

Terry Waite

Until last November, Terry Waite, the Archbishop of Canterbury's special adviser, who has specialised in negotiating the release of hostages in the Middle East, had appeared to stride through the sinister morass of Lebanese politics with a quiet confidence borne from a profound moral conviction.

The evidence suggested that his confidence was not misplaced. He had, after all, secured the release of three Anglican missionaries held in Iran in 1981, and in 1985, had persuaded the Gafafy regime to release four Britons held in the aftermath of the St James' Square incident, in London in April 1984, when WPC Yvonne Fletcher was killed in crossfire from the Libyan People's Bureau. He had also managed to obtain the release of three Americans held in Lebanon during 1985 and 1986.

All in all it was an impressive result, a victory, it seemed, for individual initiative when governmental heavyhandedness seemed unable to cut through the

lated in Libya when he had to convince the country's General People's Congress that it should recommend the release of the four British prisoners who had been held there for several months. Shortly before his address to the Congress, Mr Waite had also swung Libyan sympathies his way by offering a free telephone service to Libyan held prisoners in British gaols, so as to assuage the anxieties of relatives over their treatment.

In his half-hour address to the Congress, Mr Waite was obviously at great pains to convince his audience that he was prepared to take their assertions of principle seriously - an attitude that earned him resolute and undying hostility in Downing Street. No wonder that Mrs Thatcher now refers to his captivity in Lebanon as an international not a British problem, and that the Foreign Office has been equally careful to emphasise that it had warned Mr Waite not to return to the Lebanon in January 1987.

Mr Waite has had plenty of practice in applying moral persuasion and patience to political and social problems. He began his career in the Anglican Church through the Church Army - an Anglican answer to the Salvation Army movement - but was soon acting as adviser to the Bishop of Bristol in relations with the USA and Africa. In 1968, after five years in this post, he moved to Africa, taking up a post for the Anglican Archbishop of Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi. It was a post that was to have its dangerous moments, for he was in Kampala during Idi Amin's expulsion of Ugandan Asians and was frequently arrested by members of what was an increasingly undisciplined army.

In 1971 he moved to Rome, acting as adviser to a Roman Catholic development organisation, and in 1980, was called back to Britain to join Archbishop Runcie's personal advisory staff. He became

involved in hostage negotiations only by accident in 1981 - when there appeared to be nobody else suitable for the task.

It is possible to take a slightly more sceptical view of Terry Waite's achievements, however. After all, five of the hostages whose release he organised were either members of the Anglican Communion, or members of associated churches. It is not surprising, therefore, that Mr Waite could assume the authority to argue for their release - although the magnitude of the task involved should not be ignored.

Equally, in the case of Libya, it was evident that the British prisoners there were really being held as hostages - Libya wanted contact and negotiations with the British government and, if possible, the release of Libyans in British prisons. Mr Waite's task was, to that extent, eased.

Terry Waite's success is in large part due to the willingness of those with whom he negotiates to accept that he does genuinely offer a moral evaluation of the issues confronting both hostage takers and negotiators in terms that they can accept. The fact that he has dealt mainly with Islamic fundamentalists - where a large part of the justification for hostage taking is based precisely on the *immorality* of Western society and its values - has, in itself, made his approach to the problem an appropriate one. One wonders, for instance, if the extremist Palestinian groups that have been involved in hostage-taking in the past would be quite as open to his arguments. They, after all, tend to look for tangible results.

Indeed, that is, perhaps, the real tragedy of Mr Waite's situation today. He clearly returned to Beirut in January in order to re-establish his credentials as an independent negotiator, still wedded to the moral view and not involved in undercover US attempts at purchasing freedom for their hostages in Lebanon in time for the American congressional mid-term elections last



The long wait

November. Unfortunately, although there is no substantive evidence that he ever offered money for hostages (despite Palestinian claims that he raised \$2m from private US sources to bail out the remaining US hostages in Lebanon) or promised to arrange prisoner exchanges (Kuwait, for instance, has consistently refused to talk to him about the 17 Islamic Jihad prisoners it holds whose release has now been demanded by his captors in Lebanon).

But the Lebanese groups involved in hostage taking have learned from the evidence of US duplicity over hostages and terrorists, as revealed in the Irangate scandal. They no longer seem prepared to make the distinction between individual negotiators from the West, buttressed by moral principle, and Western governments prepared to wheel and deal for domestic electoral advantage. To them, Mr Waite is now merely an emissary from those Western institutions which they despise and with which cynical bargaining for tangible results is the best approach. •

George Joffe

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Gordian knot of hostage-takers' demands and official bombast.

To many people the achievement seemed far greater than the simple success in freeing 10 hostages. It was Mr Waite's approach to the problem that seemed so impressive. It lacked any obvious material motive, offering instead patient discussion, the constant formulation of a moral stance based on his personal religious convictions and the constant attempt to understand and appreciate the arguments being put forward by those with whom he was dealing.

His whole approach was, perhaps, most clearly articu-