

Chapter 14

International Terrorism and International Tourism ¹

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When people are concerned about terrorism they prefer simple answers so that they can decide for themselves “Will I be next?” or “Will I be safe?” Complex answers are not welcome, perhaps because we are not good at handling complexity just as we are not good at estimating probabilities of risks. While we live in risk societies, our assessment of risks is often intuitive and primitive. The risk of being killed in a terrorist attack aboard an American aircraft, for instance, is only one in 25 Million – fifty times smaller than being killed in any given year by lightning.³ We develop models to reduce the complexity of the world to something we can mentally handle. Yet we should not mix up models of reality with the reality itself.

When we look at Terrorism and Tourism we look at two phenomena that are complex in their own right and even more so when put together. Tourism can refer to religious tourism, heritage tourism, sport and adventure tourism, recreational tourism, mass tourism, eco-tourism and many more varieties. Terrorism can refer to religious terrorism, ethno-nationalist terrorism, left- or right wing terrorism, lone wolf or solo terrorism, narco-terrorism, single issue terrorism, vigilante terrorism, regime terrorism and more. On top of that, terrorism is often confused with other forms of political violence, ranging from sabotage and arson to violent demonstrations and assassination.

Tourism might involve land- and sea-travelling, cruises and safaris, mountain tracking in Nepal or sun-bathing in Kenya – it comes in many forms. For some countries and regions tourism is (or was until recently) one of the pri-

¹ The present text is based on a presentation at an ESRC Research Seminar on “Terrorism and the Complexity of Soft Targets: The Case of the Tourism Industry” held at the Conference Centre Oxford, 10 March 2010.

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³ Nate Silver, “Crunching the Risk Numbers,” *Wall Street Journal*, 8 January 2010.

mary sources of income (e.g. Egypt, Thailand, Bali in Indonesia), for others it is marginal. However, worldwide tourism and travel as a whole are substantial industries, accounting for more than 7 percent of the world's total workforce and contributing over 8 percent of global GDP in 2009.⁴ In 2009 there were 880 million international tourist arrivals – a 4% drop compared to the previous year. Already at the time of 9/11, tourism and travel were with 3.6 trillion dollars the world's largest industry, employing every 12th worker in the world.⁵ It is also one of the fastest growing sectors of the world economy.⁶ At the same time it is also one of the most volatile and vulnerable industries – due to shifting consumer tastes, economic cycles, domestic political instability as well as shocks caused by domestic and international terrorism.⁷

The actors and key stakeholders involved are the terrorists themselves, the tourists, the tour operators, hotel detectives, tourist guides, insurance companies, airline operators and many more, including the media.

It is not easy to say something meaningful about worldwide phenomena like terrorism and tourism in their combination without sticking to generalities or getting lost in details of individual cases. In this article, I shall try to review some empirical research.

First we need to look at the logic of terrorist attacks on tourists and tourist facilities. If we look at the categories of targets chosen by terrorists, civilians are prominent – that is what makes terrorism different from much of warfare and from some other forms of political violence. Civilians are attacked for a variety of reasons such as:

1. They are easy targets, since, as foreigners, they generally lack situational awareness;
2. Tourists are usually concentrated in tourist resorts, at sightseeing points; they often travel in groups along well-known routes which makes them easy to ambush;
3. They are usually representatives of a wider group—often seen as rich, white Western elites—attacking some of them can scare the rest of them;
4. They are a source of revenue for the local regime which is often the main enemy of the terrorists;

⁴ Ufi Ibrahim, "Travel & Tourism is One of the Most Dynamic Industries," available at www.kiwicollection.com/insider_detail/ITEM=101 (accessed on 8 December 2009).

⁵ Worldwatch Institute, "Tourism, Terrorism, and Tomorrow" (Washington, D.C.: Worldwatch, 13 December 2001).

⁶ H.R. Seddighi and A.L. Theocharous, "A Model of Tourism Destination Choice: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis," *Tourism Management* 23:5 (October 2002), 475-487.

⁷ Christian Steiner, Ala Al-Hamarneh and Günter Meyer, "Krisen, Kriege, Katastrophen und ihre Auswirkungen auf den Tourismusmarkt," *Zeitschrift für Wirtschaftsgeographie* 50:2 (2006): 98-108; J.T. Coshall, "Combining volatility and smoothing forecasts of UK demand for international tourism," *Tourism Management* 30:4 (August 2009): 495-511.

