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4 Accidental counterterrorism: the role of the state in the demise of the Weather Underground

At the pinnacle of their revolutionary career the Weather Underground was making the headlines with bombings of targets as prominent as the Pentagon and the Capitol.¹ Acknowledging the group's audacity, FBI-director J. Edgar Hoover once called the Weather Underground "the most violent, persistent and pernicious of revolutionary groups".² For a while the group rode the waves of widespread protests against the war in Vietnam and found a receptive audience amongst the many young Americans who were interested in anti-establishment ideas. The Weather Underground was clearly a product of its time, but is also a clear example of what happens to terrorist groups that are out of touch with their social environment. As Audrey Kurth Cronin has argued, the inability to pass on a message to a next generation of supporters was an important factor in the demise of many leftist terrorist groups.³ The Weather Underground illustrates her point, as we can reconstruct the group's struggle for purpose and direction after its anti-imperialist message had lost its appeal.

Another interesting aspect of the history of the Weather Underground is that the impact of the US government's counterterrorism efforts was often unintended, or intended in a different way. For instance, the attempts by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to infiltrate the group and arrest its members were generally unsuccessful, but they did, as will be argued below, contribute to the group's demise. And this was by no means the government's only fluke. The title of this chapter is 'Accidental counterterrorism' because the measures that will be discussed below were

¹ Parts of this chapter have been published in T. van Dongen, "Law Enforcement as Politics by Other Means: Lessons from Countering Revolutionary Terrorism," *Police Practice and Research*, 2012, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15614263.2012.723382>.

² "The Weather Underground: Report of the Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Other Internal Security Laws of the Committee of the Judiciary" (US Senate, 1975), 38.

³ Cronin, *How Terrorism Ends*, 105-107.

taken with a different effect in mind or were not even intended as counterterrorism measures at all.

So while there are several interesting angles from which to study the Weather Underground, there is not a large body of research into the functioning of the organisation or the attempts of the US government to counter it. There is little scholarly work about the group beyond two volumes that sympathetically but adequately chronicle the history of the movement, one comparative analysis of the Weather Underground and the Red Army Faction and an analysis of the media coverage of the Days of Rage, a violent demonstration the group organised in 1969.⁴ None of these publications pay much attention to the role of the state in the expiration of the group in the mid- to late seventies. In their analyses of the way the Weather Underground fell apart, they rather focus internal discord.⁵ In doing so, they are overlooking a major factor in the group's downfall. The group's internal dynamics certainly played a major role, but we should not be impervious to the state actions that created an atmosphere in which this discord could arise. This chapter will argue that the state did play a crucial role in the demise of the Weather Underground, albeit in unsuspected ways.

4.1 The Weather Underground

4.1.1 Ideology

The Weather Underground was a left-wing extremist group that operated in the US from the late sixties to the mid-seventies.⁶ It started out as the

⁴ R. Boyd, "Representing Political Violence: The Mainstream Media and the Weatherman 'Days of Rage,'" *American Studies* 41, no. 4 (2000): 141–64; Berger, *Outlaws of America*; R. Jacobs, *The Way the Wind Blew: A History of the Weather Underground* (London and New York: Verso, 1997); J. Varon, *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction, and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and Seventies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

⁵ Berger, *Outlaws of America*, 232–234; Jacobs, *The Way the Wind Blew*, 174–175.

⁶ During this period, the group changed its name twice. It started out as the Weatherman, then called itself Weather Underground and later Weather Underground Organization. In this chapter, we will stick to the most commonly used name, the Weather Underground.

militant wing of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), the leftist student organisation that was deeply involved in protests against the war in Vietnam. SDS had been founded in 1962, when it issued the Port Huron Statement, in which it criticised the US government for its militarised foreign policy and the build-up of its nuclear arsenal as well as for such social ills as discrimination, economic exploitation and political elitism.⁷ It was not, however, until the Vietnam War that the organisation attracted a mass following. The ranks swelled as a result of its nationwide grassroots resistance against the war, and SDS managed to mobilise some 20,000 people for a protest march in Washington, DC.⁸ At SDS' 1969 National Convention, the organisation's radical wing, which would later become the Weather Underground, forced their more traditionally communist opponents of the Progressive Labor Party (PL) out of the organisation. PL was joined by other 'Old Left' wings of the SDS. Less orthodox sections went with the Weathermen. Others left the movement in disillusion.⁹

The Weather Underground, initially named the Weathermen, took its name from the Bob Dylan song *Subterranean homesick blues*, which has a line that goes 'You don't need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows'.¹⁰ The group's name thus suggested the dawning of a new era, and the Weathermen's had objectives to match. The group's ultimate political goal was nothing less than the overthrow of the capitalist and imperialist political system and the establishment of socialism in the US, although what united group members was more the notion that something had to change than a clear vision about where things should be headed.¹¹ This ambition has to be placed in the political context of the late

⁷ "The Port Huron Statement of the Students for a Democratic Society" (Students for a Democratic Society, 1962), <http://coursesa.matrix.msu.edu/~hst306/documents/huron.html>.

⁸ M. Klimke, *The Other Alliance: Student Protest in West Germany and the United States in the Global Sixties* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 42.

⁹ K. Sale, *SDS* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 397–400.

¹⁰ See <http://www.bobdylan.com/#/songs/subterranean-homesick-blues>, accessed 24 March 2010.

¹¹ C. McCauley and S. Moskalenko, "Individual and Group Mechanisms of Radicalization," in *Protecting the Homeland from International and Domestic Terrorism Threats: Current Multi-*

sixties. In 1967, shortly before embarking on his ill-conceived mission in Bolivia, Che Guevara famously called for the creation of “two, three, many Vietnams”, meaning that all around the world national resistance groups should take up arms to fight US imperialism.¹² Together, they would increase the costs of US imperialism to the point where the US would be so overburdened that its capitalist system would collapse. The Weather Underground, whose members worshipped Che as a demi-god, perceived itself as part of this international movement. It viewed the fight of African-American militant organisations, such as the Black Panthers, as an internal anti-colonial struggle, and by supporting this struggle in the heart of US imperialism, the Weather Underground felt that it was contributing to the fight waged abroad by, among others, the Tupamaros in Uruguay and the Vietcong.¹³

But while the Weather Underground was unassuming in the definition of its own place in the anti-imperialist struggle, the relations with their American comrades-in-arms were not always easy, mostly as the result of another of the movement’s ideological traits. The group’s reluctance to claim a leading role was greatly appreciated among the radical black civil rights movement, but there was also a hedonistic twist to the Weathermen’s world view, and that went down less favourably. The Weather Underground had arisen from the student movement, which was strongly under the influence of the then prevailing counterculture. In this scene, people cultivated free sex and liberal drug use. The Weathermen had internalised these views and practices and saw the counterculture as a way to shed bourgeois values. This meant, very practically, that smoking marihuana became a revolutionary act, a

Disciplinary Perspectives on Root Causes, the Role of Ideology, and Programs for Counter-Radicalization and Disengagement, 2010, 88.

¹² Che Guevara, *Che Guevara Reader: Writings on Guerrilla Strategy, Politics and Revolution*, ed. D. Deutschmann (Melbourne and New York: Ocean Press, 1997), 323–328.

