

Anticipating Patterns of Global Terrorism 2001

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Brief Analysis

The 2001 edition of Patterns of Global Terrorism, the U.S. government's preeminent annual accounting of international terrorism, is slated for release tomorrow, a few weeks later than its usual April unveiling. The delay is presumably the result of the sharp rise in international terror activity in 2001. The report is said to be twice the usual length, including an overview of a U.S.-proposed global framework for countering terrorism. Key to judging the report, however, will be its treatment of terrorism writ large, including the controversial issues of Palestinian terrorism and state sponsors.

The Counterterrorism Framework

Assuming that Patterns 2001, as expected, discusses the necessary framework for counterterrorism, key issues it should analyze are the need for an international legal framework and the importance of international cooperation, including the roles of multilateral organizations such as the UN and NATO. It would be helpful if the report highlighted specific cases in which U.S. counterterrorism efforts were significantly enhanced through the cooperation of foreign governments, as well as those in which clashing cultural or political interests have complicated efforts to enlist international cooperation.

International Terrorist Groups

2001 was a watershed year for international terrorism, not only in terms of counterterrorism activity but in terms of the quantity and quality of attacks. As in the past, the report will presumably provide regional overviews and catalog highlights worldwide in a country-by-country accounting, but it will surely focus on attacks by al-Qaeda and the organization's terrorist affiliates.

Although al-Qaeda certainly deserves the spotlight, the report's integrity will largely depend on how well it covers the other aspects of "global terrorism," especially terrorism in the Arab-Israeli arena. Indeed, the steady increase in Palestinian terrorist activity throughout 2001 would logically suggest that the section on terrorist activity in Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip should be expanded from the two pages devoted to this issue in last year's report. If, instead, this section is given only a few paragraphs in Patterns 2001, serious questions will be raised regarding the sincerity of earlier official statements to the effect that states cannot both help the United States with al-Qaeda and, at the same time, embrace Hizballah or Hamas. Additionally, the Israel-West Bank-Gaza section in this year's

presumably expanded report should note the many suicide bombings and other spectacular terrorist attacks carried out in 2001, without limiting itself to those attacks -- such as the Dolphinarium disco (June 1, 2001) and Sbarro pizzeria (August 9, 2001) "homicide" attacks -- in which foreigners were killed alongside Israelis.

The report should also address the involvement of senior Palestinian Authority (PA) officials in anti-Israeli terrorism, including suicide bombings targeting civilians in major Israeli population centers. Terror attacks by Fatah groups such as Force 17 and the Tanzim should be noted in the text of the report, or, at the very least, in the appendix listing major acts of terrorism. Both groups are worthy of being added to the Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) list, which is also appended to the Patterns report. Their inclusion on the list is unlikely, although the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) -- removed from the FTO list in 1999 after forswearing violence, but recently added to the Treasury Department's Specially Designated Terrorists (SDT) list for conducting a series of attacks during the past eighteen months -- provides an open and shut case for reinstatement. The report should also make special note of the meteoric rise in terrorist activity by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), including car bombings and the assassination of an Israeli government minister. But the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, a recently designated FTO directly linked to the PA through official PA documents seized by Israel, should receive attention as the group most responsible for the steady escalation of terrorist tactics and operations over the course of 2001.

State Sponsors of Terrorism

No states are expected to be removed from the appended list of state sponsors of terrorism (candidates for removal included Cuba, Libya, and Sudan), nor is the list expected to expand to include states like Lebanon -- despite Beirut's open support for Hizballah and Asbat al-Ansar (recently named an FTO), and the regime's outright refusal to participate in the global effort to block funds linked to terrorist groups or individuals. The report should, however, address the issue of ongoing Saudi financing of terrorism at both the official and private levels, including the earmarking of Interior Ministry funds specifically for the families of Palestinian suicide bombers. But the most critical coverage anticipated in the report concerns three key state sponsors: Iran, Syria, and Iraq.

Iran. CIA director George Tenet's congressional testimony on February 6, 2002, described Iran as "the foremost state sponsor of terrorism." Citing its attempt to transfer offensive arms to the PA aboard the Karine-A smuggling ship in January 2002, Tenet said that there has been "little sign of a reduction in Iran's support for terrorism in the past year." Whether Patterns 2001 will give similar prominence to Iran's partnership with Hizballah in smuggling over fifty tons of military-grade weapons into Gaza for use by Palestinian terrorist groups (critical events that spill into January of the next year are regularly included in Patterns) is an open question. Were Patterns 2001 to devote little attention to the active, state-sponsored escalation of terrorism by Iran, it could be interpreted politically as a decision to modify the analytical integrity of the report for the sake of "throwing a bone" to Iranian reformists.

Syria. While Syrian intelligence cooperation relating to al-Qaeda certainly deserves mention, the report should also discuss Damascus's role as the operational planning, financing, and coordination headquarters for terrorist attacks sponsored by Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, PFLP, Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC), and Hizballah; its role in the ongoing instruction of Hamas and other terrorist recruits at Syrian training camps; and its role in the multiple efforts to smuggle katyusha rockets and other weapons from Syria into the West Bank via Jordan. In light of the fact that no less than seven FTOs are headquartered in Damascus, it would be inappropriate to give Syria a free pass on terrorism. Otherwise, some might view the report as having been written to advance certain policy aims (securing Syrian cooperation on intelligence and the peace process) at the expense of others (the war on terrorism), rather than reflecting true realities on the ground.

Iraq. Iraqi sponsorship of terrorism deserves closer analysis than it has received in previous years. Iraq pays "death benefits" to the families of Palestinian suicide bombers (recently raised from \$10,000 to \$25,000). Worth noting is

the resurrection of both the Palestine Liberation Front (PLF) and Arab Liberation Front, Iraqi-sponsored Palestinian groups that distribute these funds and, in the case of the PLF, have also conducted a series of terrorist attacks. The report should also discuss suspicions that an Iraqi intelligence officer in Prague -- whether or not he also met Mohammed Atta -- planned a possible attack on the offices of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.

Conclusion

The many presidential statements condemning terrorism writ large, along with those equating support for terrorism with terrorism itself, illustrate why the Patterns of Global Terrorism report should take a firm stance in the realm of truth telling, even where inconvenient. The largest Palestinian smuggling operation ever reported, whose mastermind -- a senior PA official -- is now incarcerated in a PA jail under American and British supervision, should be included in this report. After all, the White House itself has described evidence linking the PA, Iran, and Hizballah to the Karine-A affair as "compelling." It would be unfortunate if Patterns 2001 failed to echo the administration's previously firm statements on international terrorism. This kind of report would highlight the cacophony of discordant and competing voices emanating from different corners of Washington's decisionmaking elite, and, ultimately, would portray Patterns as representing the State Department's perspective -- emphasizing the impact of terrorism on policy objectives -- more than a holistic U.S. position on international terrorism.

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