
URBAN RIOT

Collective breaches of public order through riot, unrest and public demonstration need not be specifically urban, although even the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 culminated in a march on London. The very concentrations of population makes an urban setting more likely, and the symbolic importance of many urban places, as well as the proximity of governments, provides more opportunities. Nor are these public disturbances particularly a modern phenomenon, although modern communication techniques may render them more effective as political demonstrations, and spread the news of such occurrences more rapidly through potential rioters, creating a 'copy-cat' sequence. Urban riots were a fairly regular and expected feature of the urban scene, so that most cities had their recognized congregating points for the staging of such demonstrations, which survive in such spaces as London's Trafalgar Square or The Hague's 'Malieveld'.

The definitive line between legal and illegal demonstration is difficult to draw, and is as much a matter of prevailing custom and compromise as law. So also is the distinction between crime (especially street crime) and riot, and many of the defensive techniques described earlier stemmed as much from the perennial fear of the mob, that survived well into the nineteenth century in almost all European cities, as from fear of individual criminal acts.

Similarly, the relationship between urban riots and urban terrorism and guerrilla insurgency is complex. Many collective disturbances have no political implications. Jarowitz (1969) distinguished 'communal' from 'commodity' riots on the basis not of the motive but of the target, the first being an ethnic or social group and the second being property. To these could be added general hooliganism—associated in the 1980s in western Europe particularly with football matches—in which the targets appear to be randomly chosen. Disturbances may even, within certain understood limits, be tolerated. For example, many societies, both now and in the past, have specified times of acceptable 'misrule' or 'carnival'. However, many riots may be more-or-less spontaneous and undirected outbursts of anger and frustration at real or imagined grievances.

In what was termed the 'long hot summer' in the middle of the 1960s, when the residents of the black ghettos of American cities turned to widespread looting and burning, the underlying grievances might have had a logic in the years of discrimination or neglect, but the timing and choice of cities appeared to be unpredictable and disorganized (Button 1978). Similarly, Georges' (1978) study of the Newark riots of 1975 found it difficult to relate either the particular timing or location to specific grievances. In a detailed analysis of what Lewis (1976) argues is an unbroken, 200-year tradition of violence in the United States, he concludes that the most important locational characteristic is simply the population size of cities. During the period of greatest media interest (1964–8), 80 per cent of all property damage and 60

per cent of all injuries occurred in just five cities (Los Angeles, Newark, Detroit, Washington and Chicago). The far less severe but in some respects similar disturbances in British cities in 1981 and 1983 again proved difficult to predict or explain on grounds of the social, economic or size characteristics of the cities concerned (Peach 1985).

Mass demonstrations organized for political ends, whose objective is to confront the authorities by acts of collective law-breaking, have in recent years become an accepted, legitimate part of the political scene, even in parliamentary democracies. Indeed, the experience of the *annus mirabilis* of 1989 in eastern and central Europe suggests that they may have become a necessary preliminary to the establishment of such a democracy. In addition, mass urban rioting can form part of a more extensive range of insurgency activities: for example, as a cover for terrorist or guerrilla acts of assassination, sabotage or subversion of the security forces, or as part of a propaganda and preparation phase of full-scale revolution—as grievances are made public, the security forces provoked into an over-reaction that increases such grievances, and potential activists for the later stages of insurgency are recruited. The large scale 1986/7 disturbances in the black townships of South African cities, and the Palestinian ‘uprising’ since 1987 (*Intifada*) in the towns of the West Bank and Gaza Strip (although censorship in both cases made it difficult to assess) appear to be examples of such a mixture of popular spontaneity and political orchestration, whose purpose is to consolidate the legitimacy of an insurgent organization both internally and externally. Such consolidation may occur as a result of the actions of security forces in response to an existing riot. In 1990 up to 20,000 Soviet troops had to force entry into the central area of Baku, which had already been barricaded by insurgents, in order to secure government and party buildings and the Subunchinsky railway station. The resulting casualties did much to legitimize Azerbaijan separatism.