5. When kidnapped and taken hostage, tourists are a source of ransom money and an instrument to blackmail both local and foreign governments concerned about their citizens' safety and security;
6. Tourists from certain countries (e.g. Israel) can serve as substitute target, as it is easier to hit them abroad than at home.

For the terrorists, tourists are often unimportant in themselves but important to convey messages to third parties.⁸ Such messages might include the following:

1. Your government cannot protect you all the time everywhere;
2. We can strike at places and times of our own choosing and are strong;
3. You are not welcome here since you support the local regime.

To convey such messages explicitly or implicitly, it does not really matter which individual tourist or which group is targeted, or even where they are targeted, as long as an attack on them can be associated, directly through the location or indirectly through a constructed message, with the enemies of the terrorists. The media and the Internet allow the terrorists to link an attack in country A to a government in country B so that the location of the attack becomes of secondary importance. In other words, there can be a certain substitution of targets without detracting from the message to be conveyed with an attack.

Tourists can be hit at sightseeing points—like Luxor—en route in a bus, train or plane or in hotels. Hotel attacks have increased in recent years: while there were major attacks against 30 hotels in 15 different countries in the eight years before 9/11, there were more than twice as many attacks—62—in the eight years after 9/11 in twenty different countries. The number of fatalities increased six and a half times in the eight years after 9/11 compared to the previous eight years while the number of injured increased six times in comparison.⁹ The fact that most hotel windows still do not have a protective film that prevents glass from becoming shrapnel has increased the number of casualties.

Hotels are not only extreme soft targets. Although tourists in hotels are almost by definition civilians and non-combatants, some religious terrorists consider hotels licit targets. As one author put it:

“For jihadists, the ideological justifications for attacking hotels are numerous. In many countries with heavy militant presences, large hotels are among the most

⁸ In this view, I strongly disagree with authors like H. Aziz who argues that “...violence is a reaction to irresponsible tourism development,” holding that, with regard to attacks on tourists in Egypt, “The tourism industry, the government, the developers and the tourists are as responsible for this undesirable situation as the Muslim groups.” See H. Aziz, “Understanding attacks on tourists in Egypt,” *Tourism Management* 16:2 (March 1995): 91-95.

⁹ “Special Security Report: The Militant Threat to Hotels,” *Stratfor*, 8 September 2009, p.5.

prominent symbols of Western culture – especially recognized Western hotel chains such as JW Marriott, Hilton, InterContinental and Radisson. The jihadists and their supporters view hotel attacks as in keeping with the Koranic injunction of prohibiting vice and commanding virtue: Hotels are places where men and women mix freely, and guests can consume alcohol, dance, and engage in fornication and adultery. Jihadists might also see an attack on a large hotel as a strike against a corrupt elite enjoying life at the expense of the impoverished majority.”¹⁰

Hotels are, as it were, sitting ducks. They can usually be accessed from several sides, some of those who pass through the door are guests, others are visitors and rarely are people and luggage thoroughly checked. Terrorists can check in a hotel a couple of days before they strike and carry out their operation from their hotel room. At the same time, in most hotels taxis and catering vehicles can approach hotel lobbies and other entrances without prior checks at an outside perimeter. Target hardening is costly; it scares off not only terrorists but also many tourists who do not like the inconveniences caused by security checks and in the end might feel insecure rather than secure by visible security measures, knowing that a particular hotel is considered a possible target. The choice between convenience and security is too often decided in favor of convenience, which is also helped by cost considerations. What is true for hotels is often also true for airline companies. While a national airline carrier like El Al might be able to invest almost one third of its budget on security measures, commercial airlines cannot do so without pricing themselves out of the market.

What Do We Know about Terrorism and Tourism?

A few things stand out from research:

Tourists are targets of terrorists but they are not the most frequent targets, although they are among the more prominent ones. What is fresh on our minds are some high-profile attacks like those in November 2008 in Mumbai on the Taj Mahal Palace and Oberoi Trident hotels – attacks that killed 71 people and wounded more than 200 people, half of them international visitors.¹¹ Yet if we look at statistics of terrorist incidents the picture is less frightening.

The US government’s World Incident Tracking System recorded, for the period 2004 – mid-2009 a total 77 incidents where tourists were involved. These incidents cost the lives of 196 people while another 808 persons were injured and 94 were taken hostage—all told 1,098 victims resulted from these 77 incidents—that is, on the average between two and three people got killed and between eleven and twelve got injured. These incidents took place in only 10 percent of all countries: Nepal, India, Turkey, Thailand, Afghanistan, Spain, Myan-

¹⁰ Ibid., p.4.

