in one instance setting fire to an entire complex in Kuwait, containing an oil well, a plant and a terminal. Almost half of their attacks have resulted in casualties, and nearly a quarter of the attacks have had other major impacts on human beings such as injuries or loss of freedom. On the other hand, none of their attacks led to closedowns and few of them had important economic effects.

The inclination on the part of many leftist groups and, to a lesser degree, separatist movements to avoid large casualties, relatively speaking, as compared to Islamist groups, may be explained by differences in ideology. Militant Islamists tend to seek religious justification of their attacks by obtaining a fatwa from a religious authority, whereas leftist and separatist groups are often more dependent on

26 Militant environmentalists have rarely been involved in attacks on oil and gas facilities, according to our data, although a thorough survey of domestic incidents during the past decades would probably yield more events. The only recorded incident that can be related to an environmentalist cause occurred in Ecuador in 1998, when an Indian group kidnapped three employees from an oil company as a protest against environmental damage to their land, caused by the oil companies. The hostages were released unharmful.

27 Two examples of right-wing involvement in petroleum terrorism: a right-wing group occupied a production plant in Bolivia in 1981. The occupation lasted for three days, during which time 52 employees were kept hostage. Another right-wing extremist group planned to blow up a refinery in the USA in 1997. The plan was uncovered by police in advance, and was never carried out. In addition to blowing up the refinery, the group probably intended to cause the release of lethal gas, thereby killing rescue workers, first response teams, policemen, etc. and possibly neighbors. The group had provided their own family members with gas masks.

28 It is difficult to determine why terrorist groups of different ideological trends choose different target types when they attack petroleum infrastructure. Tactical security considerations are important when planning and carrying out attacks on petroleum targets, and since the security environment differs from one group to another, the targeting pattern will also differ. It is therefore impossible to ascribe different targeting patterns to ideological differences alone.

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maintaining a level of popular support from a local or regional constituency (Hoffman, 1998, p. 196ff).

Motivations: Why do Terrorists Attack Petroleum Infrastructure?

Terrorist and rebel groups do not necessarily state their intentions and goals, and it may be difficult to understand their motives. A list of the motivations and demands most commonly put forward by the groups themselves cannot therefore be entirely exhaustive.

- Economic motives are the most frequently stated reason. Demands for ransom, blackmail and also outright robbery have occurred in 21 incidents altogether. Fund-raising is extremely important for rebel and terrorist organizations, especially with the decline in state sponsorship after the end of the Cold War. In several cases, rebel groups have degenerated into profit-hungry warlords and criminal organizations, abandoning their erstwhile political-ideological goals.
- Opposition to the national government has been stated as a reason in 13 cases of attacks; demands for a greater share in the government's revenues have been put forward in four recorded incidents.
- Opposition to foreign oil companies' exploitation of national petroleum resources has been quoted in seven cases.
- Other common reasons include protest against the involvement of multinational companies in Third World countries, and also the policies of Western governments towards these countries.
- Part of efforts to negotiate the release of imprisoned group members and labor conflicts were cited as group motivation in four to six incidents.

The above are the motives explicitly stated by the terrorist or rebel groups. If one turns to the implicit reasons, then, judging by available information on the groups involved, the most common motivation seems to be opposition to the national government and foreign petroleum companies, followed by economic motives.

The Impact of Political Regime and Armed Conflict

It has been noted that terrorist attacks on petroleum infrastructure seem to be undertaken more often by insurgent and rebel groups involved in armed conflict with their national government rather than by political terrorists who are operating in peaceful democracies and who lack well-defined territorial or military objectives. The Colombian civil war, which has raged since 1984, strengthens this assertion. Control over the flow of oil revenues has been a key issue between the contending parties - the national government, and a conglomerate of leftist guerrillas, partly in alliance with drug-trafficking mafias. Over the years, the two main guer-
rilla organizations, the National Liberation Army (ELN) and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), have perpetrated numerous attacks on a wide range of petroleum installations and personnel, seriously disrupting production and export (Associated Press, 2001).

A similar example is Yemen. Although it was ravaged by a civil war in the early 1990s, the country is today more affected by its fragility as a state than by any ongoing insurgency. Violence in Yemen is the product of continuous tribal conflicts, proliferation of small arms, and increasingly weak government control outside the main cities. While kidnappings of foreign personnel and sabotage against oil pipelines primarily have been the work of disaffected tribal elements demanding a greater share of the state’s resources, recent events suggest that new motivations, Islamic militancy in particular, are becoming a more important factor. In addition, younger members of tribes, for whom ancient codes of honor and protection of visitors count less than the need for immediate financial returns, have become more involved in the kidnapping-for-ransom business. This seems to lead to more bloody outcomes of the traditionally non-violent Yemeni hostage situations (International Crisis Group, 2003).

