

The State Department's 1997 Terrorism Report:

Issues to Watch

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Brief Analysis

The Department of State will soon issue Patterns of Global Terrorism 1997, its authoritative survey of trends and developments in international terrorism. Its credibility requires fair, objective, and comprehensive reporting of all relevant documented facts, complemented by convincing circumstantial evidence, concerning the activities of terrorist organizations and the role of state-sponsors of international terrorism. However, the Administration has not always treated state sponsors evenly. Although past years' editions of Patterns have been the main U.S. government vehicle for outlining a strong case against some countries, like Iran and Sudan, the State Department has usually refrained from blunt talk about the roles of two other key regional actors-the Palestinian Authority (PA) and Syria. The credibility of this year's report will depend, to a large extent, on whether it addresses the following set of issues:

Palestinian Authority Patterns 1996 commended the PA for its "efforts" in 1996 to "combat," "root out," and "rein in Palestinian violence aimed at undermining the peace process," and arrest terrorist suspects, and it asserted that "Chairman Arafat and other senior PA officials regularly condemned acts of terrorism." Yet it ignored charges that the PA deliberately did not arrest some suspected terrorists, prematurely released others without trial or extradition, and allowed still others to "escape." Also, the report failed to address charges that PA officials and institutions themselves incited violence. While recognizing PA efforts at preempting some terrorist activity, Patterns 1997 should reflect the following actions:

1) The PA refused to arrest some key terrorist suspects while maintaining the "revolving door" prison system for many of those it did arrest. Examples include:

--In February 1997, the PA released Amjad Muhammad Hinawi, a suspected Islamic Jihad militant involved in the May 1996 murder of U.S. citizen David Boim; Patterns 1996 lauded his initial arrest. He was later rearrested and sentenced to ten years in March 1998.

--In March 1997, the PA released key Hamas leader Ibrahim Makadmeh. The PA later reissued a warrant for his arrest after he exulted in the bombing of a Tel Aviv cafe with the cry that "holy warriors" had prevailed, but in November 1997 Hamas announced that the PA dropped the warrant for Makadmeh's arrest and that he was living freely in Gaza.

--In June 1997, Abdel Nasser al-Qaisi of the PFLP, serving a life sentence for the murder of an Israeli woman and her son in 1996, "escaped" from PA custody in Jericho. The following month, Abd al-Rahman Ghneimat, a suspected member of the Kfar Sureif cell of Hamas' Izz a-Din al-Kassam, reportedly "escaped" from a PA jail in Hebron. In early 1998, Ghneimat was reported to be in Israeli custody. Also in July, the PA released seven PFLP-GC members who had been arrested six months earlier.

-In October 1997, the PA reportedly released 38 Hamas and Islamic Jihad members detained after the Jerusalem bombings, including Hani Hassan Rahim, also linked to the Dizengoff bombing and Muhammad Khawaja, who

allegedly also planned the 1995 Beit Lid bombing.

2) Members of the PA police and security organs were linked to terrorist activity. In July, Israel arrested three Palestinian policemen as they tried to attack the West Bank settlement of Har Bracha near Nablus. In October, Brig. Gen. Ghazi Jabali, head of the PA police, was reported to have told trainees at the Palestinian Police Academy that 150 members of Hamas and PFLP were serving in the Palestinian police, including at least 25 wanted by Israel for links to terrorist activities. In November, Israel arrested twelve alleged members of the Sureif terror cell, reportedly including Palestinian security personnel who were helping the other suspects.

3) Senior PA officials appeared to condone terrorist groups and the use of terrorism. In March 1997, Arafat met with Hamas and Islamic Jihad leaders shortly before a terrorist attack in Tel Aviv. The subsequent release of Ibrahim Makadmeh led Israel to charge that Arafat had given a "green light" to terrorism. In late August, Arafat met with Hamas and Islamic Jihad leaders again, just before the September terrorist attack in Jerusalem; his photograph kissing Hamas leader Abd al-Aziz al-Rantisi appeared on the front page of the New York Times. Incitement by PA officials included numerous calls for a possible renewal of "armed struggle," a direct contradiction of the original Rabin-Arafat letter of mutual recognition. At least three Palestinians allegedly involved in selling land to Jews were the victims of extrajudicial killings, after PA justice minister Freih Abu Medain proclaimed that the death penalty would be imposed for such a "crime."

Syria Patterns 1996 stated that there was "no evidence" of direct Syrian involvement in "planning or executing" terrorist activities since 1986 even while acknowledging that Syria "has not acted to stop anti-Israeli attacks" by terrorist groups acting from Lebanon, hosts the "headquarters" and "training camps" for several terrorist groups, provides "safehaven and support," and allows "the resupply of arms" to terrorist groups. Patterns 1996 made no mention of repeated Jordanian reports of terrorist infiltrations and weapons smuggling from Syria, long-standing Turkish allegations of infiltrations into Turkey from Syria of Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) terrorists, allegations of a Syrian link to the 1996 al-Khobar bombing in Saudi Arabia (a suspect was reported to have committed suicide while in Syrian custody), or Syria's facilitation of Iranian support for terrorist groups. Patterns 1997 should include those points-given that much of that activity continued in 1997-as well as the following 1997 activities:

1) Senior Syrian officials publicly supported the use of terror and terrorist groups under the guise of "struggle" and "resistance." Syrian officials-including President Asad and members of his family-regularly meet with leaders of both secularist and Islamic fundamentalist terrorist organizations and lend support to their "struggle" or "resistance" against Israel. For example, in January, Asad's son Bashar hosted a Hizballah delegation in Damascus led by Sheikh Nasrallah. At about that time, the Syrian government allowed Hizballah, Islamic Jihad, and Hamas to hold a rally in Damascus, where they renewed threats of suicide bombings in Israel.

2) Terrorist groups in Syria were linked to specific acts of terrorism. Reuters and Ha'aretz reported that the individuals who carried out both the March 1997 Tel Aviv bombing and the September 1997 Jerusalem bombing had connections to, or may have acted on orders from, Hamas headquarters in Damascus, home of Hamas military operatives Imad al-Alami and Izzedin Sheikh Khalil. In November, Syria-based Al-Quds radio station allowed Islamic Jihad to use it to claim responsibility for killing an Israeli student in Jerusalem, according to the Jerusalem Post.

Implications for U.S. Policy As the principal document on which both the executive and legislative branches-as well as nongovernment experts-rely to formulate counterterrorism strategies, the State Department's Patterns of Global Terrorism must retain integrity that is above reproach. Legislators and government officials may disagree on the best policies to fight terrorism, but all parties deserve unfailingly comprehensive data and analysis. In this regard, two main conclusions of Patterns 1996-that, excepting Iran, state-sponsored terrorism had been curbed, and that the PA was actively and fully combating terrorism-were troubling. This year, the credibility tests will focus on coverage of Syria and the PA. Despite their participation in the peace process, the State Department must be as

comprehensive in its analysis of them as it is of Iran, Sudan and Libya. Dealing with terrorism requires facing the unwelcome news about its sources, even if it adds messy complications to other U.S. interests.

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