

# Age of Terror

## A new form of war

BBC website: [news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/age\\_of\\_terror/](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/age_of_terror/)

### Episode Synopses

#### 1. Terror International

1976. An Air France flight from Tel Aviv to Paris left Athens airport after a stopover. Minutes after take-off, four heavily armed terrorists took control of the plane. Two were Palestinian, two were German Marxist revolutionaries in a deadly ideological alliance. They represented the internationalisation of terror. They redirected the plane to Colonel Muammar Gaddafi's Libya, where it was refuelled before flying on to Idi Amin's Uganda. At Entebbe airport the hostages were held by the four terrorists and more Palestinians, supported by the Ugandan army.

The terrorists demanded the release of Palestinian prisoners from Israeli jails. Non-Israeli hostages were released and the terrorists set a deadline: "accept our demands or we start to kill the remaining hostages". The Israeli government had to decide between a negotiated settlement and a military intervention. The explicit threat to the hostages forced their choice. They sent in a commando team on an audacious and risky raid. The daring assault succeeded brilliantly; the terrorists were killed, as were a large number of Ugandan troops. Three hostages and just one Israeli soldier died. One hundred hostages were returned to Israel unscathed.

This was the perfect storm of 70s terror. After Entebbe, the international terror network was crippled and Israel set the model of Western responses to terror, no capitulation to demands and the real prospect of a military response. It is a model which is still being applied every day in the West Bank and Gaza.

#### 2. 10 Days Of Terror

1987. A bomb exploded without warning in the Fermanagh town of Enniskillen. The device was timed to detonate during the annual Poppy Day ceremony, at which the Ulster Defence Regiment would be on parade. An emotionally potent day in the Northern Irish Protestant calendar, the ceremony had also attracted a large number of civilians.

At the time, Gerry Adams was trying to coax the Republicans into political engagement with the British government, to explore the political path to power. Every dead civilian would endanger his strategy.

When the bomb exploded in Enniskillen, a wall collapsed on to the gathering crowd. Eleven people died in the rubble and chaos. They were all Protestant civilians, many elderly women. The IRA claimed the operation was a mistake. But this was a desecration for which there could be no acceptable apology. With revulsion around the world, Gerry Adams's strategy for political engagement appeared to have been dealt a death blow.

But in the same week, the military wing of the IRA had also been dramatically compromised. A ship carrying a huge arsenal of arms was intercepted in French waters. The *Eksund* was crewed by five Irishmen. Under interrogation, the skipper revealed that the cargo was destined for the IRA, a gift from Libya's Colonel Gaddafi. This turned out to be the fourth shipment of deadly cargo. Only a week after the interception of the *Eksund*, the IRA deployed semtex explosive from Libya in Enniskillen.

There would be no more Libyan arms and explosives for the IRA after the *Eksund*. And Gerry Adams would use the Enniskillen calamity to strengthen his case within the Republican movement for a political solution. He insisted that the IRA could not kill civilians and expect to sustain support for their cause. The chaotic events of one week in 1987 would push Northern Ireland toward the peace process culminating in the astonishing political settlement between Northern Ireland's extremes in 2007.

But as one terror organisation was choking on the murder of non-combatants, another was emerging which had no such streak of political pragmatism or self-denial.

### CURRENT AFFAIRS & DOCUMENTARIES

**TX Date:** 15 April 2008

**Duration:** 4 x 50 minutes

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#### 3. The Paris Plot

1994. As an Air France plane was preparing to leave Algiers airport, four men dressed in uniforms entered the plane to check passports. But they were not officials of the Algerian authorities; they were members of the GIA, an Islamist extremist group who had been slaughtering thousands across Algeria for the last two years. They were part of a vicious, brutalising civil war that had engulfed Algeria since the elections which gave the Islamic party victory were cancelled by the military.

The men hijacked the plane and demanded it be flown to Paris. Two days elapsed and three passengers were executed before the Algerian authorities allowed the flight to depart for Marseille.

At Marseille, the terrorists demanded 27 tonnes of fuel to fly on to Paris. The French authorities then realised that they had no intention of landing in Paris and negotiating the release of the hostages. Instead, they were planning to use the plane as a missile and crash it into the heart of Paris, in a terrifying prototype of 9/11. An elite team of French commandos raided the plane, killing the terrorists and liberating the passengers. France cracked down on Islamist extremists in its midst, many of whom fled to England and 'Londonistan' is born.

A new combustible form of terror had arrived: the struggle of one country mixed with devotion to religious extremism. The result was a commitment to a spectacular war on the non-believer, a war that made no distinction between guilty and innocent, combatant and civilian.

This terror was being waged on the near enemy, Algeria and France, but the sacred war was about to be spread in all directions across the globe.

#### 4. War On The West

1998. A truck loaded with explosives pulled up outside the US Embassy in the heart of Nairobi. A man jumped out and threw a stun grenade at the guards. A suicide bomber then detonated the explosives. The embassy and adjacent buildings were reduced to smouldering rubble, packed buses parked at the crossroads were ignited. 224 people died. Thousands were injured.

There had been warnings. In late autumn 1997, there was intelligence from a 'walk in' at the Nairobi Embassy that it was to be bombed. The US Ambassador had already notified Washington of its vulnerability. In the spring, Osama bin Laden had issued a fatwa against Americans, military and civilians, threatening them with death wherever they were. As the Americans and the West tried to work out what to do about bin Laden, a team of international terrorists quietly plotted the embassy attack in the mountains of Afghanistan and the suburbs of Nairobi.

In the aftermath, President Clinton launched Operation *Infinite Reach*, attacking bin Laden's Afghan base. But bin Laden had gone. His reach seemed further than that of the world's only superpower.

The embassy bombs ushered in a new chapter of the Age of Terror. The ideology of jihad (holy war) against the West united al-Qaeda's affiliated groups of Islamist extremists in a campaign of global terror. Today, they regard all civilians as legitimate targets. No one is presumed innocent – we all participate in the perceived guilt of our political leaders. This is the final, terrible logic of the Age Of Terror.

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