

Terrorism against Peace: The International Dimension

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Brief Analysis

On November 29, 1994, Oliver "Buck" Revell, former associate deputy-director-investigations, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI); Kenneth Katzman, Middle East analyst at the Congressional Research Service; and Steven Emerson, freelance journalist and executive producer of the PBS documentary *Jihad in America*, addressed a session of The Washington Institute's Policy Forum. The following is a rapporteur's summary of their remarks.

Oliver "Buck" Revell

The FBI began a special focus on international terrorism in 1980, after the Iranian Revolution, when terrorists from abroad began committing acts of violence and building an infrastructure in the United States. In the mid-1980s, two statutes gave the Justice Department and the FBI extraterritorial jurisdiction to investigate acts of terrorism against Americans anywhere. The FBI recognized that a number of militant Islamic groups were using violence to intimidate moderate American Muslims and affect U.S. policy.

Militant Islamic groups in the United States are avid opponents of peace and support international terrorist groups that are directly engaged in violence. These groups have wrapped themselves in an American Achilles heel -- the First Amendment. It is difficult for law enforcement officials to differentiate between legitimate humanitarian aid and that which is diverted to terrorist activities because the Constitution guarantees the freedoms of speech, assembly, and religion.

The United States must never allow terrorists to goad it into diluting the constitutional rights that differentiate U.S. policy from the extremists' hateful philosophies. However, the United States cannot be naive about the true intent of extremists in its midst. There are a number of ways to combat terrorism while maintaining the integrity of the Constitution. To better protect Americans against international terrorism, the United States should:

- 1) Create a central repository within the federal government to collect and analyze all information relating to the activities and immigration status of those who have engaged in or supported terrorism. In addition, it should establish a mechanism to ensure coordination between the agencies that are responsible for counterterrorism.
- 2) Revise the law pertaining to visa, passport, and political asylum requirements. Establish a means to expel those who pose a threat to U.S. or international security and are temporarily in the United States either legally or illegally. Currently this requires a litigation process that can take years.
- 3) Increase law enforcement liaison and exchange of information with counterpart agencies in moderate and secular Muslim states.
- 4) Stop domestic support for international terrorist groups either through vigorous prosecutions under the recently-enacted federal statute prohibiting sending funds to terrorist organizations overseas, or if necessary by creating a more effective law with the same purpose.
- 5) Revise the attorney-general's guidelines to allow federal law enforcement agencies to take cognizance of public

information and open activities of organizations that clearly indicate their direct support of terrorism.

It is possible to protect Americans from terrorism without violating constitutional rights. Failure to take proper precautions now may result in the need for more draconian measures later.

Kenneth Katzman

Iran's role in exporting Islamic revolution poses a threat to U.S. national security interests in the Middle East. Iran is waging an attack on the peace process on Israel's borders: in the south, it seeks to destabilize Mubarak's regime in Egypt; in the north, it supports Hezbollah in southern Lebanon; and it supports Hamas and Islamic Jihad in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

Iran is not only holding on to its core base among the Shi'a, but since 1989 it has significantly expanded its base in the Sunni Islamic world. Shi'a militancy began before the 1979 Iranian Revolution with the formation of the Dawa party in Iraq. Ayatollah Khomeini later built on the principles of this party to form the ideas behind the revolution. The Dawa party remained in Iraq after the revolution, serving as the training camp for many future Shi'i leaders, who later exported their ideas to south Lebanon (Hezbollah), Kuwait, and a number of other countries in the region.

Until 1989, Iran had difficulty penetrating the Sunni world because the Sunni intellectual background is grounded in Muslim Brotherhood doctrine. Two pivotal events in 1989 allowed Iran to penetrate the Sunni community. First, the coup in Sudan brought the National Islamic Front to power. This group, a direct outgrowth of the Muslim Brotherhood, entered into a tacit alliance with Iran to promote Islamic revolution. Second, the Soviets finished their pullout from Afghanistan, and the United States and Saudi Arabia began to disengage from the Afghan conflict. This gave Iran access to the Arab Muslim volunteers who fought in Afghanistan.

Iran also sought access to Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, who share its interest in obstructing the peace process. There is evidence of direct Iranian funding of Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and of indirect Iranian support through its chief client in Lebanon -- Hezbollah. Cooperation also exists between Hezbollah and the two Palestinian groups. Iran is helping Hezbollah move overseas so that it will not be permanently dismantled by an Israel-Syria peace agreement and can reconstitute itself in south Lebanon if the peace process unravels.

Since Iran lacks the money to promote mass support for an Islamic revolution, it can more effectively use its resources by aiding guerilla and terrorist groups. This strategy is based on the idea that after any successful revolution the most extreme elements usually emerge dominant. To defuse Iran's strategy, it is important to work with more moderate, non-violent groups and divide them from the militants. King Hussein has pursued this strategy and has been remarkably successful.

Steven Emerson

The four most active groups are Hezbollah, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and the Egyptian Gamaat, although these are not the only groups carrying out violence. Their targets are primarily symbols of the West, including Israel, Egypt, secularism, democracy, and the separation of church and state.

In the last fifteen years, groups such as the PLO, PFLP, and DFLP that constituted the "nationalist secularist terrorist threat," have been supplanted by this transnational militant Islamic threat. These groups have established infrastructures in nearly every Western country that generate and "launder" money, provide weapons and training, recruit volunteers, and provide ideological/political support and central decision-making.

In the United States there exists all five elements, with Hamas having the largest network of any group. These groups have realized that to gain legitimacy and support they must establish research institutes and think tanks in the United States to seize the leadership of the Islamic community and cultivate political and ideological support.

The development of the fundamentalist diaspora has created a de facto "fundamentalist internationale," a network of

groups that lack a clear hierarchy but cooperate on a number of tactical efforts and missions, such as the World Trade Center bombing. This networking is essential to these groups and has extended to Argentina and Europe.

These groups have the potential to play a major destabilizing role in the peace process. The network in the diaspora is leading to severe weakening of moderates in home countries, which reduces Yasser Arafat's ability to capture higher levels of support. Arafat also faces the challenge of building the kind of grassroots support that Hamas has built over a period of many years.

This Policy Forum report was prepared by Jennifer Sultan. ❖

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