¹¹ Joe Brancatelli, “Portofolio.com: Business Travel,” *Washington Post*, 9 December 2009.

mar, France, Colombia, Egypt, Yemen, Bolivia, Israel, Jordan, Ecuador, Morocco, Mauretania, Indonesia and Croatia.¹²

The Global Terrorism Database of the University of Maryland lists, for the much longer period from 1970 to 2007, 365 incidents involving tourists.¹³ That is about ten incidents per year. Considering the fact that the GTD records over 82,000 domestic and international incidents, that is not that much – only 0.22 percent of the total.

However, the impact of single incidents—let alone campaigns of terrorism on tourism—can be enormous. Take Egypt, between 1992 and 1997: 96 foreign tourists were killed in those six years of which 58 were killed in one single incident in Luxor.

Table 1: Attacks on Tourists, 1992–1997 in Egypt

October 1992: British nurse killed in bus attack near Cairo.

February 1993: Two tourists (one French and one American) killed outside a Cairo hotel.

October 1993: One US and one French tourist killed outside a Cairo hotel.

March 1994: One German tourist killed on a Nile cruise boat.

September 1995: Two Germans and two Egyptians killed in the Red Sea resort city of Hurghada.

October 1995: One Briton killed and one wounded with one Egyptian killed and five wounded in an attack on a tourist mini-van in the Nile Valley.

April 1996: Eighteen Greek tourists killed and sixteen wounded in an attack on a tourist Coach near the Pyramids at Giza. It is believed the Greeks were incorrectly assumed by their attackers to have been Israelis.

September 1997: Ten German tourists killed in an attack outside the Egyptian Museum in Cairo.

November 1997: Fifty-eight tourists massacred in the area of the Luxor Temple. Victims of this worst massacre of tourists in Egypt during the 1990s included French, Swiss, British and Japanese nationals.

These attacks cost Egypt billions of dollars in tourism income. Yet the biggest massacre—the one in Luxor instigated by Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyy—was also the last mass casualty disaster in Egypt for almost than ten years. The dependency of the Egyptian population on tourism meant that the terrorists were losing the support of the same people they claimed to represent. In other words, the tactics of killing tourists became self-defeating and the terrorist group re-

¹² "Worldwide Incidents Tracking System," U.S. National Counterterrorism Center, wits.nctc.gov (accessed 27 February 2010).

¹³ Global Terrorism Database, START, University of Maryland, accessed 27 February 2010.

sponsible for it split as a consequence, disagreeing on tactics. The government increased security at tourist sites—in 1997 there had been only one guard and three policemen at Luxor—and that contributed to the fact that tourism in 1999 was already back on the 1997 level. Nevertheless, one truth sticks out above all others regarding the relationship between tourism and terrorism: such political violence deters tourism. One study by Walter Enders and Todd Sandler, focusing on the effect of terrorism on tourism in Spain in the period 1970–1988 found that a typical incident scared away over 140,000 tourists when all monthly impacts were combined.¹⁴

The disruption of tourism and travel due to acts of terrorism can be severe. After 9/11 both airline passenger loads and hotel occupancy in the United States declined for several months by 50% and more in some regions.¹⁵ Yet the magnitude and duration of such a downturn is dependent on various factors like the severity and frequency of terrorist attacks. Some existing evidence indicates that frequent attacks have a more profound effect on tourist arrivals or rather, the decline thereof, than the severity of attacks. If attacks are perceived as unique events rather than as part of a sustained campaign, tourists are more likely to come back.¹⁶ The two Bali bombings in 2002 and 2005, while severely damaging tourism (arrivals dropped by about 25 percent in 2003 and by 20 percent during the first six months in 2006¹⁷ – were less damaging than prolonged campaigns of terrorism as we saw in places like Lebanon or Sri Lanka.

Tourists, as opposed to business travelers, can easily switch from one destination to another. For instance, after 9/11 fewer Americans went abroad to tourist destinations while some domestic and regional destinations like Hawaii experienced a temporary upsurge in the period after 9/11.¹⁸ Customers of tourist products are flexible while tourist destinations—except for cruise

¹⁴ Walter Enders and Todd Sandler, "Causality between transnational terrorism and tourism: The case of Spain," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 14:1 (1991): 49-58.

