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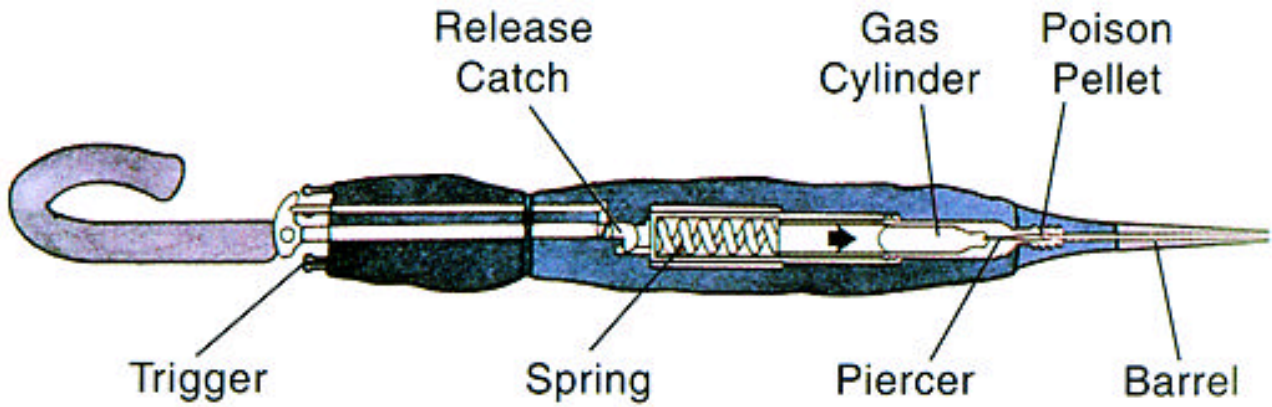
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CHEMICAL AND BIOLOGICAL TERRORISM
CAN YOU TRUST YOUR UMBRELLA?

In “For Your Eyes Only” James Bond’s irrepressible quartermaster, Major Boothroyd (a.k.a. Q) demonstrates his latest toy: a rather lethal umbrella. Using a faceless mannequin, one of Q’s assistants illustrates how the umbrella looks and acts like it should until struck by water (as umbrellas are wont to do from time to time). Suddenly, sharp metal hooks extend all along the edge of the umbrella as it swiftly closes upon the victim’s neck. The motion is quick and precise, but one can’t help but imagine the far messier spectacle if a human being were caught under it in a rainstorm.

Unfortunately, the fictional version of MI6 portrayed in the James Bond films is not the only place one can find a deadly device masquerading as protection against the elements. In September 1978 the Bulgarian secret service shot a Bulgarian exile, Georgi Markov, with just such a device (pictured below). Disguised as an umbrella, the surreptitious gun inserted a small pellet into Markov’s thigh. The pellet contained only a few hundred millionths of a gram of the deadly poison ricin (supplied by the KGB), but it was enough. Markov died four days later in a London hospital. Another Bulgarian defector, Vladimir Kostov, was similarly attacked in Paris the month before. Kostov was shot in the back and suffered a high fever, but survived. He sought medical treatment after hearing of Markov’s death and doctors removed from his back a small pellet identical to the one used to kill Markov.

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Not satisfied with leaving such methods solely in the hands of the secret agent-types, the *Aum Shinrikyo* cult tried a simpler version during their chemical and biological escapades. In their infamous sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway, *Aum* operatives chose the decidedly low-tech dissemination method of dropping bags of liquid sarin on the floor, puncturing them with the sharpened ends of their umbrellas, and then beating a hasty retreat as the nasty stuff spilled out onto the ground. Despite their primitive dissemination methods, *Aum* managed to murder 12 people, injure over a thousand, terrorize several thousand more, and spark a national WMD counterterrorism industry in the United States.

Analysts have long commented on the copycat nature of terrorists and terrorist groups. Once a new method of attack (from car bombings to airplane hijackings to hostage taking for ransom money) has met with success other terrorist groups are bound to emulate it. Given such a phenomenon among terrorists, are we witnessing any evidence of an increase in the use of umbrellas in terrorist operations especially those involving chemical and biological weapons? Should we be calling for an international embargo on umbrella sales to Afghanistan to prevent Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaida

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organization from acquiring such dangerous, dual-use technology? Probably not. For one thing, *Aum* has inspired far fewer follow-up attacks than many analysts predicted shortly after their March 1995 attack. Although the jury is still out, *Aum* may have been unique. Even the Minnesota Patriots Council, which developed ricin because they believed it to be used by the CIA and the KGB, never conceived of using it in the same manner as the Bulgarian secret service. Rather than use an umbrella, the MPC experimented with using hand lotion as a means of dissemination.

For another, an umbrella (even one involving a chemical or biological weapon) simply does not offer the same level of destruction, the same “bang for the buck” as other terrorist methods. Not even the Weather Underground, whose name would seem to imply an interest in such methods, showed any evidence of ever considering using umbrellas in any of their attacks. Instead they chose the symbolic bombing of the imperialist power structure. So the answer is no, the standard terrorist arsenal is not about to become the gun, the bomb, and the umbrella. Of course, if Osama bin Laden did decide to try such a method of attack, it would bring a whole new meaning to his “umbrella terrorist network”.

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