

Patterns of Terrorism 2002: Terror, Counterterror, and State Sponsorship

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Brief Analysis

Today, the State Department releases the 2002 edition of Patterns of Global Terrorism, its congressionally mandated annual accounting of international terrorism. The report chronicles a year marked by both devastating terrorist attacks and remarkable progress targeting al-Qaeda in the war on terror. However, against the backdrop of the increasingly successful international campaign to prevent such attacks by targeting terrorist groups, what stands out is the lack of a similar effort in 2002 to target state sponsors -- a problem that continues today.

2002 Terror Attacks

While the total number of terrorist incidents fell in 2002, this reflects a decrease in incidents technically defined by the U.S. government as "acts of international terrorism" (such as acts of sabotage against South American pipelines). Indeed, international terrorist groups from al-Qaeda to Hamas carried out devastating terror attacks throughout 2002.

Al-Qaeda and its affiliated subgroups were especially active in 2002. The year started with the kidnapping and murder of Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl in January, followed in April by the suicide truck bombing of the Djerba synagogue in Tunisia, which killed 21 people, including 14 Germans and a Frenchman. The next month, 11 French naval engineers were killed in a suicide car bombing in Karachi, and 11 people were killed in a June bombing targeting the U.S. consulate in Karachi, Pakistan. In October, a French oil tanker was bombed in Yemen's Aden Harbor. Just six days later, nearly 200 people from twenty-nine countries were killed in the Bali bombings -- the worst single act of terrorism since September 11. The following month suicide bombers struck an Israeli-owned hotel and two missiles were launched at an Israeli chartered airliner in Mombasa, Kenya.

Palestinian terrorist groups also stood out in 2002. Between them, the various groups recorded one of their most deadly years ever, including at least twenty-three suicide bombings. The victims of these attacks -- where 183 were killed and 1,232 wounded -- include citizens from the United States, Israel (Jews and Arabs), Romania, Thailand, Norway, the former Soviet Union, South Africa, and Ethiopia. Indicative of the increased role Hizballah played in supporting Palestinian terrorism in 2002, the group supplied an expert to assist in building a forcible bomb for the

most devastating of these attacks, the March 27 bombing that killed 29 and wounded 172 Passover celebrants at the Park Hotel in Netanya.

Most disturbingly, as the State Department stated in its July 2002 Palestine Liberation Organization Commitments and Compliance Act (PLOCCA) report, "some senior PLO and PA leaders did little to prevent -- and in some cases encouraged -- acts of violence and an atmosphere of incitement to violence." Indeed, Palestinian leaders "clearly knew" that Palestinian groups were involved in attacks and that some PA and PLO officials were themselves involved in these attacks, "in some cases in coordination with other Fatah-affiliated groups or with Hamas or Palestinian Islamic Jihad [PIJ]."

War on Terror Successes

Despite the devastation of these attacks, 2002 in fact marked a turning point in the war on terror. By the end of the year, upwards of 3,000 al-Qaeda leaders and foot soldiers had been captured around the world, and U.S. authorities had targeted 62 organizations supporting terrorist groups and frozen \$125 million in terrorists' assets.

Authorities foiled terror plots across the globe in Bosnia, Italy, France, Germany, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Pakistan, and the United States. Indeed, in the United States alone, authorities thwarted both the "shoe bomber" (Richard Reid, in the last days of 2001) and the "dirty bomber" (Jose Padilla, in May), and arrested suspected terrorists in Portland, Seattle, Detroit, and Lackawanna, New York, to list just a few.

One of the key factors behind the authorities' ability to thwart such plots is the long list of senior al-Qaeda terrorists captured over the course of 2002. Abu Zubaideh, al-Qaeda's operations commander, was captured in Pakistan on March 28, followed by close associates like Abu Zubair al-Haili in Morocco and Omar al-Farouq in Oman. Others, like Abd al-Rahim Nashiri and Abu Ali al-Harithi in Yemen, were killed. In September, Ramzi bin al-Shibh, a co-conspirator in the World Trade Center attack, was captured in Pakistan, marking a critical milestone in the war on terror and leading to the subsequent capture of other wanted terrorists and the frustration of terror plots.

Prosecutors also enjoyed a banner year in 2002, including the first successful conviction of terrorists in the U.S. courts for providing "material support" to a designated Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO). In June, Mohamad and Chawki Hammoud were convicted of providing Hizballah with material support as leaders of a Hizballah cell in Charlotte, North Carolina.

The year 2002 was marked by counterterrorism success against Palestinian terrorist groups as well. Despite predictions that Operation Defensive Shield -- the massive counterterrorism operation Israel conducted in the West Bank in April 2002 -- would yield only short-term dividends, denying terrorists the freedom they had previously enjoyed has severely curtailed their ability to conduct successful attacks. Indeed, by arresting or killing Palestinian terrorists, Israel thinned the groups' leadership and soldiers. Through conducting periodic raids and responding to threat information with focused closures, Israel inhibited their ability to conduct attacks.

State Sponsors

Iran continues to be the world's foremost state sponsor of terror. Iranian state sponsorship not only continued in 2002 in the form of backing Hizballah and Palestinian groups, its support for those groups expanded alongside support for al-Qaeda fugitives. For example, in June 2002, Iran gave PIJ a 70 percent increase in funds, and throughout 2002 Tehran continued to train terrorists at camps in Lebanon's Beka'a Valley and in Iran proper. Iran also provided safe haven to two senior al-Qaeda fugitives who head the group's military committee, as well as to dozens of other al-Qaeda personnel. According to an Arab intelligence officer, some al-Qaeda operatives were instructed to leave the country in 2002, but were told "they may be called on at some point to assist Iran."

Syria, whose state sponsorship remains second only to Iran, remains on the State Department list for its close ties to

Hizballah and Palestinian terrorist groups with offices in Damascus and Syrian-controlled Lebanon. Patterns 2002, however, is expected to give a nod of recognition to Damascus for its cooperation in the war on terror, specifically its interrogation of the September 11 recruiter Mohamad Zammar and sharing threat information about a plot targeting U.S. forces in Bahrain. But Italian court documents and wiretaps of al-Qaeda operatives recently disclosed by the Los Angeles Times reveal that throughout 2002 "Syria was a hub for recruits moving between Europe and Ansar [al-Islam]'s Iraqi stronghold." Even as Syria provided limited cooperation in the war on terror, Asad's police state tolerated the existence of an al-Qaeda "logistical structure" in Syria. According to the Italians, the terrorist smuggling network was managed by an al-Qaeda operative named Mullah Fuad, who "organized the flow of 'brothers' to Iraq via the Syrian cities of Damascus and Aleppo."

Despite the recent liberation of Iraq, it will remain on the State Department's list of state sponsors of terror because there is no sovereign Iraqi government to make the certifications necessary to be removed from the list.

Emerging Patterns

While international terrorist groups remain intent on attacking Western targets, they are finding it increasingly difficult to do so. To continue along this trajectory, however, the international community must apply the same determination with which it targets terrorist groups to states that fund, train, harbor, or otherwise support these groups.

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