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Overview of State-Sponsored Terrorism



Patterns of Global Terrorism -2000

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The designation of state sponsors of terrorism by the United States--and the imposition of sanctions--is a mechanism for isolating nations that use terrorism as a means of political expression. US policy seeks to pressure and isolate state sponsors so they will renounce the use of terrorism, end support to terrorists, and bring terrorists to justice for past crimes. The United States is committed to holding terrorists and those who harbor them accountable for past attacks, regardless of when the acts occurred. The US Government has a long memory and will not simply expunge a terrorist's record because time has passed. The states that choose to harbor terrorists are like accomplices who provide shelter for criminals. They will be held accountable for their "guests" actions. International terrorists should know, before they contemplate a crime, that they cannot hunker down in safehaven for a period of time and be absolved of their crimes.

The United States is firmly committed to removing countries from the list once they have taken necessary steps to end their link to terrorism. In fact, the Department of State is engaged in ongoing discussions with North Korea and Sudan with the object of getting those governments completely out of the terrorism business and off the terrorism list.

Iran, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Cuba, North Korea, and Sudan continue to be the seven governments that the US Secretary of State has designated as state sponsors of international terrorism. Iran remained the most active state sponsor of terrorism in 2000. It provided increasing support to numerous terrorist groups, including the Lebanese Hizballah, HAMAS, and the Palestine Islamic Jihad (PIJ), which seek to undermine the Middle East peace negotiations through the use of terrorism. Iraq continued to provide safehaven and support to a variety of Palestinian rejectionist groups, as well as bases, weapons, and protection to the Mujahedin-e-Khalq (MEK), an Iranian terrorist group that opposes the current Iranian regime. Syria continued to provide safehaven and support to several terrorist groups, some of which oppose the Middle East peace negotiations. Libya at the end of 2000 was attempting to mend its international image following its surrender in 1999 of two Libyan suspects for trial in the Pan Am 103 bombing. (In early 2001, one of the suspects was convicted of murder. The judges in the case found that he acted "in furtherance of the purposes of...Libyan Intelligence Services.") Cuba continued to provide safehaven to several terrorists and US fugitives and maintained ties to state sponsors and Latin American insurgents. North Korea harbored several hijackers of a Japanese Airlines flight to North Korea in the 1970s and maintained links to other terrorist groups. Finally, Sudan continued to serve as a safehaven for members of al-Qaida, the Lebanese Hizballah, al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya, Egyptian Islamic Jihad, the PIJ, and HAMAS, but it has been engaged in a counterterrorism dialogue with the United States since mid-2000.

State sponsorship has decreased over the past several decades. As it decreases, it becomes increasingly important for all countries to adopt a "zero tolerance" for terrorist activity within their borders. Terrorists will seek safehaven in those areas where they are able to avoid the rule of law and to travel, prepare, raise funds, and operate. The United States continued actively researching and gathering intelligence on other states that will be considered for designation as state sponsors. If the United States deems a country to "repeatedly provide support for acts of international terrorism," the US Government is required by law to add it to the list. In South Asia, the United States has been increasingly concerned about reports of Pakistani support to terrorist groups and elements active in Kashmir, as well as Pakistani support, especially military support, to the Taliban, which continues to harbor terrorist groups, including al-Qaida, the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya, and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. In the Middle East, the United States was concerned that a variety of terrorist groups operated and trained inside Lebanon, although Lebanon has acted against some of those groups. Lebanon also has been unresponsive to US requests to bring to justice terrorists who conducted attacks against US citizens and property in Lebanon in previous years.

Cuba

Cuba continued to provide safehaven to several terrorists and US fugitives in 2000. A number of Basque ETA terrorists who gained sanctuary in Cuba some years ago continued to live on the island, as did several US terrorist fugitives.

Havana also maintained ties to other state sponsors of terrorism and Latin American insurgents. Colombia's two largest terrorist organizations, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia and the National Liberation Army, both maintained a permanent presence on the island.

Iran

Despite the victory for moderates in Iran's Majles elections in February, aggressive countermeasures by hardline conservatives have blocked most reform efforts. Iran remained the most active state sponsor of terrorism in 2000. Its Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) continued to be involved in the planning and the execution of terrorist acts and continued to support a variety of groups that use terrorism to pursue their goals.