¹³ This theme ran through all of the group's major strategic papers. See K. Ashley et al., “You Don’t Need a Weatherman to Know Which Way the Wind Blows,” in *Weatherman*, ed. H. Jacobs (Ramparts Press, 1970), 60; B. Dohrn, B. Ayers, and J. Jones, eds., “Prairie Fire: The Politics of Revolutionary Anti-Imperialism,” in *Sing a Battle Song: The Revolutionary Poetry, Statements, and Communiqués of the Weather Underground* (New York, Toronto, London and Melbourne: Seven Stories Press, 2006), 239–240.

conclusion that the Weather Underground was all too willing to accept. The group always openly associated itself with the counterculture, for instance in the declaration of war that Weather leader Bernardine Dohrn issued against the US. In this document, she wrote: "Dope is one of our weapons", and "If you want to find us, this is where we are. In every tribe, commune, dormitory, farmhouse, barracks and townhouse where kids are making love, smoking dope and loading guns."¹⁴ Following up on its commitment to the counterculture, one of the Weather Underground's most remarkable actions was the jailbreak and transfer to Algeria of LSD-guru and counterculture-icon Timothy Leary.¹⁵ Such moves were appreciated by the white middle class youths from which the group had originated, but the Black Panthers, a group that the Weathermen were eager to impress, were less enthusiastic. They witnessed the devastating effects of drug addiction on black communities every day, and took offence at the Weather Underground's cultivation of drug use, which became one of the causes of the strains on their relations with the Weathermen.¹⁶

4.1.2 Organisational culture and structure

Terrorism is sometimes seen as a weapon of the weak. The case of the Weather Underground lends credence to this interpretation, as the group's underground existence was not entirely a mode of choice. Initially, the plan was to spark mass uprisings to overthrow the government. Their most ambitious attempt to this effect took place in October 1969, when the Weathermen organised a manifestation they called the Days of Rage. After they had broken with the less radical segments of the SDS, but before they went underground, the group organised the Days of Rage in an attempt to "bring the war home". The

¹⁴ B. Dohrn, "A Declaration of a State of War," in *Sing a Battle Song: The Revolutionary Poetry, Statements, and Communiqués of the Weather Underground*, ed. B. Dohrn, B. Ayers, and J. Jones (New York, Toronto, London and Melbourne: Seven Stories Press, 2006), 150.

¹⁵ B. Dohrn, "Dr. Timothy Leary," in *Sing a Battle Song: The Revolutionary Poetry, Statements, and Communiqués of the Weather Underground*, ed. B. Dohrn, B. Ayers, and J. Jones (New York, Toronto, London and Melbourne: Seven Stories Press, 2006), 153–55.

¹⁶ R. Jacobs, "The New History of the Weather Underground," *Monthly Review*, 2006, <http://monthlyreview.org/2006/06/01/the-new-history-of-the-weather-underground>.

idea behind this initiative was that the opening of a front on American soil would help bring the US' imperialist regime to its knees.¹⁷ In the weeks preceding the event, the Weathermen gathered as many people as they could for violent demonstrations in Chicago. October 8 to October 11 saw several hundreds of protesters roaming the streets of Chicago, destroying property and provoking violent confrontations with the police. Each day, the demonstration ended in street fights with the police. Many Weathermen were wounded or arrested, or both.¹⁸ The leadership afterwards tried to sell the Days of Rage as a success, but there was no escaping the fact that the turn-out had been disappointing. On the eve of the demonstrations, the leadership had predicted that tens of thousands of angry protesters would join, but only several hundred turned up, which convinced the leadership that American society was not yet ready for a mass movement.¹⁹ This brought the Weathermen to consider alternative courses of action and was one of the factors that led to the decision to take the organisation underground. Another consideration was the fact that the FBI had deeply penetrated the SDS, making it virtually impossible for the radicals to function outside of the scrutiny of the federal police.²⁰

The immediate trigger for the move underground, however, was the police murder of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark, both members of the Black Panthers. The death of Hampton and Clark was by all accounts a watershed event in the history of the Weather Underground. Although under no illusions about the nature and role of the FBI, the Weathermen were nevertheless deeply shocked when they heard the news. In the recollection of many Weathermen, the murders revealed the cruelty and ruthlessness of the foe they were up against. It was now clearer than ever

¹⁷ Sale, SDS, 419.

¹⁸ T. Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (Bantam Books, 1987), 393–394; N.L. Zaroulis and G. Sullivan, *Who Spoke up? American Protest against the War in Vietnam, 1963–1975* (New York: Doubleday, 1984), 262.

¹⁹ Varon, *Bringing the War Home*, 109.

²⁰ Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *The COINTELPRO Papers: Documents from the FBI's Secret Wars against Dissent in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2002), 172–173 and 225.

that the revolutionary struggle was a fight to the death and that compromise was out of the question.²¹ The possibility that they might be the Bureau's next victims convinced many in the group of the necessity of a move underground. As former member Cathy Wilkerson recalls thinking: "This really is war. I would do anything, I vowed, anything not to let this murder be in vain."²²

Before the Weather Underground abandoned the aboveground SDS head office, which it controlled after it had expelled all dissident members of the SDS, it spent several months steeling its membership for life as an illicit organisation.²³ The failure of the Days of Rage and the death of Clark and Hampton drove home the need for special preparation to transform the Weathermen into hardened cadres that could adequately function under difficult circumstances as an illegal, underground urban guerrilla group. This meant that all members had to be moved around the country to take them away from their regular lives and break the ties to their former, bourgeois existence.²⁴ The preparation for the underground struggle also included long and intense criticism/self-criticism sessions to stamp out individualism and remnants of the bourgeois lifestyle. During these sessions, modelled after the practice of the Red Guards in communist China, the collective singled out one member for fierce criticism about his or her shortcomings as a revolutionary.²⁵ This practice fed a certain in-group competition, in which all group members were

²¹ S. Green and B. Siegel, *The Weather Underground: The Explosive Story of America's Most Notorious Revolutionaries* (Docurama, 2003), 33:30 - 35:15; S. Stern, *With the Weatherman: The Personal Journey of a Revolutionary Woman* (New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 190-192.

²² C. Wilkerson, *Flying close to the Sun: My Life and Times as a Weatherman* (London, New York, Toronto and Melbourne: Seven Stories Press, 2007), 313.

²³ See e.g. B. Ayers, *Fugitive Days: A Memoir* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 141-142; Stern, *With the Weathermen*, 225-226; L. Grathwohl and F. Reagan, *Bringing down America: An FBI Informer with the Weathermen*, 2013, 113.

²⁴ Berger, *Outlaws of America*, 105.

²⁵ D. Gilbert, *Love and Struggle: My Life in SDS, the Weather Underground, and beyond* (Oakland: PM Press, 2012), 124; Varon, *Bringing the War Home*, 58-59.

forced to show they were more radical than the others.²⁶ On a yet more intimate level, the leadership started the 'smash monogamy' campaign. In order to eradicate monogamy, which was considered selfish, bourgeois and therefore unbecoming of a revolutionary, the Weather Underground collectives engaged in bizarre group sex sessions, during which the members were forced to show their dedication to the collective by having sex with all other members of the group, male and female.²⁷ The idea behind these rituals was that they would bring the members of the collectives to let go of their individuality and to become totally committed to the movement and the revolution.²⁸ Many members left the movement at this point, repelled by the group pressure.²⁹ Furthermore, newcomers were subjected to so-called acid tests. Weatherman Linda Evans described in a letter to the movement how FBI infiltrator Larry Grathwohl, who supplied the information that led to her arrest, was forced to take acid before undergoing cross-examination about his background, as some in the movement already had their suspicions about him.³⁰ Through measures like these, the various collectives of the Weather Underground were made into closely-knit units, which made it difficult for the FBI to infiltrate.

