

Europe and Middle East Terrorism

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Brief Analysis

As President George W. Bush completes his latest European trip -- one highlighted by a symbolic Memorial Day speech in Normandy that underscored the link between America's past wars and the current war on terror -- his European Union (EU) hosts have begun to implement a policy on terrorism that is fundamentally at odds with the "Bush Doctrine": namely, that those who support, fund, or abet terror are terrorists themselves.

On May 3, 2002, the EU added eleven organizations and seven individuals to its financial-blocking list of "persons, groups, and entities involved in terrorist acts." This action is particularly significant because it marks the first time that the EU has frozen the assets of non-European terrorist groups.

The EU list now includes the Taliban, al-Qaeda, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), the Iranian dissident group Mujahedin-e-Khalq, and the Izz al-Din al-Qassem Brigades (the military wing of Hamas). It also includes the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) from Turkey, which has recently adopted a new name, the Kurdistan Freedom and Democracy Congress (Kadek).

Terror or Charity?

Far more telling than the names that have been added to the list, however, are the names that have been omitted -- Hizballah, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), and Hamas itself. According to press accounts, the EU is looking to maintain a distinction between terrorist groups' political and charitable activities on the one hand, and their direct terror wings on the other.

Consistent with this interpretation, the EU placed several individual Hizballah terrorists on its list, but not the organization itself. This implies that these Hizballah operatives somehow work independently of the group that recruits, trains, and funds them for terror missions. Similarly, listing only the military wing of Hamas but not the group itself suggests that Hamas is solely a charitable and political organization somehow disconnected from the heinous suicide bombings coordinated, funded, and lauded by its leaders in the West Bank, Gaza, and Damascus. In fact, Hamas social-welfare organizations play a direct role in facilitating Hamas terrorist attacks, including suicide bombings. A November 5, 2001, FBI memorandum on the Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development -- which served as a Hamas front organization in the United States until it was closed down in December 2001 -- provided convincing evidence that Hamas social-welfare organizations (e.g., charity committees and hospitals) form

the core of the group's logistical and financial support network, including support for terror attacks.

Interestingly, the EU's decision to distinguish between the political and military wings of these terrorist organizations comes at the same time that Spain (which currently holds the rotating six-month EU presidency) is making moves in the opposite direction on its own home front. Spanish prime minister Jose Maria Aznar recently announced his intention to introduce legislation outlawing Batasuna, the political party affiliated with the terrorist group Basque Homeland and Liberty (ETA). Declaring his confidence that Batasuna would be declared illegal, Aznar stated, "I make no distinction between terrorists, none at all, whether they are here in the Basque country or in New York. Nothing can justify a terrorist act." Spain's draft law would outlaw any group that "encourages hatred, violence and social confrontation to further its political objectives" -- a criterion that Hizballah, Hamas, and the PFLP easily meet. Noting Batasuna's refusal to condemn ETA terrorist attacks, Patxi Lopez, the leader of the Basque Socialist party, observed that "in a democracy you cannot allow political groups to mock the system by acting as shields for terrorists." By this standard, Middle East groups like Hamas and Hizballah would certainly qualify as terrorist groups.

A Different Standard for the Middle East Than for Europe?

The expanded financial-blocking list also seems to suggest that the EU applies different standards to groups that target Europeans (e.g., al-Qaeda) compared to groups that target innocent civilians in the Middle East (e.g., Hizballah). For example, in the wake of the September 11 attacks, Britain arrested al-Qaeda associate Yasser al-Sirri, despite his insistence that his role was limited to political and public relations functions. In contrast, no action has been taken against Hizballah- or Hamas-related political, financial, or logistical-support activities in Europe. In fact, the PFLP's Leila Khaled -- charged in Britain for her role in the 1970 hijacking of an El Al airliner but released in exchange for a hostage before going to trial -- recently traveled to London, where she openly gave public lectures and media interviews despite the criminal charges still pending against her in British courts. On May 22, Khaled told an audience at the School for Oriental and African Studies at the London School of Economics that "there are no suicide bombers, they are all freedom fighters." She also taunted British authorities, saying "if they are prepared to arrest me, I am prepared. My people can answer. We have a lot of supporters here."

Any such distinction between terrorism in Europe and terrorism in the Middle East would be shortsighted; that is, it would not address Europe's own narrow interests. Europe could well become a target for Middle East terrorists once again, as it was in the past. As the European diplomatic role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has increased, Palestinian groups have already begun targeting European interests. On March 26, 2002, PIJ terrorists murdered two international observers, one Turk and one Swiss, assigned to the Temporary International Presence in Hebron. On May 1, 2002, the PFLP detonated a bomb in the garden of the British Council in Gaza City, hours after the transfer of five PFLP terrorists and a Palestinian Authority (PA) official to a jail in Jericho (where American and British civilian observers are stationed to verify their continued detention). The bombing, which damaged the Council's door, was claimed by the PFLP in a statement denouncing Britain's role in the incarceration of its members.

Similarly, after playing a central role in the negotiations that ended the standoff at Bethlehem's Church of the Nativity but led to the exile of thirteen Hamas and Fatah militants, Arafat advisor Mohammad Rashid found his home firebombed by members of the PFLP. Six EU member states spent sixteen days debating the terms and conditions for accepting these thirteen Palestinian militants -- all involved in terrorist activities, including suicide bombings and the murder of an American -- as part of the deal that ended the standoff. It remains to be seen whether, where, and when Palestinian terrorists will punish these European states for negotiating the involuntary departure of their fellow militants. Moreover, Palestinian terrorist groups may not take kindly to any security crackdown imposed at the direction of the American, Russian, UN, and EU "Quartet." The backlash against such a crackdown may be directed less toward the PA and more toward the United States and the EU, the engines behind

the resolutions of the Ramallah and Bethlehem standoffs and the powers pushing for an end to terrorist attacks.

Conclusion

The theory of separate social-welfare, political, and terror wings that operate independently of one another is mistaken. The fallacy of distinguishing between the nonviolent activities of terrorist groups and the terror attacks that they carry out directly should be prioritized on the agenda of the ongoing U.S.-European terrorism dialogue, especially in light of recent Palestinian attacks on Western targets.

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