

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Conviction of Carlos marks end of era in international terrorism

By Douglas Davis

LONDON, (JTA) - For more than two decades, "Carlos the Jackal" was the symbol of international terrorism.

This high-living killer-for-hire, who had sown fear around the world, had inspired authors and a genre of movies, the latest being the recently released film "The Assignment."

But when the fabled terrorist, whose real name is Ilich Ramirez Sanchez, was convicted of murder in December, it was clear that the mystique was gone.

Indeed, it was a slightly comical, pathetic figure of a debauched and overweight 48-year-old playboy who emerged from a Paris court to start serving a life sentence for killing two French secret service agents and their Lebanese accomplice in a Paris apartment on June 27, 1975.

Those charges reflected a mere token of the killings attributed to the Venezuelan-born doctrinaire Marxist, who is estimated to have taken at least 80 lives on behalf of his Palestinian and other masters.

France still expects to try Carlos for his alleged role in a series of bomb attacks that claimed 17 lives in France between 1979 and 1982.

He is also wanted in Germany for allegedly bombing Berlin's French cultural center, and in Austria for his most spectacular raid - the kidnapping of 11 OPEC oil ministers in Vienna in 1975.

The trial of Carlos marked the official end of his terrorist career, but he had already been supplanted by international terrorists of a different ilk.

Carlos has little in common with the shadowy Islamic terrorists of the 1990s, who specialize in indiscriminate mass murder as they pursue jihad, holy war, against the 'godless West' with the promise of paradise-to-come.

Indeed, Carlos would rank high among their targets.

Their austere regime of faith bears no resemblance to the lifestyle of Carlos, which was dedicated to the pursuit of bacchanalian pleasures: fast women, fine wines and chunky Cuban cigars by night; spy videos, business magazines and cafe culture by day.

The generation of terror that gave birth to Carlos was centered around a charismatic leader who was well paid and well connected, with networks that extended across Europe and into Asia - the

Irish Republican Army in Britain, the Red Brigades in Italy, the Baader-Meinhof gang in Germany and the Japanese Red Army.

The personality cult remains a potent element for today's terrorists, but the object of adoration and obedience is not the romantic, university-educated, middle-class suburbanite with trademark beard and designer sunglasses who is propelled down a frenzied path toward revolutionary fervor and high explosives.

Instead, Islamic terrorist groups tend to be centered around religious leaders, such as the blind Sheik Omar Abdel-Rahman, who inspired the attempt to blow up the World Trade Center in New York, and the quadriplegic Sheik Ahmed Yassin, founder of Haillas and champion of the Palestinian suicide bomber.

And unlike the tight, cellular structures created by their predecessors, the modern Middle East terrorist group is more likely to be "project-driven" based on custom-built units designed for specific operations, drawing on battle-trained specialists from such theaters as Afghanistan, Bosnia, Chechnya, Algeria, Azerbaijan, Egypt and Sudan.

These informal, decentralized terrorist structures of the 1990s are fluid, mobile and dynamic, posing a significantly greater challenge to counterterrorism experts than the operations of the past.

Some of today's terrorists live in hospitable Middle Eastern environments under the protection of Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Libya or Sudan. But many more exploit the democratic freedoms of the West to preach their doctrine of religious extremism, to recruit followers, raise funds, plan operations, organize logistics and issue orders.

The modern terrorists are able to blend into their pluralistic Western environments, but they despise what they perceive as the liberal decadence of the West and remain uncompromising opponents of its accompanying materialist, secularist culture.

Carlos was a different breed. Born in Venezuela in 1949, he is the son of a wealthy Marxist lawyer, Jose Altargarcia Ramirez Navas, and one of three brothers - Vladimir and Lenin - named for the first leader of the Soviet Union.

At age 17, Carlos traveled to

London to study chemistry - "I'm great at making explosives," he said at his trial - and two years later, in 1968, enrolled at Moscow's Patrice Lumumba University, though Soviet authorities expelled him for participating in an unauthorized demonstration.

Having drunk deeply from the well of revolutionary thought, he emerged into the world in 1971 ready to put belief into practice.