The Weather Underground consisted of three major collectives, one in New York, one in San Francisco and one in Seattle. These collectives were guided by an organisational centre, initially called the Weather Bureau, later the Central Committee.³¹ The three collectives each consisted of

²⁶ C. McCauley and S. Moskalenko, "Mechanisms of Political Radicalization: Pathways toward Terrorism," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20, no. 3 (2008): 422.

²⁷ See e.g. M. Rudd, *Underground: My Life with SDS and the Weathermen* (New York: Harper Collins, 2009), 165–166.

²⁸ Ayers, *Fugitive Days*, 142.

²⁹ A group of four drop-outs who were critical of the Weathermen's group pressure, described their reasons in an open letter. See Inessa et al., "It's Only People's Games That You Got to Dodge," in *Weatherman*, ed. H. Jacobs (Ramparts Press, 1970), 421–439.

³⁰ L. Evans, "Letter to the Movement," in *Weatherman*, ed. H. Jacobs (Ramparts Press, 1970), 462–63; for Grathwohl's account of this incident, see Grathwohl and Reagan, *Bringing down America*, 122–126.

³¹ B. Ayers, "Weather Underground Redux," April 20, 2006, <http://billayers.wordpress.com/2006/04/20/weather-underground-redux/>.

several dozens of members, divided in small cells that planned and carried out their own operations, independently from other cells.³² The cells knew little about each other's attacks, and only the members in the Weather Underground's leadership knew about the activities of all cells and collectives.³³ As one member recalls: "There was a leadership which was the Weather Bureau that circulated around the country and would visit various collectives. I was in one of the groups, so they would visit us occasionally. I didn't know what was going on in other areas of the country, 'cause we had a need-to-know principle, right? If you didn't have to know it, you didn't know it, and you didn't ask."³⁴ The existing accounts convey the impression that the Weather Bureau's leadership was unassailed. It travelled from collective to collective to be personally involved in the day-to-day business of the organisation, for instance to purge unreliable members.³⁵ The instructions of the leadership were rarely questioned: "If we heard rumors that the Weatherbureau was eating steak and flying first class while we in Seattle were eating rice and spaghetti and hitchhiking, we ignored them. Our leadership was infallible. Our leadership was our source of inspiration. They were the creators of Weatherman. They took the most chances and thought the most seriously. If they have steak every now and then, didn't they deserve it? There was nothing our leadership could do that they could not justify."³⁶

4.1.3 Modus operandi

The Weathermen never believed that they themselves could generate enough violence to beat the US government. Instead, its violence was exemplary in the sense that they showed the people that the state was not

³² W. Greene, "The Militants Who Played with Dynamite," *New York Times*, October 25, 1970.

³³ Wilkerson, *Flying close to the Sun*, 361; Grathwohl and Reagan, *Bringing down America*, 132-133; Gilbert, *Love and Struggle*, 190.

³⁴ Green and Siegel, *The Weather Underground*, 57:19 - 57:43.

³⁵ Grathwohl and Reagan, *Bringing down America*, 70 and 113.

³⁶ Stern, *With the Weathermen*, 117.

all-powerful and that resistance was possible.³⁷ As David Gilbert explained, the group's attacks were "actions to educate about the oppressor and to show that there are ways to fight back without being crushed".³⁸ They were provocations, meant to taunt and ridicule the US government. This being the group's strategy, the Weathermen chose their targets on the basis of their value as symbols of US power. In the planning phase, much care was taken to select a target that could easily be associated with the anti-imperialist struggle. A failure to do so would mean that an attack would not have the mobilising effect that the group was aiming for.³⁹ In this respect, the group was largely successful, as their targets were indeed easy to reconcile with its political goals. Targets of Weathermen bombings included police stations, army bases, a military research centre, courthouses and, later on, major corporations. Undoubtedly the group's most iconoclastic attacks were those on the Pentagon and the Capitol.

Another demand that the Weathermen applied to their attack plans was that the risk of casualties had to be minimal. Their restraint in this respect was largely the result of a traumatic event in 1970, often referred to as the 'townhouse explosion' after the Greenwich Village townhouse where it took place. In March 1970, Weatherman Terry Robbins, clearly with the intention to kill people, was putting together a bomb that was meant to be used against a dance for soldiers at a New Jersey army base.⁴⁰ However, the bomb accidentally went off, killing Robbins and two other Weathermen. Shocked by the impact of the explosion and the death of their three comrades, the movement decided to only detonate its bombs at night and only after a warning had been given over the phone.⁴¹ Another reason for the group's restraint was its political agenda. Like most left-

³⁷ Ayers, *Fugitive Days*, 222.

³⁸ Gilbert, *Love and Struggle*, 151.

³⁹ Grathwohl and Reagan, *Bringing down America*, 133 and 154–155.

⁴⁰ M. Rudd, "The Kids Are All Right," 2005, <http://www.markrudd.com/?organizing-and-activism-now/the-kids-are-all-right-2005.html>.

⁴¹ Berger, *Outlaws of America*, 154.

wing terrorist groups of the 1970s, the Weather Underground took care not to victimise its potential constituency.

Before placing a bomb, members of the group would carry out extensive surveillances, scanning the target buildings for escape routes and feasible places to hide a bomb. The low-level security measures around most office buildings in the 1970s allowed the members of the group to enter a building in the morning pretending to be employees and then wander the hallways to learn the best way to commit an attack. When cell members found that an attack was possible, they went into the buildings they had selected, and placed an improvised explosive device (IED) with a timer. The timer was set to make the IED go off at a time when there was little chance that anyone would get hurt.

Overall, the Weather Underground managed to keep its body count low. The Global Terrorism Database has no record of a Weathermen attack in which anyone got wounded, and it lists only one attack in which someone was killed.⁴² Moreover, it appears that this one attack was not a terrorist attack by the Weather Underground, but rather a bank robbery by five anti-war activists in need of money for their campaign.⁴³ While two of the perpetrators may have been members of the Weather Underground, it is far from certain that they were, nor that the robbery was a Weathermen action instead of an isolated initiative. This being the case, we can assume that the Weather Underground did only material damage in the attacks it carried out.

4.1.4 Aftermath

In recent years, a group of scholars, most prominently John Horgan, have introduced a strand of counterterrorism research that addresses the ways

⁴² "Search Terms (weather Underground)," Global Terrorism Database, accessed July 15, 2013, <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/Results.aspx?charttype=pie&chart=fatalities&search=weather%20underground>.

⁴³ D. Abel, "Apologetic in the End, William Gilday Dies," Boston Globe, September 16, 2011, http://www.boston.com/news/local/massachusetts/articles/2011/09/16/william_lefty_gilday_dies_at_82/?page=1.

in which members of a terrorist organisation can be lured out of the terrorist organisation and into a normal life.⁴⁴ These policies closely correspond to counterterrorism principle 'offer exits' explained in chapter 1. In his analyses, Horgan argues for a distinction between deradicalisation and disengagement. Ideally, terrorists are deradicalised, meaning that they change their minds about the group's ideas and assume political views that are more in line with what is considered socially acceptable. Disengagement is a more modest policy objective in the sense that it does not require that the terrorists cease to be radicals, but merely that they cease to be terrorists. In a case of disengagement, a terrorist has not distanced him- or herself from the organisation's ideas, but no longer takes part in its activities. Horgan argues that most withdrawals from terrorist organisations constitute cases of disengagement, not deradicalisation.⁴⁵ Speaking from its experience in countering home-grown terrorism, the Dutch *Algemene Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst* (General Intelligence and Security Service, AIVD) made a similar observation in a 2010 report on jihadist terrorism in the Netherlands.⁴⁶ Although the evidence is anecdotal and strongly biased towards the leading members of the movement, the Weather Underground appears to confirm this notion as well.