The reactions of the authorities to riot, or in the longer term to the fear of the possibility of riot, has throughout much of urban history been either to fortify refuges within the city (the ‘citadel solution’) or to remove themselves from the city, or from the parts of it where the actions of the mob were most prevalent (the ‘Versailles solution’). The former option was adopted by the Norman conquerors of eleventh-century England, where the castle on its motte was designed to protect the new government from the existing citizens and to cow the city into submission rather than protect it from external attack. Such a use of the castle was as much the rule as the exception through much of the Middle Ages. London’s Tower, Paris’s Bastille, Utrecht’s Vredenburg, and many other such citadels, sheltered the urban government against enraged citizens whose lawlessness was allowed to burn itself out in the town outside.

The vulnerability of national, or even in the case of Rome and Constantinople imperial, governments to the urban mob of the capital—whose demands had to be placated at the expense of national policies—was an

argument encouraging a move of courts and government apparatus beyond its physical reach into the more peaceful countryside outside the city. Bourbon Versailles of the seventeenth century was only a later and larger-scale version of the English Westminster option of 600 years earlier. In its extreme form, this option was a not unimportant consideration in the creation of new government cities established beyond the disruptive influence of the metropolis. The Hague was a haven away from the tumult of the Holland cities, whose mobs had already murdered the government of de Witt; Washington was removed from Philadelphia and Boston whose unruly citizens had already led a successful revolution; and, in more modern times, the foundation of cities such as Brasilia and Islamabad have more in common with seventeenth-century Versailles than the spacious, imposing architecture alone.

At the more micro-scale it has long been clear that there is a relationship between the details of the street and building block-patterns, and the effective deployment of the military resources of the security forces, although this relationship can be oversimplified. It is true that narrow, irregular streets and spaces, deny to the security forces a number of their inherent advantages—especially their capacity to manoeuvre and deploy disciplined units, and to bring their superior fire power to bear at crucial points. Such an urban morphology is typical ‘close country’ in military terms, making the use of mobile forces (whether cavalry, tanks or armoured personnel-carriers) less effective. Fields of fire are seriously truncated by buildings reducing the effectiveness of artillery, and increasing the reliance on short-range, close-order small arms, where the citizens comparative disadvantage is likely to be least.

Many of these disadvantages, however, apply also to the rioters—who equally have a need for open space and broad lines of movement, if they are to exploit their weight of numbers. In addition, the psychology of the mob requires the visible presence of a critical mass of participants in order to create the atmosphere of an unstoppable tide of protest which will overwhelm opposition. Beijing’s Tianamen Square may have been an ideal, open and symbolic space for a mass challenge to the established order but it was equally ideal in 1989 for clearance by the military forces of that order.

Standard police tactics—known as the ‘herding sheep technique’ according to Methuin (1970)—are, in order of priorities: first, to cordon off vulnerable areas; second, to contain the rioting within specific areas of the city; and, third, to enter the riot area and disperse the rioters. The detailed urban morphology plays an important role in all three stages. Bodies of rioters and demonstrators are broken up by forcing them away from the open spaces of squares and boulevards and channelling them into narrower streets and alleys. This may be undertaken either by the physical pushing by large numbers of unarmed police, as in Britain (as described in detail by Deanne-Drummond (1975:108), or by resort to anti-personnel projectiles. In both cases it is important that the street pattern not only allows escape but is precisely the

sort of 'close country' whose morphology itself splits rioters into smaller more manageable groups whose impetus will be lost by dispersion. Many of the occasions when such tactics fail, and result in either a collapse of the security forces or an over-reacting 'police riot' can be related to failures to use the morphological pattern correctly: for example, by herding rioters into an area from which they cannot escape—the 'bursting boiler' situation (Methuin 1970).