Rebel and Insurgent Attacks on Petroleum Targets during Armed Conflict

In order to study how the patterns of petroleum terrorism may vary depending on the presence of internal armed conflicts, one may divide incidents into two main categories: strikes in countries in armed conflict, and strikes in countries at peace.29 Not surprisingly, one finds that both the presence and the intensity of the armed conflict are significant in accounting for the level of petroleum terrorism. The analysis of incidents occurring in countries in armed conflict indicates that while methods and targeting patterns in these countries chiefly follow the general pattern, with blasting of pipelines and kidnapping as the most frequent methods of attack,

29 When defining countries at peace and at armed conflict, Wallensteen and Sollenberg’s table of armed conflicts has been used (Wallensteen and Sollenberg, 1999). It covers the period 1989–98. The table covers wars (defined as conflicts causing more than 1,000 deaths a year), intermediate armed conflicts (more than 1,000 deaths during the conflict, but less than 1,000 a year) and minor armed conflicts (less than 1,000 deaths during the entire conflict). No table of wars covering the entire period (1922–99) was found. As the number of incidents is relatively small for 1989–99 (54 incidents), we decided to review them by sorting the events from the pre-1989 period using Correlates of War and Peace (Singer and Small, 2001), which covers the entire period from 1816 to 1992 (although with a higher threshold for casualties). This yielded some 80 incidents, and the general pattern of targeting corresponded to our previous results, using Wallensteen and Sollenberg’s table. The disadvantage of using Correlates of War and Peace is that it operates with a much higher threshold for armed conflict than Wallensteen and Sollenberg’s table, and hence, it does not cover minor and intermediate armed conflicts.

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armed attacks on petroleum industry personnel are far more common and more lethal than otherwise.30

Petroleum Terrorism in Peaceful Democracies?

For threat assessment purposes, one is more interested in patterns of petroleum terrorism in democracies without internal armed conflict. Drawing upon various sources on armed conflicts and democracy performance (in particular Freedom House, which rates countries as “free”, “partly free” and “not free”), one obtains the following results:

Table 5.1 Political regime and the occurrence of petroleum terrorism 1972–99

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Country</th>
<th>Incidents</th>
<th>Incidents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Free” countries</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Partly free” countries</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Total 229</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is indicative of the relationship between political regime and the level of terrorism that “not free” countries – which were quite numerous during most of this period, and which also hosted much of the petroleum industry – had a relatively small share of the attacks. This underlines the common observation that highly authoritarian and totalitarian regimes rarely experience high levels of terrorism (Lia and Skjolberg, 2000). In “free” countries without internal armed conflicts, one finds that out of a total of 229 incidents of petroleum terrorism between 1972 and 1999, there were only 53 recorded incidents (23 per cent). It also appears that while the number of attacks on petroleum installations worldwide has remained relatively constant over the past 20 years, in peaceful democracies the number of attacks has decreased in the past decade.33

30 When looking at the entire 1922–98 period, combining Wallensteen and Sollenberg’s table and the Correlates of War and Peace, one finds that all recorded lethal terrorist attacks against pipelines had occurred during armed conflict, and that four or five of these attacks had caused more than 124 casualties.

31 In order to determine which countries can be classified as “peaceful democracies”, we have drawn upon data from various sources (Singer and Small, 2001; Wallensteen and Sollenberg, 1999; Ayres, 2000, pp. 107–17). Data from Freedom House, http://www.freedomhouse.org have also been used. The latter regularly rates countries as “free”, “partly free” and “not free”.

32 Eight incidents that have occurred in England are not included in this overview, as a result of the Northern Ireland conflict. Between five and seven of these incidents were indeed carried out by the IRA, and mainly targeted depots (2–4) and terminals (2). However, an unknown group (possibly Islamists) bombed the offices of Kuwait Oil in London in 1980.

As to methods and targeting, one finds that bombing of offices is relatively more common in peaceful democracies than elsewhere — almost twice as frequent as in countries in armed conflict. Refineries have also been targeted in peaceful democracies, but ITERATE has recorded no armed attacks on petroleum industry personnel, and kidnappings have been rare, confined largely to Latin American democracies. The only armed terrorist assault that has been recorded — the Armed Communist Fraction attack on the Italian President of Chevron Oil on April 21, 1976 — did not result in any casualties. Moreover, apart from a PFLP attack on an OPEC meeting in Vienna in 1975, one finds no hijacking or seizure operations against petroleum targets in peaceful democracies. Let us take a look at one of the most serious campaigns of petroleum terrorism in democracies at peace.