The former leadership of the Weather Underground have changed their methods, but not their ideas. All leaders discussed in this chapter are still committed to activism. Bernardine Dohrn and Bill Ayers, now a married couple, have chosen academic careers to fight for their cause. Neither of the two ever rejected the objectives of the Weather Underground, stating, on the contrary, that they still hold radical views.⁴⁷ David Gilbert, who

⁴⁴ See e.g. Noricks, "Disengagement and Deradicalization: Processes and Programs"; Bjørgo and Horgan, *Leaving Terrorism behind*.

⁴⁵ J. Horgan, "Deradicalization or Disengagement? A Process in Need of Clarity and a Counterterrorism Initiative in Need of Evaluation," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 2, no. 4 (2008): 3–8.

⁴⁶ *Disengagement en Deradicalisering van Jihadisten in Nederland* (AIVD, 2010).

⁴⁷ R. Chepesiuk, *Sixties Radicals Now and Then: Candid Conversations with Those Who Shaped the Era* (Jefferson: McFarland, 1995), 102 and 239; B. Ayers and B. Dohrn, *Bill Ayers and Bernardine Dohrn on the Weather Underground, the McCain Campaign Attacks, President-Elect Obama and the Antiwar Movement Today*, interview by A. Goodman,

continued the armed struggle into the early 1980s, until he was arrested for shooting a guard during an armed robbery, publishes radical writings from prison.⁴⁸ Similarly, although not from prison, former Weather Bureau member Mark Rudd spreads ideas about anti-imperialism and activism by giving lectures around the US.⁴⁹ Grass-roots movements that need help in building their support base can hire former Weather leader Jeff Jones, who runs a consultancy firm that advises progressive organisations.⁵⁰ Even Brian Flanagan, who went on to become a professional billiards player and later a New York bar-owner, professions that hardly suggest political radicalism of any kind, never essentially changed the ideas he had as a Weatherman. In fact, several decades after the highlight of his participation in radical politics, his bar still sported several SDS posters and a statuette of Lenin.⁵¹ Although, as these examples show, many Weathermen did not change their minds, the group did fall apart in the mid-1970s. How did this happen? The next sections will make clear that state actions played a crucial role.

4.2 Counterterrorism principles and the Weather Underground

4.2.1 Restraint in the use of force and the rule of law

Chapter 1 noted the risks involved in the use of excessive force, which might well increase the terrorists' willingness to use violence. The case of the Weather Underground is a clear example of this dynamic. In its

Democracy Now!, November 24, 2008, http://www.democracynow.org/2008/11/24/democracy_now_exclusive_part_2_bill; D. Remnick, "Mr. Ayers' Neighbourhood," *The New Yorker*, November 4, 2008, <http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/tny/2008/11/mr-ayerss-neighborhood.html?yrail>.

⁴⁸ D. Gilbert, *No Surrender: Writings from an Anti-Imperialist Political Prisoner* (Abraham Guillen Press, 2004).

⁴⁹ See www.markrudd.com, accessed 13 July 2010.

⁵⁰ See www.jeffjonesstrategies.com, accessed 13 July 2010.

⁵¹ B. Smith, "Sudden Impact," *ChicagoMag*, December 2006, <http://www.chicagomag.com/Chicago-Magazine/December-2006/Sudden-Impact/index.php?cp=3&si=2&cparticle=1&siarticle=0#artanc>.

reaction to the domestic turmoil of the late 1960s, the US government relied primarily on its secret services, especially the FBI. In the mid-50s, the FBI, which also had the lead in the efforts to capture the Weather Underground, had initiated the Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO), which consisted of a string of mostly illegal operations to disrupt a wide variety of opposition groups. COINTELPRO campaigns usually comprised four main elements: infiltration, psychological warfare (which included spreading false rumours within movement and to the press), harassment through the legal system (false arrests, misuse of grand juries) and extra-legal force and violence (burglaries, beatings, vandalism).⁵² COINTELPRO was officially recognised only in 1971 and was ended in the same year, but by then it had done much to confirm the perception of the state that was prevalent among the Weathermen. Leftist groups that the Weather Underground associated with, as well as the Weathermen themselves and their lawyers and family members experienced various forms of state harassment, such as burglaries by FBI agents looking for clues about the group's whereabouts.⁵³ Furthermore, the memories of the way the police handled the anti-war protests at the National Democratic Convention in Chicago in 1968 were still fresh. Several groups, including SDS, had planned protests outside of the Convention, where George McGovern was making a bid for the presidential candidacy for the Democratic Party. The protests were meant to be peaceful, but massive riots broke out, and lasted for five days. Many protesters were clubbed, tear gassed or arrested.⁵⁴ Having participated in these or similar protests, several members of the Weather Underground

⁵² The various COINTELPRO-campaigns are well-documented. See e.g. Churchill and Wall, *The COINTELPRO Papers: Documents from the FBI's Secret Wars against Dissent in the United States*. For the four main components, see B. Glick, *War at Home: Covert Action against US Activists and What We Can Do about It* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1989), 10.

⁵³ M.W. Swearingen, *FBI Secrets: An Agent's Exposé* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1995), 77-78; J. Dohrn, Jennifer Dohrn: I Was The Target Of Illegal FBI Break-Ins Ordered by Mark Felt aka "Deep Throat," interview by A. Goodman and J. González, *Democracy Now!*, accessed July 15, 2013, http://www.democracynow.org/2005/6/2/exclusive_jennifer_dohrn_i_was_the.

⁵⁴ "Brief History Of Chicago's 1968 Democratic Convention," *All Politics*, 1996, <http://edition.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS/1996/conventions/chicago/facts/chicago68/index.shtml>.

had personal experience with and were radicalised by police violence.⁵⁵ But the most important event, as we have seen above, was the brutal police murder of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark. This shocked the Weathermen, but also hardened their resolve. The Weather Underground started out from the assumption that the US was an imperialist state, bent on the repression of dissent and the exploitation of its black internal colony. The methods used by the FBI and the police confirmed this notion of US state power, and gave the Weathermen an enemy to fight.

The FBI's heavy-handed approach was not only counterproductive directly with regard to the Weather Underground, but also resulted in hostility from the social environment in which the Weather Underground operated. In order to acquire the intelligence needed to curb a violent non-state actor, the state must be on good terms with those who can provide intelligence. Generally speaking, the population will not serve as a source of information unless it has sufficient trust in the state. This rule also held in the case of the Weather Underground, which grew out of the student movement. As the student movement had arisen to protest against state repression, it will come as no surprise that few in the student movement, the social environment of the Weather Underground, sympathised with the FBI. In a way, they were a protective shield around the Weather Underground, which could count on their unwillingness to help the Bureau, even in the face of severe harassment.⁵⁶ With the help of the support network, the Weather Underground could acquire financial resources, arrange means of transportation and obtain false passports and driver's licences, all of which were crucial to the group's survival.⁵⁷

Thus, the case of the Weather Underground shows that, as the programme theory in section 3.3.1 and 3.3.2 would predict, the excessive use of force and violations of the rule of law was indeed

⁵⁵ See e.g. Rudd, *Underground*, 87–89.

⁵⁶ Chepesiuk, *Sixties Radicals Now and Then*, 104; D. Gilbert, *Students for a Democratic Society and the Weather Underground Organization* (Montreal: Abraham Guillen Press, 2002), 21–22.