¹⁵ Jonathan N. Goodrich, "September 11, 2001 attack on America: A record of the immediate impacts and reactions in the USA travel and tourism industry," *Tourism Management* 23:6 (December 2002): 573-580.

¹⁶ John T. Coshall, "The Threat of Terrorism as an Intervention on International Travel Flows," *Journal of Travel Research* 42:1 (2003): 4-12; Abraham Pizam, "Severity versus Frequency of Acts of Terrorism: Which Has a Larger Impact on Tourism Demand?" *Journal of Travel Research* 40:3 (2002): 337-339.

¹⁷ Joe Brancatelli, "Portofolio.com: Business Travel," *Washington Post*, 9 December 2009.

¹⁷ "Worldwide Incidents Tracking System," US National Counterterrorism Center; www.wits.nctc.gov (accessed 27 February 2010).

¹⁸ Carl Bonham, Christopher Edmonds, and James Mak, "The Impact of 9/11 and Other Terrible Global Events on Tourism in the United States and Hawaii," *Journal of Travel Research* 45:1 (August 2006): 99-110; Peter Gut and Stephen Jarrell, "Silver Lining on a Dark Cloud: The Impact of 9/11 on a Regional Tourist Destination," *Journal of Travel Research* 46:2 (November 2007): 147-153.

ships—cannot move.¹⁹ Terrorist attacks in one tourist destination can have spill-over effects on a whole (sub-) region and damage the tourist industry of an entire region as we saw in the mid-1980s in the Mediterranean.²⁰

What Can Be Done?

There are two basic strategies that tourism managers and Ministries of Tourism can pursue: they can try to improve the security situation at their destination or they can try to change the security perception among tourists and tour operators about their destination.²¹ Since it is easier and less costly to change perceptions than to change reality, the inclination will be to go for the former. It is a well-known fact that tour operators can push certain destinations through pricing policies and advertisement campaigns.²² However, they do not want to send their customers to their deaths. Tour operators usually can switch from one destination to another while those in local tourist industries at a dangerous destination cannot.

While the local tourism industry makes investments to increase its attractiveness for tourists and expects that the profits will surpass their investment, the expenditures for public safety are largely borne by the government. If all goes well the government receives taxes to compensate it for the extra costs of law enforcement.²³ If things do not go well and the tourist industry is hard hit, governments are often also expected to step in and help. That can take several forms, e.g. with sector-specific targeted subsidies and tax reductions (as happened after 9/11 in the United States).²⁴

However, to bring tourists back to a destination deserted due to terrorist threats as soon as possible requires that the prospective tourist makes a realistic assessment of the risks involved. The perceptions of many tourists about the risk of terrorism are indeed in many cases exaggerated. On the other hand, tourists tend to underestimate, sometimes grossly, the risks of becoming a victim of crime or a victim of diseases picked up locally in a foreign destination.²⁵

¹⁹ Sevil F. Sönmez, Yiorgos Apostolopoulos, and Peter Tarlow, "Tourism in Crisis: Managing the Effects of Terrorism," *Journal of Travel Research* 38:1 (2003): 13-18.

²⁰ Konstantinos Drakos and Ali M. Kutan, "Regional Effects of Terrorism on Tourism in Three Mediterranean Countries," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 47:5 (October 2003): 621-641.

²¹ Jeffrey S. Conant, John J. Burnett, and Gail Zank, "Terrorism and Travel: Managing the Unmanageable," *Journal of Travel Research* 26:4 (1998): 16-20.

²² N. Cavlek, "Tour Operators and Destination Safety," *Annals of Tourism Research* 29:2 (April 2002): 478-496.

²³ G. Feichtinger, R.F. Hartle, P.M. Kort, and A.J. Novak, "Terrorism Control in the Tourism Industry," *Journal of Optimization Theory and Applications* 108:2 (February 2001): 283-296.

²⁴ Adam Blake and M. Thea Sinclair, "Tourism Crisis Management: US Response to September 11," *Annals of Tourism Research* 30:4 (October 2003): 813-832.

²⁵ R.I. Mawby, "Tourists' Perceptions of Security: The Risk-fear Paradox," *Tourism Economics* 6:2 (June 2000): 109-121. The author's findings confirm the high crime vic-

Tourists themselves can take certain precautions so that they are not being kidnapped or otherwise targeted by terrorists. One of them is **not to stick out** in a crowd like the typical tourist. The risk-aware tourist will also check out the travel advise of his government as well as other governments. The foreign offices of the US, the UK and the Netherlands have excellent websites where realistic assessments of the risks to be expected are presented.