Iran's involvement in terrorist-related activities remained focused on support for groups opposed to Israel and peace between Israel and its neighbors. Statements by Iran's leaders demonstrated Iran's unrelenting hostility to Israel. Supreme Leader Khamenei continued to refer to Israel as a "cancerous tumor" that must be removed; President Khatami, labeling Israel an "illegal entity," called for sanctions against Israel during the intifadah; and Expediency Council Secretary Rezai said, "Iran will continue its campaign against Zionism until Israel is completely eradicated." Iran has long provided Lebanese Hizballah and the Palestinian rejectionist groups--notably HAMAS, the Palestine Islamic Jihad, and Ahmad Jibril's PFLP-GC--with varying amounts of funding, safehaven, training, and weapons. This activity continued at its already high levels following the Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon in May and during the intifadah in the fall. Iran continued to encourage Hizballah and the Palestinian groups to coordinate their planning and to escalate their activities against Israel. Iran also provided a lower level of support--including funding, training, and logistics assistance--to extremist groups in the Gulf, Africa, Turkey, and Central Asia.

Although the Iranian Government has taken no direct action to date to implement Ayatollah Khomeini's fatwa against Salman Rushdie, the decree has not been revoked, and the \$2.8 million bounty for his assassination has not been withdrawn. Moreover, hardline Iranians continued to stress that the decree is irrevocable. On the anniversary of the fatwa in February, the IRGC released a statement that the decree remains in force, and Ayatollah Yazdi, a member of the Council of Guardians, reiterated that "the decree is irrevocable and, God willing, will be carried out."

Iran also was a victim of Mujahedin-e-Khalq (MEK)-sponsored terrorism. The Islamic Republic presented a letter to the UN Secretary General in October citing seven acts of sabotage by the MEK against Iran between January and August 2000. The United States has designated the MEK as a Foreign Terrorist Organization.

Iraq

Iraq planned and sponsored international terrorism in 2000. Although Baghdad focused on antidissident activity overseas, the regime continued to support various terrorist groups. The regime has not attempted an anti-Western terrorist attack since its failed plot to assassinate former President Bush in 1993 in Kuwait.

Czech police continued to provide protection to the Prague office of the US Government-funded Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), which produces Radio Free Iraq programs and employs expatriate journalists. The police presence was augmented in 1999, following reports that the Iraqi Intelligence Service (IIS) might retaliate against RFE/RL for broadcasts critical of the Iraqi regime.

To intimidate or silence Iraqi opponents of the regime living overseas, the IIS reportedly opened several new stations in foreign capitals during 2000. Various opposition groups joined in warning Iraqi dissidents abroad against newly established "expatriates' associations," which, they asserted, are IIS front organizations. Opposition leaders in London contended that the IIS had dispatched women agents to infiltrate their ranks and was targeting dissidents for assassination. In Germany, an Iraqi opposition figure denounced the IIS for murdering his son, who had recently left Iraq to join him abroad. Dr. Ayad `Allawi, Secretary General of the Iraqi National Accord, an opposition group, stated that relatives of dissidents living abroad are often arrested and jailed to intimidate activists overseas.

In northern Iraq, Iraqi agents reportedly killed a locally well-known religious personality who declined to echo the regime line. The regional security director in As Sulaymaniyah stated that Iraqi operatives were responsible for the car-bomb explosion that injured a score of passersby. Officials of the Iraqi Communist Party asserted that an attack on a provincial party headquarters had been thwarted when party security officers shot and wounded a terrorist employed by the IIS.

Baghdad continued to denounce and delegitimize UN personnel working in Iraq, particularly UN de-mining teams, in the wake of the killing in 1999 of an expatriate UN de-mining worker in northern Iraq under circumstances suggesting regime involvement. An Iraqi who opened fire at the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) office in Baghdad, killing two persons and wounding six, was permitted to hold a heavily publicized press conference at which he contended that his action had been motivated by the harshness of UN sanctions, which the regime regularly excoriates.

The Iraqi regime rebuffed a request from Riyadh for the extradition of two Saudis who had hijacked a Saudi Arabian Airlines flight to Baghdad, but did return promptly the passengers and the aircraft. Disregarding its obligations under international law, the regime granted political asylum to the hijackers and gave them ample opportunity to ventilate in the Iraqi Government-controlled and international media their criticisms of alleged abuses by the Saudi Arabian Government, echoing an Iraqi propaganda theme.