⁵⁷ Grathwohl and Reagan, *Bringing down America*, xx; Gilbert, *Love and Struggle*, 158–159.

counterproductive. Ignoring the risks involved in taking an overly repressive approach to countering domestic opposition, the FBI had no qualms about intimidating or physically attacking members of the New Left and the black resistance movement. This approach, which reached its climax in the liquidation of Clark and Hampton, was one of the factors that gave rise to the Weather Underground as a terrorist organisation. Also, the *Umfeld* of the Weather Underground grew hostile toward the state and therefore refused to cooperate with the FBI in tracking down the Weathermen.

4.2.2 Intelligence gathering

In 1970, J. Edgar Hoover announced “the largest manhunt in FBI history” to catch the Weather Underground.⁵⁸ This approach was largely unsuccessful, as the FBI appears to have lost its grip on its nemesis after 1969. Initially, however, the picture did not look this bleak. The FBI had extensively infiltrated SDS, to which the members of the Weather Underground still belonged for most of 1969.⁵⁹ Also, in the months immediately after the Weathermen took over SDS, the FBI managed to get a fairly accurate idea of what was going on within the movement. The FBI-files accurately report what was discussed at the SDS National Convention in late 1969 and what positions were taken by the various leading members.⁶⁰ But the stream of information was reduced to a trickle after the leadership decided in December 1969 to take the organisation underground. In its communiqués, the Weather Underground rightfully boasted about the FBI’s inability to penetrate the movement.⁶¹ Several FBI agents involved later expressed their frustration at their inability to get a hold of the movement. Larry Grathwohl was one of the few successful

⁵⁸ “The Weather Underground,” 28.

⁵⁹ Rudd, *Underground*, 135-136.

⁶⁰ FBI, *Foreign Influence - Weather Underground Organization*, 1976, 58-62, <http://foia.fbi.gov/foiaindex/weather.htm>. SDS members themselves were aware of the scale of the infiltration. See for example Rudd, *Underground*, 135-139.

⁶¹ B. Dohrn, “New Morning - Changing Weather,” in *Sing a Battle Song: The Revolutionary Poetry, Statements, and Communiqués of the Weather Underground*, ed. B. Dohrn, B. Ayers, and J. Jones (New York, Toronto, London and Melbourne: Seven Stories Press, 2006), 167.

infiltrators, but the FBI had to blow his cover at an early stage, as the need to show some results became so pressing that it was decided to take the opportunity to arrest two Weathermen, thereby sacrificing Grathwohl as a source of information.⁶² As Grathwohl's handler bluntly put it: "[T]his decision came from the man in Washington. We need an arrest."⁶³ The arrests were made, but the FBI's intelligence position deteriorated.

In a telling illustration of the level of knowledge about the workings of the Weather Underground, the FBI, after having infiltrated the so-called Revolutionary Committee of the Weather Underground, thought it had finally gotten to the group's leading centre, the Central Committee, only to find out that the Revolutionary Committee was a mere splinter that had gone its own way after the organisation had started to fall apart.⁶⁴ The impotence of the FBI vis-à-vis the Weather Underground is also clear from the chart below, which indicates per year how many members of the Weather Underground were arrested. The numbers are drawn from a report from the Senate Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and other Internal Security Laws. This report contains a list of brief biographies of all known Weathermen, including information about if and when they were arrested.⁶⁵ The chart shows that the vast majority of arrests took place in 1969, that is, before the decision to go underground was taken. The chart indicates the numbers of arrests, not the numbers of arrested individuals. Some members were arrested more than once in one year, with leading member Jeff Jones scoring a record setting number of six arrests in 1969.

⁶² Jacobs, *The Way the Wind Blew*, 107-108.

⁶³ Grathwohl and Reagan, *Bringing down America*, 190.

⁶⁴ Berger, *Outlaws of America*, 235-236.

⁶⁵ For the entire list, see "The Weather Underground," 46-116.

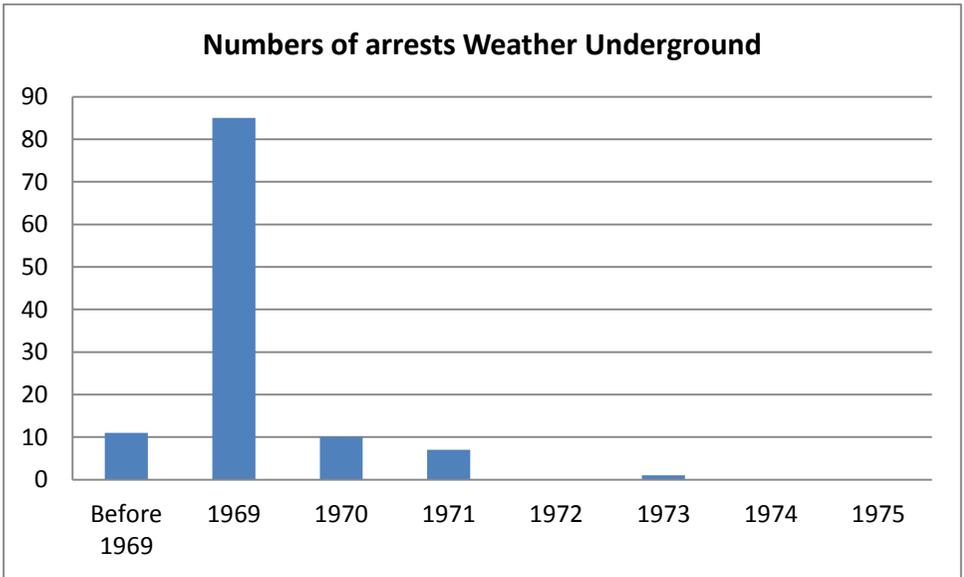


Figure 13. Pattern of arrests of members of the Weather Underground over time

From the Subcommittee report it is clear that the Days of Rage account for the lion's share of the arrests in 1969. After the group went underground, the numbers of arrests decreased dramatically, which suggests that by this move the Weather Underground effectively shielded itself from interference by law enforcement agencies. The explanation for the FBI's failure to curb the Weather Underground by infiltration and other intelligence instruments is threefold.

First, as we have seen above, the FBI had alienated the social circles around the Weathermen. Their hostility kept them from providing the Bureau with the information it needed. Second, there was the transformation that the organisation went through during the period of preparation that preceded the move underground. In the previous sections it was described how the leadership forged unity among the membership to make sure they were all able to handle life underground. The result was a closed and secretive organisation, where any attempt at

infiltration could easily be picked up.⁶⁶ The third explanation for the FBI's lack of success in tracking down and apprehending members of the Weather Underground is the organisational culture of the FBI in the first half of the seventies. J. Edgar Hoover had introduced high standards of appropriate dress and behaviour for an FBI-agent. As Special Agent Wes Swearingen was instructed after he first joined the Bureau: "Y'all will always present the appearance of a successful businessman. Mr. Hoover expects each of his Special Agents to wear a dark business suit, a white shirt, a dark conservative tie, dark socks, and black shoes. Argyle socks and colored socks are strictly forbidden."⁶⁷ This culture of slickly combed hair and dark grey suits was so deeply engrained in the organisation that many FBI-agents found it difficult and at times even objectionable to act like members of groups like the Weather Underground, who were in many ways the direct opposite of FBI personnel.⁶⁸ As Linda Evans rightfully observed at the time, if not without a certain conceit: "The FBI is not exactly the most competent organisation to direct itself against us, because our styles are so completely different that it's hard for them to understand us."⁶⁹

There were even some moral concerns about what it would take to get an undercover agent into the Weather Underground. In the opinion of a New York district attorney involved in the hunt for the Weathermen, "[i]t would be unconscionable to ask a policeman to infiltrate such a group. He would have to start popping pills, smoking grass and live in a commune".⁷⁰ This moral abhorrence of the decadent, out-of-control hippies of the Weather Underground was shared by the FBI and stood in the way of its success in its attempts to infiltrate the group. Cril Payne, an

⁶⁶ Ross and Gurr, "Why Terrorism Subsides: A Comparative Study of Canada and the United States," 418.