The main responsibility in improving security for tourists rests with local governments and those managing tourist destinations. It is important for tourist destinations not only to provide security but also, if security fails, to have a crisis management plan at hand. Guidebooks for crisis management, establishing a crisis management task force, and simulation exercises together with law enforcement officials should be part of the measures to manage the effects of terrorism and other disasters.²⁶ Unfortunately, much of the tourism industry is still reactive rather than pro-active when it comes to man-made and natural disasters. The Asian Tsunami crisis in 2004 was, however, an eye-opener and efforts have been made to strengthen the organizational resilience.²⁷

While pro-active pre-crisis prevention is obviously the first strategy to pursue, one cannot realistically expect to avoid disaster all the time. Therefore emphasis must also be placed on crisis management and impact mitigation if a terrorist attack or a natural disaster occurs.²⁸

The way we tend to react to crises, including disastrous terrorist attacks, is that there is a sudden burst of activity, some useful some not, and then a slackening of attention. What is needed is an on-going concern that is not event-driven and cyclical but permanent.²⁹

Involving the media is also crucially important. Unfortunately, commercial media are often sensationalists rather than showing responsibility. Terrorists count on the fact that negative news is bigger news than good news and they are deliberately creating bad news to obtain free publicity and attract new recruits to their ranks and gain recognition for the terrorist cause. If the media would not report on terrorism, much of present-day terrorism would simply not happen for the whole point of attacking a few people indiscriminately is to scare many others who identify with the few unfortunate victims. The news

timization rates experienced by tourists. The same conclusion is also reached in Klaus de Albuquerque and Jerome McElroy, "Tourism and Crime in the Caribbean," *Annals of Tourism Research* 26:4 (October 1999): 968-984.

²⁶ Sönmez, Apostolopoulos, and Tarlow, "Tourism in Crisis: Managing the Effects of Terrorism."

²⁷ Bridgette Sullivan Taylor and David C. Wilson, "Managing the Threat of Terrorism in British Travel and Leisure Organizations," *Organization Studies* 30:2/3 (2009): 251-276; Pforr and Hosie, "Crisis Management in Tourism: Preparing for Recovery."

²⁸ Brent W. Ritchie, "Chaos, Crises and Disasters: A Strategic Approach to Crisis Management in the Tourism Industry," *Tourism Management* 25:6 (December 2004): 669-683.

²⁹ C. Michael Hall, "Travel Safety, Terrorism and the Media: The Significance of the Issue-attention Cycle," *Current Issues in Tourism* 5:5 (2002): 458-466.

value system of the media is largely based on commercial values: violence gets attention and more attention means larger circulation and larger audiences that can be sold to advertisers. While censorship is not the answer and would be difficult to implement in the age of the Internet anyway, the way our news system works is not very helpful to contain terrorism. It has been said by Brigitte Nacos, herself both a journalist and an academic lecturer, that "...the news media and terrorists are not involved in a love story; they are strange bedfellows in a marriage of convenience."³⁰

The link between terrorism and the media is much closer than the one between terrorists and tourists. Tourists are easy targets but they are, until now, less frequent targets than some other unfortunate groups of civilians who get caught in conflicts of which they do not see themselves as part.

The threat of terrorism to tourism cannot be permanently reduced simply by measures taken by the travel and tourist industry. What is needed is something more fundamental: a strengthening of the norm that distinguishes between combatants and civilians and absolutely prohibits deliberate attacks on civilians. That is something that can only be achieved if those who are the guardians of our normative systems – our religious leaders and secular teachers, our parents and our political leaders and our cultural artists but also our media uphold the idea that life is precious and sacred and not something to be sacrificed for the sake of a religion or ideologies that divide mankind by class, race or religion. We must foster an understanding that we only have one life and one planet and that whether we are tourists and travelers or hosts to them, we are, in the end, all human beings whose live on this beautiful planet should not be shortened by politically-motivated violence.

³⁰ Brigitte Nacos, *Terrorism and Counterterrorism. Understanding Threats and Responses in the Post – 9/11 World*, 3rd edition (Boston: Longman, 2010), p.263. To support her argument, she quotes a suspected London-based follower of Bin Laden who told an interviewer, "Terror is the language of the twenty-first century. If I want something, I terrorize you to achieve it." (pp.299-300) – a statement that, according to her, "goes to the heart of the terrorist calculus" (p.300).