

Maureen and Mike

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This transcript represents the nearly verbatim record of an unrehearsed interview. Please bear in mind that you are reading the spoken word rather than the written word.

**Oral History Number: 197-001**  
**Interviewee: Richard Drake**  
**Interviewer: Scott Martinson**  
**Date of Interview: March 4, 1988**

*Note: Interviewer has a bad stutter, repeated words were not transcribed.*

Scott Martinson: Okay.

Richard Drake: Okay. Twenty minutes and 60, that's what I promised you, I'm going to give you 60 minutes of information in 20 minutes, go ahead.

SM: When did you first become interested in studying international terrorism?

RD: In the late 1970s, after the kidnapping and assassination of Aldo Moro in Italy. I decided that was an event of such historic importance to the Italian people, I resolved to investigate it. From there I became interested in terrorism more generally.

SM: When did you decide to choose to study the Red Brigades, at that point?

RD: At exactly that point. He was kidnapped and killed by the Red Brigades in the spring of 1978, just about 10 years ago, and in order to learn why he had been killed, I had to do a lot of research on the Red Brigades as an organization. It was out of that interest that my book, soon to be published in fact by Indiana University Press, it was out of that interest that the book emerged.

SM: In your terrorism class, you said, you mentioned that the disease of terrorism must be taken out of action. Would not the elements that survived require us to develop a completely new doings of meeting them on their own grounds to help, to deal with them?

RD: Absolutely. In the case of the Red Brigades in fact the Italian government did manage to mount a successful campaign. The Red Brigades have not been eliminated completely, but the threat that they posed to the state has been greatly reduced over the last several years. So tactics have been created that have resulted in far more success now than the tactics of say, 10 years ago did, so I think that's been happening in some cases of terrorism, not in all certainly.

SM: With the hunting down of a large number of the Red Brigades terrorists, do you think that they might come back, the Red Brigades, from the point of near destruction?

RD: It's hard to predict what's going to happen, but on the basis of what already has happened it's extremely difficult for me to see how they could come back all the way to where they were say, eight or nine years ago. As I said a moment ago, there's still in existence, there are still some 50 or so Red Brigadists on the loose. The only way they could possible stage a comeback,

it seems to me, would be if a major crisis were to befall Italy and strike the existing institutions of Italy. And as in all critical situations, radical groups stand a much greater chance of gaining political success than they do in relatively normal times. Right now, it's hard to see how they could come back from near destruction.

SM: What is the, in your class, what is the definition of the Malmo International I was interested in finding some more information about it.

RD: The Malmo International is a group of right-wing radicals gathered from all over Europe. It was a group that was founded in the early 1950s. It really was kind of a clearinghouse of reactionary right-wing elements. Primarily it seems to me, the major members were from Italy, and France, Germany, Spain, but they were European white, and they propose to demolish democratic liberal Europe and replace it with a reactionary state, much more in keeping with the fascist model than with the present day democratic model.

SM: What can the politicians in Europe do to prevent this radical switch back?

RD: Well, that group is of negligible importance at the moment, and again, as in the case of the Red Brigades, the only way that the Malmo International could ever, or likeminded groups, could ever achieve political significance would be if a disastrous crisis were to befall Europe and create conditions of such extreme instability, such extreme worry and fear, that existing democratic centrist political institutions would be perceived by the peoples of Europe to be unequal to the task of preserving order. That's my theory of extremist politics, that they only become important in crisis moments.

SM: What do you think special is happening in Libya since the bombing of the country by the U.S. in April of '86?

RD: It's hard to know what's going on in Libya. It's a closed society. There's no flow of unrestricted or uncensored information coming out of there. The reports that I read are very contradictory about Gaddafi's situation. It's an enigma right now. I still think that the bombing of Libya was a mistake. I don't think it accomplished anything. It has been said that we had to do something against terrorism. Well Gaddafi, according to the Rand Corporation, represented only a very tiny, less than five percent, of the world's problem with terrorism. If we really wanted to do something against terrorism, we should have struck Iran or Syria. That would have been the way to go with that. But I think, I think the attack on Gaddafi was primarily a public relations gesture that achieved nothing of lasting consequence in making the world a more peaceful place.

SM: What can be done about in the Middle East in the taking of foreign nationals, such as the Marine Colonel William Higgins?

RD: Well I guess the only way you can prevent that completely is to keep foreign nationals out of the Middle East, and not send them there at all. We've demonstrated a complete inability to protect foreign nationals. They're kidnapped almost at the will of the terrorist person over there. As long as that situation's as volatile as it is, the only sure-fire way to prevent such kidnappings is to keep people out of there. The only other thing we can do is to adopt extremely stringent security measures for those people. But I don't think you're going to achieve 100 percent success even with the most stringent security measures. You can't protect everybody all the time.

SM: Are all foreign nationals, would that not close off a major source of information for what is going on in that area?

RD: I agree completely, but what I am saying I guess is that we have to balance our priorities. As long as we feel it is necessary to have Americans in the Middle East we have to be prepared to take losses over there. I think that is inevitable, given the nature of the situation. The birds are coming.

SM: What can be done ultimately in the end to end the support of the radical terrorists in the Middle East or is there much that can be done?

RD: Again, it seems to me that the situation there is so desperate, it's so charged with hostility and violence that it's impossible for me to see how a happy ending can occur there. It's a very— unless a dramatic breakthrough were to be achieved to remove the ground from the radical elements. Right now they are basing their successes it seems to me, on the widespread anger and hostility of large segments of the population in the Middle East. There are large segments of the population in the Middle East that are alienated from the present arrangement that exists. Until we find a way to address the concerns of that large pool of alienated people, we're going to have terrorism there. There's simply no way around that.

SM: The group, that doesn't help the West Bank and the Gaza Strip?

RD: Precisely, in the occupied territories. That's the hard part of the matter, which we have resolutely refused to solve. Until we solve that problem, it's going to be a mess and everything that we try to do will fail until that problem is solved. There is no movement at all that I can see in this country, or in Israel, to address that problem.

SM: Shouldn't the U.S. change its policy on supporting Israel with no questions asked?

RD: In an ideal world, I would say yes, the United States should do that. But we don't live in an ideal world. We live in a political world. For any American leader to make an assertion of that nature would be political suicide, and he would not be elected. If he were already in office, his support would melt away in Congress overnight. So it does not seem feasible to take that approach politically, although ideally I think it's the right thing to do. Politically it's not possible.

SM: Thanks.

RD: You mean we did it in 20 minutes? I told you we would! You got your hour's worth of material, and you're all ready to go!

SM: It's only a little snip.

RD: What do you need now? What do you need?

[End of Interview]