⁶⁷ Swearingen, *FBI Secrets*, 7.

⁶⁸ D. Cunningham, *There's Something Happening Here: The New Left, the Klan, and FBI Counterintelligence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 168-169.

⁶⁹ History Channel, *Declassified: Radical America, Left and Right*, 2006, 3:21 - 3:31, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NIJXTYZbBpc&NR=1>.

⁷⁰ M. Arnold, "Weathermen: They Boast of Bombs and the Boast May Be True," *New York Times*, November 8, 1970.

FBI-agent who had been assigned to the investigation of the Weather Underground, actually remembers being frowned upon by colleagues for acting like a Weatherman, even though they knew it was part of the job he had been assigned.⁷¹ Other FBI-agents who were involved in attempts to track down the Weather Underground questioned the Bureau's expertise on different grounds. Special Agent Don Strickland later admitted that the FBI standard approach to tracking down and capturing fugitives did not work.⁷² Wes Swearingen, another FBI-agent that had been tasked to capture the Weathermen, lamented this lack of expertise even more explicitly: "The problem was not that the Weathermen had college degrees, but that the majority of the agents in charge and supervisors had no experience in locating and apprehending fugitives. It was much like the blind leading the blind."⁷³

In sum, the combination of indoctrination and isolation of the Weathermen and the lack of expertise on the part of the FBI allowed the collectives of the Weather Underground to remain at large. In terms of the program theory on intelligence gathering in chapter 1, the failure to infiltrate the movement indicates that things went wrong in the output phase. It was the way the principle was implemented that accounts for its lack of success, not the principle as such. The explanation lies in the FBI's reluctance to act like members of the Weather Underground, the Bureau's its lack of experience in dealing with fully underground opponents and with the adaptation of the Weather Underground after 1969, when the organisation went into hiding and took on some sectarian qualities that made it practically impenetrable. However, this immunity to the FBI's efforts at disruption and debilitation cannot be perceived as an unqualified success for the Weather Underground. It was able to avoid infiltration, detection and arrest, but only at a considerable price, which brings us to the next section.

⁷¹ C. Payne, *Deep Cover: An FBI Agent Infiltrates the Radical Underground* (New York: Newsweek Books, 1979), 127.

⁷² Green and Siegel, *The Weather Underground*, 1:03:39 - 1:04:32.

⁷³ Swearingen, *FBI Secrets*, 91.

4.2.3 Law enforcement and direct action

We have seen above how the FBI failed to infiltrate the Weather Underground and arrest more than a handful of its members. However, the pressure was kept high, and it was this pressure, together with the loss of political momentum after the end of the war in Vietnam (as discussed below), that contributed significantly to the unravelling of the Weather Underground.

The FBI never dismantled the Weather Underground, but on several occasions came close. The group's most important narrow-escape occurred in 1971, when the Bureau had tracked down the Weather collective in San Francisco. The San Francisco Weathermen were forced to leave all their belongings behind and only escaped after they managed to shake the police in a brief car chase.⁷⁴ Even though the Weathermen got away, the incident showed that they always had to reckon with the police and the FBI, and could never let their guard down. The effect this had on the organisation shows that law enforcement pressure does not necessarily have to result in arrests in order to be successful. An illicit organisation that is forced to spend a lot of time and resources on avoiding arrest has little opportunity left for political action, which is essentially what happened to the Weather Underground. The constant need to acquire new false IDs and safehouses and to buy and get rid of cars drained the movement of many resources that could otherwise have been spent on violent political action.⁷⁵ Also, the material living conditions were less than luxurious, as is clear from the accounts of several former members, who remember poor food and frequent illness.⁷⁶ FBI informer Larry Grathwohl took note of the hardship of life

⁷⁴ Berger, *Outlaws of America*, 157–158.

⁷⁵ Rudd, *Underground*, 248; J. Raskin, "Personal Reflections on Language, Gesture and Mythology in the Weather Underground," in *Sing a Battle Song: The Revolutionary Poetry, Statements, and Communiqués of the Weather Underground, 1970-1974* (New York, Toronto, London and Melbourne: Seven Stories Press, 2006), 127.

⁷⁶ Rudd, *Underground*, 184–185.

underground as well: "It is not unusual for them to go for days without eating. To live in dirt and filth is rule rather than exception."⁷⁷

Initially the Weathermen could bear the revolutionary lifestyle. They even described their constant vigilance as a form of spiritual and mental growth. In one of their communiqués, they spoke of "a yoga of alertness, a heightened awareness of activities and vibrations around us - almost a new set of eyes and ears".⁷⁸ Bill Ayers, a member of the Weather Underground's central leadership, recalled the exhilaration and intensity of living up to the ideal of the revolutionary and claimed that he felt "born again" after the movement went underground.⁷⁹ The tolerance for the burdens of life underground decreased, however, after it became clear that the revolutionary potential was fading, largely as a result of the end of the Vietnam War.

With the ebbing of the revolutionary tide and the subsequent internal quarrelling about the new course, members began to see the efforts to hide from the FBI in a different light. Survival and avoiding arrest had become more important than revolutionary politics, which made clear the futility of their efforts and undercut group members' willingness to participate in illicit activities.⁸⁰ At the same time, the yearning for a more normal life was growing, not in the least because some members wanted to raise a family or already had children, whom they wanted to have a regular life.⁸¹ Even the fiery Bernardine Dohrn, the leader of the Weather Underground, dubbed "La Pasionara of the lunatic left" by J. Edgar Hoover, decided to surface for such mundane reasons. After they had their first child, she and her husband Bill Ayers realised that underground

⁷⁷ Grathwohl and Reagan, *Bringing down America*, xv.

⁷⁸ B. Dohrn, "New Morning - Changing Weather," in *Sing a Battle Song: The Revolutionary Poetry, Statements, and Communiqués of the Weather Underground*, ed. B. Dohrn, B. Ayers, and J. Jones (New York, Toronto, London and Melbourne: Seven Stories Press, 2006), 165.

⁷⁹ Ayers, *Fugitive Days*, 234.

⁸⁰ P. Davis and K. Cragin, eds., *Social Science for Counterterrorism: Putting the Pieces Together* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2009), 267.

⁸¹ Wilkerson, *Flying close to the Sun*, 370.

life was becoming untenable.⁸² The combination of the pressure, the wish for a life aboveground, and the lack of responsiveness of the constituency broke the spirit of the Weather Underground, whose members began to question whether there was much point in carrying on the armed struggle. The mood was perfectly, if prosaically, summed up by former member Brian Flanagan, who said: "I thought we were being reduced to a group that just put a bomb here and then a few months later put a bomb here and then put a bomb there. That seemed to me to be sort of played out. How much further could we go with that? And we were increasingly being thought of as sort of an isolated cult. I was feeling lonely and alienated and I missed my girlfriend and I just wasn't having a very good time."⁸³

When examining the effects of law enforcement and direct action, it is tempting to point out that the output identified in the program theory was falling short, as the FBI rarely managed to arrest a member of the Weather Underground and the group retained the capability to carry out bombings. Even though this is true, the Bureau's efforts did nevertheless bear some fruit, although in a different way than one might expect. The case of the Weather Underground shows that the mere presence of law enforcement pressure, regardless of any arrests it results in, can by itself be a factor that leads to the incapacitation of a terrorist organisation. Always under law enforcement pressure, the Weathermen constantly had to be on guard. To this mental strain were added the time and resources that went into surviving as fugitives, to the point where the membership felt that outsmarting the FBI went at the expense of political action, the reason why they had gone underground in the first place. The FBI's ambition was undoubtedly to dismantle the Weather Underground by apprehending its members, but its success was political rather than operational in nature: the group was not dismantled, but was cut off from its support base and consequently condemned to political irrelevance.