He traveled to the Middle East and chose the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine - a militant, Marxist vehicle for promoting the Palestinian cause - to launch his career as all international terrorist.

One of his first acts, in 1973, was to brazenly walk through the front door of the London home of Edward Sieff, then a prominent Zionist leader and head of the British chain store Marks and Spencer, and coolly shoot him in the face.

Sieff survived, but the Jackal's career was launched.

By the end of the 1980s, however, the world in which Carlos thrived was changing.

After the Cold War ended and Middle Eastern governments began peacemaking efforts, Carlos was abandoned by the very states - East European and Arab - that had supported his actions.

In 1991 Syria suggested that Carlos - who had established a comfortable life under cover of a Mexican businessman in a Damascus suburb with his German wife and fellow terrorist, Magdalena Kopp, and two children - find a home elsewhere.

Refused shelter by Iraq and Libya, he finally found refuge in the Sudanese capital of Khartoum in August 1993.

By all accounts, Carlos spent his final year of freedom indulging in the pleasures of the flesh rather than revolutionary fervor.

He had shed his family and arrived in Sudan with a glamorous Lebanese belly dancer. Soon after, he acquired an attractive Sudanese companion. The trio became regulars in the Cypriot and Armenian clubs where bootleg alcohol is available at spectacular prices.

What Carlos did not know was that once in Khartoum he was tracked day and night by an American spy satellite, which is capable of monitoring objects as small as 6 inches.

On Aug. 13, 1996, Carlos finally let his guard down when he checked into Khartoum's Ibu Khalillud hospital for minor surgery on a testicle. That evening, plainclothes Sudanese state security agents persuaded him to transfer to a military hospital for his own security.

In the wee hours of Aug. 14, still groggy from the effects of the anesthetic, Sudanese security officials handed him over to French

intelligence agents who swiftly injected him with a powerful sedative, handcuffed and hooded him, before bundling him into a sack and whisking him off to a nearby airfield.

Seven hours later, the French government aircraft touched down outside Paris. When Carlos came to, he was under arrest.

Now, unless his vowed appeal is successful, he will spend the rest of his life in jail. ✪

Chronology of Carlos the Jackal's terror

Carlos the Jackal was the most prominent international terrorist for two decades. Here is a partial chronology of terror attacks in which he was believed to be involved.

July 1971: Carlos receives military training from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine in Lebanon.

May 1972: Twenty-six pilgrims killed, 78 wounded in a joint attack at Israel's Lod Airport by the Japanese Red Army and PFLP.

December 1973: Carlos shoots prominent Jewish businessman and Zionist Edward Sieff in the face at his London home. Sieff survives.

January 1974: Carlos claims responsibility for bombing the London branch of Israel's Bank Hapoalim.

August 1974: Two right-wing French newspapers and the Jewish monthly L'Arche are bombed.

December 1974: Two people killed, 30 injured in a grenade attack on the Jewish-owned cafe Le Drugstore in Paris. Carlos is a chief suspect.

January 1975: Carlos is instrumental in two rocket attack on El Al planes at a Paris airport. Terrorists are captured but allowed to fly to the Middle East.

June 1975: Carlos kills two French secret-service agents investigating the rocket attacks and their Lebanese informant.

December 1975: Three people killed when Carlos leads attack on an OPEC conference in Vienna. Eleven oil ministers are seized but later released for a huge cash ransom.

March 1982: Five people killed and 27 injured in a bomb attack on a Paris-Toulouse express train carrying then Paris mayor, now French President, Jacques Chirac. Carlos is a chief suspect.

April 1982: Carlos claims responsibility for bombing French embassy and Air France office in Vienna.

December 1983: Five people die and scores injured, in two bomb attacks in France - one in Marseilles, another on a high-speed train. Carlos is a chief suspect.

August 1983: One person killed, scores wounded, in bomb attack on French cultural center in Berlin. Germany issues warrant for Carlos' arrest.

January 1984: Carlos claims responsibility for bombing French Cultural center in Tripoli, Lebanon.

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