While the origins of the FAO attack and the hijacking were unclear, the Iraqi regime readily exploited these terrorist acts to further its policy objectives.

Several expatriate terrorist groups continued to maintain offices in Baghdad, including the Arab Liberation Front, the inactive 15 May Organization, the Palestine Liberation Front (PLF), and the Abu Nidal organization (ANO). PLF leader Abu `Abbas appeared on state-controlled television in the fall to praise Iraq's leadership in rallying Arab opposition to Israeli violence against Palestinians. The ANO threatened to attack Austrian interests unless several million dollars in a frozen ANO account in a Vienna bank were turned over to the group.

The Iraq-supported Iranian terrorist group, Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK), regularly claimed responsibility for armed incursions into Iran that targeted police and military outposts, as well as for mortar and bomb attacks on security organization headquarters in various Iranian cities. MEK publicists reported that in March group members killed an Iranian colonel having intelligence responsibilities. An MEK claim to have wounded a general was denied by the Iranian Government. The Iraqi regime deployed MEK forces against its domestic opponents.

Libya

In 2000, Libya continued efforts to mend its international image in the wake of its surrender in 1999 of two Libyans accused of the bombing of Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1988. Trial proceedings for the two defendants began in the Netherlands in May and were ongoing at year's end. (The court issued its verdict on 31 January 2001. It found Abdel Basset al-Megrahi guilty of murder, concluding that he caused an explosive device to detonate on board the airplane resulting in the murder of the flight's 259 passengers and crew as well as 11 residents of Lockerbie, Scotland. The judges found that he acted "in furtherance of the purposes of...Libyan Intelligence Services." Concerning the other defendant, Al-Amin Kalifa Fahima, the court concluded that the Crown failed to present sufficient evidence to satisfy the high standard of "proof beyond reasonable doubt" that is necessary in criminal cases.)

In 1999, Libya paid compensation for the death of a British policewoman¹⁴¹, a move that preceded the reopening of the British Embassy. Libya also paid damages to the families of victims in the bombing of UTA flight 772. Six Libyans were convicted in absentia in that case, and the French judicial system is considering further indictments against other Libyan officials, including Libyan leader Muammar Qadhafi.

¹⁴¹In April 1984, a British policewoman was killed and 11 demonstrators were wounded when gunmen in the Libyan People's Bureau in London fired on a peaceful anti-Qadhafi demonstration outside their building.

Libya played a high-profile role in negotiating the release of a group of foreign hostages seized in the Philippines by the Abu Sayyaf Group, reportedly in exchange for a ransom payment. The hostages included citizens of France, Germany, Malaysia, South Africa, Finland, the Philippines, and Lebanon. The payment of ransom to kidnappers only encourages additional hostage taking, and the Abu Sayyaf Group, emboldened by its success, did seize additional hostages--including a US citizen--later in the year. Libya's behavior and that of other parties involved in the alleged ransom arrangement served only to encourage further terrorism and to make that region far more dangerous for residents and travelers.

At year's end, Libya had yet to comply fully with the remaining UN Security Council requirements related to Pan Am 103: accepting responsibility, paying appropriate compensation, disclosing all it knows, and renouncing terrorism. The United States remains dedicated to maintaining pressure on the Libyan Government until it does so. Qadhafi stated publicly that his government had adopted an antiterrorism stance, but it remains unclear whether his claims of distancing Libya from its terrorist past signify a true change in policy.

Libya also remained the primary suspect in several other past terrorist operations, including the Labelle discotheque bombing in Berlin in 1986 that killed two US servicemen and one Turkish civilian and wounded more

than 200 persons. The trial in Germany of five suspects in the bombing, which began in November 1997, continued in 2000. Although Libya expelled the Abu Nidal organization and distanced itself from the Palestinian rejectionists in 1999, it continued to have contact with groups that use violence to oppose the Middle East Peace Process, including the Palestine Islamic Jihad and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command.

North Korea

In 2000 the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) engaged in three rounds of terrorism talks that culminated in a joint DPRK-US statement wherein the DPRK reiterated its opposition to terrorism and agreed to support international actions against such activity. The DPRK, however, continued to provide safehaven to the Japanese Communist League-Red Army Faction members who participated in the hijacking of a Japanese Airlines flight to North Korea in 1970. Some evidence also suggests the DPRK may have sold weapons directly or indirectly to terrorist groups during the year; Philippine officials publicly declared that the Moro Islamic Liberation Front had purchased weapons from North Korea with funds provided by Middle East sources.