⁸² Chepesiuk, *Sixties Radicals Now and Then*, 238.

⁸³ Green and Siegel, *The Weather Underground*, 1:07:51 - 1:08:32.

4.2.4 Addressing root causes

In chapter 1, we recounted the argument that addressing root causes, including political grievances, may be a way to deprive a terrorist organisation of its support base. There is no way to argue that the Nixon administration ended the war in Vietnam in an attempt to put an end to the Weather Underground, but the effect of this move made it a *de facto* counterterrorism measure. It affected the unity of the movement and added to the desperation that many members felt as a result of the burdens of the revolutionary lifestyle. The Weather Underground had grown out of the anti-war movement and while the war went on, there was a clear *cause célèbre* around which the radical left, including the Weather Underground, could rally. After the war ended, debates ensued about the new course, and they were never adequately resolved. This lack of a clear political purpose can be read from the pattern of the Weather Underground attacks in figure 14.

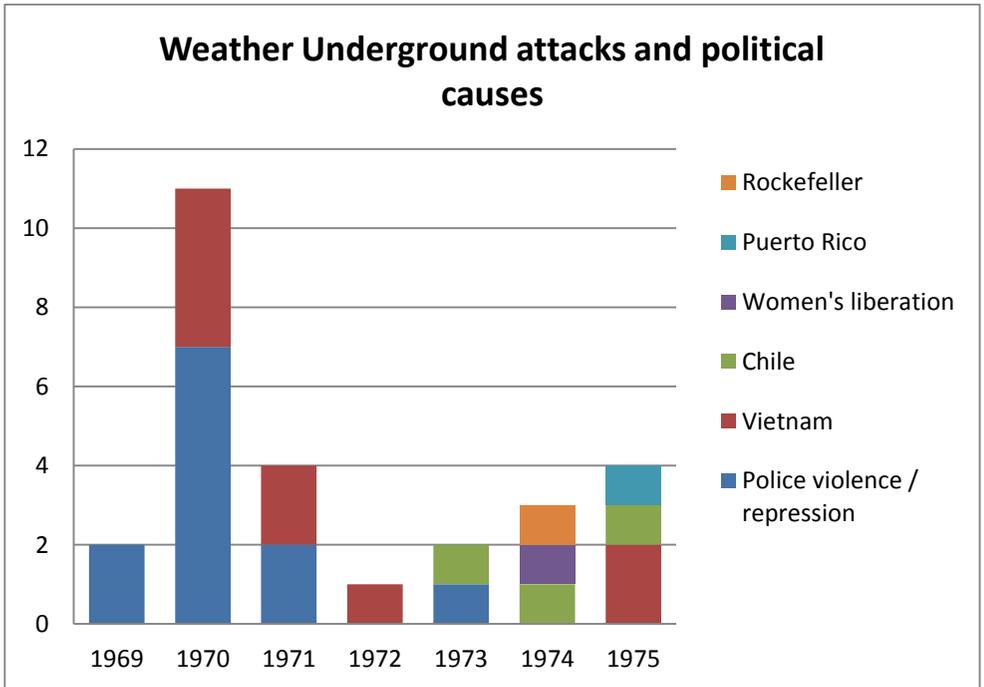


Figure 14. Pattern of attacks and causes of Weather Underground over time

To gather the data for figure 14, all attacks by the Weather Underground have been scored on the political cause they served.⁸⁴ In most cases, the Weather Underground itself explained the political cause that was served by an attack in an accompanying communiqué.⁸⁵ In cases where there was no communiqué, the political cause was deduced from the target choice. For instance, an attack on a police station without a communiqué has been placed in the category 'Police violence / repression', because it was interpreted as a protest against certain law enforcement practices.

Figure 14 shows a widening of the focus of the Weather Underground after the Paris Peace Accords of January 1973, which officially ended the Vietnam War. From 1969 till 1973, all attacks were either a protest against US involvement in the war in Vietnam or a protest against the repression of domestic opposition. In 1973, 1974 and 1975, the variety of causes that the Weathermen wanted to serve by their bombings was wider. One attack was meant to contribute to the liberation of women, another expressed support for a strike in Puerto Rico and yet others were meant to punish companies for doing business in Chile, which was then ruled by the junta of Augusto Pinochet, who had come to power after the US-backed toppling of the socialist government led by Salvador Allende. This widening of the scope of the target selection matches the impressions of the movement's memoirists, many of whom stated that with the end of the war in Vietnam, the Weather Underground failed to adopt a cause dramatic and pressing enough to preserve the movement's momentum.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ The list of attacks has been compiled on the basis of the chronologies in Jacobs, *The Way the Wind Blew*; B. Dohrn, B. Ayers, and J. Jones, eds., *Sing a Battle Song: The Revolutionary Poetry, Statements, and Communiqués of the Weather Underground* (New York, Toronto, London and Melbourne: Seven Stories Press, 2006); "The Weather Underground"; Gilbert, *Students for a Democratic Society and the Weather Underground Organization*.

⁸⁵ B. Dohrn, B. Ayers, and J. Jones, eds., "The Weather Eye: Communiqués from the Weather Underground, May 1970 - May 1974," in *Sing a Battle Song: The Revolutionary Poetry, Statements, and Communiqués of the Weather Underground* (New York, Toronto, London and Melbourne: Seven Stories Press, 2006), 131-226.

⁸⁶ Wilkerson, *Flying close to the Sun*, 391-392; Chepesiuk, *Sixties Radicals Now and Then*, 105 and 238.

This process eventually led to the disintegration of the Weather Underground, as there was no political agenda or course of action that all members could agree on. Instead, the group fell prey to internal division and bickering, leading to fractionalisation and disintegration. The Weather leadership tried to save the day by attempting to turn the Weather Underground in a more conventional communist party and put more effort into generating mass support. In a demonstration of decreased militancy, the leadership decided to spread its views by releasing a book (*Prairie fire*), a magazine (*Osawatomie*), and a movie (*Underground*). Not all members appreciated this return to the tactics of the 'Old Left' and some questioned the need to stay underground if the focus was going to be on perfectly legal activities like publishing books and magazines.⁸⁷ In the end, this solution only accelerated the disintegration that was already underway.

When seen as a way to address the root causes of terrorism, the end of the Vietnam War quite closely follows the program theory on addressing root causes in chapter 1. The atrocities in Vietnam came to an end, so the anti-war movement, the constituency from which the Weather Underground had to draw their support, effectively got what it wanted. Consequently, the support for radical action dwindled and the time of mass rallies in Washington, DC was over. This forced the Weather Underground to find a new course to attract popular support. As we have seen, they failed to do so.⁸⁸ If anything, it turned out that the Vietnam War had covered up many differences of opinion that the organisation proved unable to handle.