Several European leftist groups launched a series of attacks on petroleum targets in Europe in the mid-1980s, protesting against “the Americanization of Europe”, capitalism and the NATO alliance. The Belgian leftist group Combatant Communist Cells (CCC) briefly formed an alliance — the “Anti-Imperialist Armed Front” — with the German Red Army Faction (RAF) and the French Action Directe (AD), to co-ordinate their actions against NATO member governments. This new organization carried out an extensive bombing campaign against NATO pipelines in Europe in 1984–85. Its German branch, the RAF, bombed six NATO pipelines going through Germany, and probably also a pumping station in an attack where nobody claimed responsibility. On December 11, 1984, the Belgian CCC bombed six unguarded pumping stations along the 3700-mile NATO oil pipeline that runs across Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Germany and France. Fires resulting from the blasts were quickly brought under control, but nevertheless caused a 48-hour shutdown to the pipeline. In the following year, the CCC attempted to repeat the campaign by placing a bomb in a NATO pipeline pumping control room in Ghent. In France, AD bombed the offices of the Elf-Aquitaine Petroleum Company in Paris on December 10, 1984.

The campaign against NATO pipelines by European leftist terrorist groups was definitely a nuisance, but not a strategic threat. Also the targeting pattern demonstrated that symbolic violence, not maximum death and destruction, was the underlying theme. The Anti-Imperialist Armed Front does not seem to have perpetrated any kidnappings or armed attacks on personnel from the petroleum sector, apparently due to the CCC’s ideological disinclination to excessive bloodshed. Looking at the overall effects of petroleum terrorism in democracies at peace, one finds that closedowns have been remarkably rare (only one out of 53 incidents). There have also been fewer casualties per incident in peaceful democracies.

Thus it seems clear that the main causes of petroleum terrorism in peaceful democracies are either ideological — with the perpetrators usually domestic groups motivated by leftist ideologies, often claiming to act on behalf of the oppressed masses in the Third World — or spillover attacks from nearby civil war zones. The Gulf War in 1991 also caused a temporary upsurge in attacks on petroleum targets in Western Europe. For example, on January 29, 1991 a Greek leftist group, the November 17 Organization, fired rockets at the British Petroleum office in Athens, causing serious damage, in protest at “the barbarous Western assault” on Iraq. Attacks on military pipelines were also reported in Germany and Spain during the Gulf War. In democracies at peace, foreign groups seem to have been responsible for a relatively larger share of petroleum terrorism than elsewhere, accounting for between 7 and 11 of a total of 53 incidents. Attacks by non-domestic groups on petroleum targets in peaceful democracies in 1972–99 can be ascribed to mainly two sets of groups — Palestinian and Colombian organizations. Among the domestic groups, leftists are the predominant actors.

**Concluding Observations**

Historical patterns do not repeat themselves endlessly. Nor should they be seen as a guarantee for the future absence of serious petroleum terrorism. Although historical patterns underline the importance of symbolic-ideological considerations rather than strategic-military goals when terrorist groups target petroleum infrastructure, this need not be the case in the future. Globalization, transnational migration, spread of new technology and expertise and the diminishing importance of distance and space contribute to blur the distinctions between domestic and international terrorism, and to lower the walls between the zones of peace and zones of turmoil.

Recent years have witnessed the rise of illegal non-state actors who have, or had at certain periods, de facto control over territory, thousands of trained members and impressive financial resources. Examples include al-Qaida and its affiliated groups, the Colombian FARC and the Sri Lankan Tamil Tigers (LTTE), all of whom have

34 Unlike RAF and AD, however, the CCC “tended to pick symbolic and strategic targets for bombings and to target property rather than human life, using the terrorist event as ‘armed propaganda’ for publicizing their own specific issues or causes rather than as direct military tactics to achieve revolution” (Anderson and Sloan, 1995, pp. 70–71).

35 A rough estimate of the 53 incidents indicates that export of conflict was the cause in 10–12 strikes, ideology in 23 strikes and ideology combined with export in seven strikes (the motivation is uncertain for 11–13 strikes).

36 The missile was launched from a nearby construction site. It broke two adjacent windows on the second floor of the BP building, pierced two wooden partitions, and exploded in a large office housing the firm’s distribution department. No injuries were reported. Two other incidents of petroleum terrorism in Western Europe during the Gulf War: on February 21, 1991, a Spanish left-wing group, October First Anti-Fascist Resistance Groups (GRAPO), assumed responsibility for a bomb attack which caused limited damage to an oil pipeline supplying a joint US-Spanish naval base at Rota in southern Spain. On March 18, 1991, a bomb slightly damaged a military fuel pipeline near the German town of Emstek, supplying two German Air Force units that were stationed in Turkey during the Gulf War. The blast caused 300 cubic feet of aviation fuel to leak. No one claimed responsibility.