Sudan

The United States and Sudan in mid-2000 entered into a dialogue to discuss US counterterrorism concerns. The talks, which were ongoing at the end of the year, were constructive and obtained some positive results. By the end of the year Sudan had signed all 12 international conventions for combating terrorism and had taken several other positive counterterrorism steps, including closing down the Popular Arab and Islamic Conference, which served as a forum for terrorists.

Sudan, however, continued to be used as a safehaven by members of various groups, including associates of Usama Bin Ladin's al-Qaida organization, Egyptian al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya, Egyptian Islamic Jihad, the Palestine Islamic Jihad, and HAMAS. Most groups used Sudan primarily as a secure base for assisting compatriots elsewhere.

Khartoum also still had not complied fully with UN Security Council Resolutions 1044, 1054, and 1070, passed in 1996--which demand that Sudan end all support to terrorists. They also require Khartoum to hand over three Egyptian Gama'a fugitives linked to the assassination attempt in 1995 against Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Ethiopia. Sudanese officials continued to deny that they had a role in the attack.

Syria

Syria continued to provide safehaven and support to several terrorist groups, some of which maintained training camps or other facilities on Syrian territory. Ahmad Jibril's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC), the Palestine Islamic Jihad (PIJ), Abu Musa's Fatah-the-Intifada, and George Habash's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) maintained their headquarters in Damascus. The Syrian Government allowed HAMAS to open a new main office in Damascus in March, although the arrangement may be temporary while HAMAS continues to seek permission to reestablish its headquarters in Jordan. In addition, Syria granted a variety of terrorist groups--including HAMAS, the PFLP-GC, and the PIJ--basing privileges or refuge in areas of Lebanon's Bekaa Valley under Syrian control. Damascus generally upheld its agreement with Ankara not to support the Kurdish PKK, however.

Weapons-of-Mass-Destruction (WMD) Terrorism

At the dawn of a new millennium, the possibility of a terrorist attack involving weapons of mass destruction (WMD)--chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear (CBRN), or large explosive weapons--remained real. As of the end of 2000, however, the most notorious attack involving chemical weapons against a civilian target remained Aum Shinrikyo's sarin nerve agent attack against the Tokyo subway in March 1995.

Most terrorists continued to rely on conventional tactics, such as bombing, shooting, and kidnapping, but some terrorists--such as Usama Bin Ladin and his associates--continued to seek CBRN capabilities.

- Popular literature and the public dialog focused on the vulnerability of civilian targets to CBRN attacks. Such attacks could cause lasting disruption and generate significant psychological impact on a population and its infrastructure.*
- A few groups, notably those driven by distorted religious and cultural ideologies, showed signs they were willing to cause large numbers of casualties. Other potentially dangerous but less predictable groups had emerged, and those groups may not abide by traditional targeting constraints that would prohibit using indiscriminate violence or CBRN weapons.*

- *Some CBRN materials, technology, and especially information continued to be widely available, particularly from commercial sources and the Internet.*

Terrorist Use of Information Technology

Terrorists have seized upon the worldwide practice of using information technology (IT) in daily life. They embrace IT for several reasons: it improves communication and aids organization, allows members to coordinate quickly with large numbers of followers, and provides a platform for propaganda. The Internet also allows terrorists to reach a wide audience of potential donors and recruits who may be located over a large geographic area.

In addition, terrorists are taking note of the proliferation of hacking and the use of the computer as a weapon. Extremists routinely post messages to widely accessible Web sites that call for defacing Western Internet sites and disrupting online service, for example. The widespread availability of hacking software and its anonymous and increasingly automated design make it likely that terrorists will more frequently incorporate these tools into their online activity. The appeal of such tools may increase as news media continue to sensationalize hacking.

Although Syria claimed to be committed to the peace process, it did not act to stop Hizballah and Palestinian rejectionist groups from carrying out anti-Israeli attacks. Damascus also served as the primary transit point for terrorist operatives traveling to Lebanon and for the resupply of weapons to Hizballah. Damascus appeared to maintain its longstanding ban on attacks launched from Syrian territory or against Western targets.

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