The textbook example of the redesigning of a city in order to render it more defensible against urban riot, is the work of Baron Haussmann, prefect of Paris during the reign of Louis Napoleon, who ironically had himself come to power with the help of the Parisian mob, whose importance he therefore appreciated. The barricades had been erected across the streets of Paris no less than eight times between 1827 and 1849. The new broad boulevards, such as Rue de Rivoli, Boulevard Sevastopol and Boulevard Voltaire, that were driven through some of the remaining close-packed, working-class quarters of the city intra-muros dramatically improved access and fields of fire. More of the city could now be brought under control by 'a whiff of grapeshot', as the first Napoleon had demonstrated in 1794. Such boulevards into the heart of the city were often linked to new barracks (such as the Caserne Vitrine on the Rue de la Republique) so as to facilitate troop deployment into the working-class districts. The double irony was that, first, these precautions, intended to frustrate an urban uprising, were taken immediately before the most serious such revolt in a major capital city up to that time (the Commune of 1871), and, second, that the demolition and rehousing needed to create these precautions may well have contributed to the sense of grievance which fuelled the very uprising they were designed to prevent.

The town-planning ideas put into practice by Haussmann in Paris had numerous imitators in French provincial cities in the third quarter of the nineteenth century (Sutcliffe 1970). They were fashionable notions of how a 'modern' city should be designed rather than self-conscious attempts to create a riot-proof urban morphology, and any security advantages must have been welcomed as a fortuitous side-effect. It is, in any event, too easy to link such developments with an individual city and an individual initiator. As Hall has traced in detail for a number of European capital cities, an important motive for rebuilding the city after 1850 was 'removing the environments which encouraged political disorder' (Hall 1986:28). A generation earlier, the rebuilt ring-boulevards of Hapsburg Vienna had facilitated suppression of the street disturbances of 1848–9 (through a combination of regular artillery and cavalry) after they had come close to the overthrow of an imperial dynasty. The first proposals for the Vienna 'ring' zone was that it be left open as a 'cordone sanitaire' between the governing and the governed classes. The plan eventually adopted included some new barracks, notably the Franz Josef Kaserne, for the housing of a 'rapid-reaction force' for use in the working-

class suburbs. Similar developments of a new road system, together with barracks for the troops who could deploy along it, was found in cities as diverse as Barcelona and Stockholm (Hall 1986).

A hundred years earlier still, the baroque *residenzstadte* of a host of German ruling kings, princes, dukes and bishops had restructured their medieval capitals with broad processional ways, central squares and rotundas, and a rigid, geometrical patterning of streets (Mumford 1961). It would be far-fetched to suggest that such efforts sprang entirely, or even chiefly, from the rulers' fear of the unstable mob that infested the medieval streets and alleys of the old town. A desire for architectural display and for the public manifestation of the symbols of power were stronger motives than the creation of fields of fire for artillery or space for the drilled manoeuvring of bodies of regular household troops. Indeed, it is difficult even to associate these planning forms with a political totalitarianism that invites popular insurgency when planned capital cities from Washington to Canberra have tended to adopt such styles as being appropriate to government.

It is also salutary to remember, as a counterpoise to an over-deterministic view of the relationship of urban design and successful riot control, that some of Europe's most riot-prone cities possess the very design characteristics that favour such control. Barcelona, the city whose reputation for successive political rioting in the early decades of this century was such that the city authorities were rumoured to have numbered the paving stones so that they could be easily replaced after each misuse as barricade-building materials, had been rebuilt to the broad-grid plan of Cerda. Similarly, an impartial insurgent seeking a suitable urban layout for mass demonstrations and confrontation against conventional forces would have placed St Petersburg very low on a list of preferred cities. Not only is it dominated by broad boulevards but also its river crossings are easily controlled by a limited number of bridges, some of which were actually movable. The fact that successive governments were overthrown with the help of precisely such mass insurgency in 1917, but successfully resisted it in the same city in 1905 and 1920, merely demonstrates that the spatial patterning is only a contributory factor—of secondary importance when compared with the level of skill and resolution of the security forces and those controlling them.

URBAN TERRORISM

The failure of the armed uprising of the Paris Commune of 1871 when confronted by regular forces, marked, according to many commentators (see Burton 1975), a turning point in the history of urban insurgency. What was obvious to many was the apparent helplessness of untrained, poorly armed, loosely disciplined citizenry commanded by amateur leaders in the face of a combination of new military technology (including an accurate infantry rifle, the first quick-firing automatic anti-personnel weapons, and mobile field