37 The perpetrators could not be determined in all cases.
proven capable of launching devastating and sophisticated terrorist attack campaigns. Particularly disturbing is al-Qaida’s capacity to stage mass casualty attacks with suicide activists and its search for unconventional weaponry, as these introduce an entirely new dimension in the terrorist threat environment. A far less dramatic development has been the recent upsurge of extreme leftist and anarchist groupings rallying around an anti-globalization banner. They may prove to be the harbingers of a new era of left-wing violent activism, one in which the capitalist, powerful and global petroleum industry will stand out as a preferred target (Lee, 1996; Stratfor.com, 2001).

For the Persian Gulf region, recent years have witnessed a number of events which appear to stimulate the growth of militant and Islamic extremism in the area, enhancing the probability of terrorist and sabotage attacks against the petroleum industry, the economic mainstay of the regimes. Internal developments such as increasing youth unemployment, economic recession and delays of promised political reforms fuel resentment. External developments add to local grievances. The breakout of the al-Aqsa Intifada in September 2000, the 9/11 attacks in New York and Washington, the subsequent war in Afghanistan and the US-led invasion of Iraq in March 2003, have exacerbated the dual grievances of US "colonial" hegemony and the impotence of Arab regimes in defending Arab and Islamic causes. While al-Qaida as an organizational entity is weakened, the support for its ideological message and ideas have undoubtedly been strengthened, while the new Iraq has emerged as yet another battleground for al-Qaida-affiliated fighters.

In terms of tactics and modes of terrorist operations against petroleum-related targets in the Gulf region, one would be ill-advised to exclude the possibility of terrorist innovations. The innovative dimension of contemporary terrorism has long been overlooked. 9/11 is only one of many examples of the untapped potential for mass casualty terrorism without having to resort to exotic non-conventional weapons. In this perspective, oil and gas facilities, in particular large liquefied gas tankers, stand out as potential targets for mass casualty terrorism. The kind of attacks and plots which al-Qaida and its affiliated groups are known to have planned, would have appeared very unlikely to most observers a decade ago. 9/11 demonstrated fully how terrorists were able to convert civilian aircrafts into huge cruise missiles. Earlier al-Qaida plots have also involved the use of small explosive-laden aircrafts or helicopters to hit well-protected targets such as the G8 summit in Genoa and the US embassy in Paris. New modes of maritime terrorism also seem likely.

Undertaking large-scale offshore attacks requires resources and capabilities that most non-state groups do not have. However, the recent discovery of a submarine vessel construction program among Colombian guerrillas and drug-trafficking mafia, apparently aided by Russian expertise, and among the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, the largest Islamist insurgent group in the Philippines, tells us that new modes of operations, including underwater terrorist attacks, cannot be excluded (al-Sharq al-Awsat, 2000; Stratfor.com, 2003). The LTTE’s development of speedboats with "stealth" capacity also illustrates the rapidly growing technological range of today’s terrorist organizations in the realm of maritime operations (Guna-ratna, 2001). Terrorist groups learn quickly from each other and new modes of terrorist operations will certainly be part of the new threat environment.

References


Shi‘i Perspectives on a Federal Iraq: Territory, Community and Ideology in Conceptions of a New Polity

Reidar Visser

As debate over the future of Iraq intensified during 2002 and the first months of 2003, one concept which came to the fore as a possible key feature of a new, post-Ba‘th political order was federalism. The present chapter seeks to analyze how religious opposition parties from Iraq’s majority Shi‘i population interacted with this concept in the period between George W. Bush’s State of the Union address on January 29, 2002 (when Iraq was identified as part of the “axis of evil”) until the collapse of the Ba‘th regime in Baghdad on April 9, 2003. In the final part of the chapter, some observations are made on the emerging power struggle between various Shi‘i factions during the first weeks of the US-led occupation, until mid-May 2003 when Iraqi politics clearly entered a new phase with the emergence of a free press, the formation of new political organizations and the return of most of the exiled opposition leaders. The primary focus will be on parties and persons who work with the aim of ultimately establishing an Islamic state, but also currents which seek to further Islamic values within a secular state system will be discussed to some extent. Non-religious parties, a sizeable element of the Shi‘i political scene, are outside the scope of the chapter.

The Shi‘is and State Power

Any analysis of attitudes to federalism among Shi‘is working on an Islamic platform will have to take into account some overarching questions about the relationship between believers, clergy and state power that arise from certain main premises of Shi‘i theology. Ever since the emergence of Shi‘ism as a distinctive religious

1 The concept “Shi‘i Islamist” may seem inappropriate for certain movements whose declared aim is to transcend sectarianism, but is used for the sake of convenience in this discussion to denote political parties which are firmly rooted in Shi‘i religious and social institutions and which may or may not pursue more universalistic forms of Islamism.