4.2.5 Offer exits

Given the hard feelings of the US government towards the Weather Underground, it is difficult to see how they could have offered them a way out of the underground, yet they inadvertently did. The FBI had used every method available to build a case against members of the Weather

⁸⁷ Varon, *Bringing the War Home*, 297–298.

⁸⁸ Cronin, "How Al-Qaida Ends," 23.

Underground, but when it came to the legal prosecution, the Bureau flinched. There were conspiracy charges and charges for battery and assault out against some of the Weathermen, but much of the evidence was obtained by illegal means, for instance burglaries, unwarranted phone taps and the unlawful use of grand juries.⁸⁹ To avoid embarrassment in court, the charges against the leading Weathermen were dropped under the pretext that the use of this evidence in court would endanger national security and foreign intelligence sources.⁹⁰

For the Weathermen concerned, this meant that suddenly they were no longer fugitives. Even though the dropping of the charges was not meant as a counterterrorism measure in the way described in section 3.3.8, it did function that way. With the end of the Vietnam War, the confusion among the radical left in general and the disintegration of the Weather Underground, the Weathermen were susceptible to the idea of going back to their normal lives. The dropping of the charges against them allowed them to do so with little risk of having to stand trial for their actions of the previous years. Further, the sentences that were handed out for charges that hadn't been dropped, were mild, so here too, the aboveground became a viable alternative to the pressure and marginalisation of staying underground.⁹¹ The Weathermen perceived this as a sign that the state wanted to make amends.⁹² Also, in January 1977 President Jimmy Carter introduced an unconditional amnesty for draft dodgers, after Ford had already granted a conditional amnesty in September 1974. Before 1975, the Weathermen thought the US was turning into a fascist dictatorship, but Presidential decisions like these, the aftermath of the Watergate affair and the leniency shown by judges for surfacing Weathermen showed that times had changed. By 1980, almost all members of the Weather

⁸⁹ Swearingen, *FBI Secrets*, 87–88.

⁹⁰ This formulation is used in the brief biographies in "The Weather Underground," 46–106.

⁹¹ Jacobs, *The Way the Wind Blew*, 181; Varon, *Bringing the War Home*, 296–297.

⁹² Berger, *Outlaws of America*, 242–243.

Underground had left the underground, facing fines and probations at most.⁹³

Like ‘addressing root causes’, the ‘offer exits’ principle applies to this case in an atypical way, as it is another example of ‘accidental counterterrorism’. Amnesty regulations and reintegration programmes are usually applied to detainees. In the case of the Weather Underground, however, there was no consciously applied measure or programme. Rather, the state was forced to drop the charges against the Weathermen. Nevertheless, the effect was similar to the one outlined in the program theory. By dropping the charges, the state offered the Weathermen a viable alternative to life underground. By the time this happened, the radical left was on the decline, it was clear that the Vietnam War was going to end and many among the Weathermen wanted to lead normal lives. The dropping of the charges thus was instrumental in the lowering morale of the movement and provided incentives for underground members to surface. It is interesting, though, that the abandonment of terrorism occurred in the absence of a significant change of heart on the part of the members. Many former Weathermen stick to their radical ideas to this day, which suggests that disengagement can be realised in the absence of deradicalisation.

4.3 Conclusion

Although the role of the state in the demise of the Weather Underground is a peculiar one, given that some of the actions that severely affected the group’s cohesion and fighting spirit were not intended as counterterrorism measures, this case does provide some relevant insights regarding counterterrorism effectiveness (see figure 15 for an overview). First, it confirmed the widely shared assumption that excessive use of force and violations of the rule of law can exacerbate a terrorist threat. State violence against anti-war protesters and the Black Panthers did much to confirm the notion that the state was a dangerous and vicious

⁹³ B. de Graaf, *Theater van de Angst: de Strijd tegen Terrorisme in Nederland, Duitsland, Italië en Amerika* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Boom, 2010), 89.

foe. The police murder of the Black Panthers and the harassment of people that were in some way, however tenuously, linked to the Weather Underground were important factors in the group's decision to go underground and start a covert bombing campaign.

Another important observation concerns the use of repressive means, i.e. law enforcement and intelligence, and the inadvertent successes they may yield. The FBI failed to get infiltrators or informers in the group, and arrested very few Weathermen after the movement had gone underground, but their efforts but did have a political impact. The case of the Weather Underground shows that there is a trade-off between organisational security, i.e. the ability to remain at large, and political impact. In terrorist campaigns, operational success and political success do not necessarily go together. Terrorist organisations only have a shot at political success if their attacks can be understood by their constituency as legitimate actions that serve the interests of the group that the collectives claim to be fighting for. In order to meet this requirement the terrorist organisation needs to be able to get in touch with its constituency, something that is not easy to do when constantly in hiding. In the case of the Weather Underground law enforcement pressure put such a burden on the organisation that meaningful political action became impossible, even though the FBI never managed to bring members of the Weathermen to trial and the group continued to carry out some bombings, albeit with decreasing frequency. The detachment from the support base, brought about by law enforcement pressure, turned the Weather Underground into a vanguard without a following.

Another reason why the Weather Underground is interesting as a counterterrorism case study is that it shows the importance of the difference between the political demands of the terrorist group and those of the terrorist group's support base. The Weather Underground was out to overthrow the capitalist and imperialist system in the US, but was badly affected when the government gave in on a much more modest demand that resonated with the group's support base. Again, the end of the war in Vietnam was not meant to end terrorism, but it did lead to a

decline of peace activism. Many in the protest movement who sympathised with the Weather Underground did not move on to other anti-capitalist struggles after it became clear that the Vietnam War would come to an end. They abandoned the protest movement altogether, which obviously dampened their enthusiasm for the armed struggle waged by the Weather Underground. The Weather Underground's constituency got what it wanted, and that was much less than what the Weathermen themselves were aiming for. The group was more radical than its support base and wanted to carry on the fight against capitalism, but found that the end of the Vietnam War had taken the spirit out of the movement on which they relied to bring about the actual revolution. The Weathermen's days were numbered when members came to realise that their attacks were pointless in the absence of a protest movement or support base to pick up the bat. Finding themselves fighting for a lost cause, group members were more inclined to take the opportunity to surface when it became clear that the state's retribution would be minimal. Many were no longer willing to carry the burden of life as an urban guerrilla, and took the opportunity to leave.

| | Outcome | Explanation |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|--|
| <i>Weather Underground</i> | | |
| Restraint in the use of force | Violations counterproductive | Lacks of restraint in the use of force gained the Weather Underground the sympathy and support of the student movement, and contributed to the group's radicalisation |
| Rule of law | Violations counterproductive | The FBI's illegal actions (e.g. the black bag jobs) convinced the Weather Underground of the viciousness of the US government and hardened their resolve |
| International cooperation | Not applied | |
| Long-term commitment | Not applied | |
| Addressing root causes | Effective | The end of the Vietnam War was not a counterterrorism measure, but did remove one of the main grievances of the Weather Underground's constituency and undercut its support base |
| Law enforcement and direct action | Effective | Very few members were arrested, but the group had to put so much efforts into escaping the police that they became isolated and could not reach out to their support base |
| Offering a counter narrative | Not applied | |
| Offering exits | Effective | When the charges against the Weathermen were dropped because the evidence had been obtained by illegal means, many members surfaced and went on to other forms of activism |
| Offering non-violent alternatives | Not applied | |
| Intelligence gathering | Flawed implementation | The FBI agent's inability to act as Weathermen and the secretive nature of the Weather Underground stood in the way of intelligence gathering efforts; only one mole was placed |

Figure 15. Counterterrorism principles as applied against the Weather Underground