



RESEARCH NOTES

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A CHRONOLOGY OF MIDDLE EAST STATE SUPPORT FOR INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM, 1997: A SUPPLEMENT TO THE STATE DEPARTMENT'S *PATTERNS OF GLOBAL TERRORISM*

By Eytan J. Fisch

The U.S. State Department currently lists five states in the Middle East as sponsors of international terrorism: Iran, Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Sudan. To be classified as a state sponsor, a state must "support international terrorism either by engaging in terrorist activity themselves or by providing arms, training, safehaven, diplomatic facilities, financial backing, logistic and/or other support to terrorists." The most recent State Department report, Patterns of Global Terrorism, 1997, does not enumerate specific actions by each state sponsor of terrorism explaining why it earned them the designation. The following data on state-sponsorship of terrorism in 1997 is offered as a complement to that report. It provides details on the actions of four of the state sponsors: Iran, Libya, Syria, and Sudan. Generally, only specific acts—and not ongoing behavior, such as provision of safe haven or permission to use radio transmitters—are enumerated here.

IRAN

The United States placed Iran on its list of state sponsors of international terrorism in 1984. According to the State Department's *Patterns of Global Terrorism, 1997* (subsequently referred to as *Patterns 1997*), the United States considered Iran to be the "most active state sponsor of terrorism in 1997"—lending direct support to several international terrorist organizations in the form of funds, weapons, and training.

In his January 1998 interview with CNN, Iranian president Muhammad Khatami said that terrorism "should be condemned in all its forms and manifestations . . . terrorism is useless anyway and we condemn it categorically." Khatami also stated that "supporting peoples who fight for the liberation of their land is not . . . supporting terrorism," though

he agreed—regarding the example of terrorism against Israel—that "killing innocent men and women who are not involved in confrontations is terrorism." This appears to be a similar position to the one taken by his predecessor, former Iranian president 'Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. In a 1993 interview with *Time*, Rafsanjani said "Iran has suffered from terrorism more than any other country. We know that terrorism does not serve our interests, neither domestically nor internationally." Then referring specifically to the actions of Hizballah, Rafsanjani went on to say: "We have respect for Hizballah as it concerns the liberation of their land occupied by Israel. But if Hizballah commits terrorist acts, we do not accept that, and we condemn it. . . We should all cooperate to prevent terrorism" (*Time*, 5/31/93).

Direct Iranian Government Participation in International Terrorism

- In November 1997, Argentine security chiefs announced that there was compelling evidence to investigate right-wing Argentine congressman and former army rebel Emilio Morello as well as the Iranian cultural attaché in Buenos Aires, Moshem Rabbani, in connection with the 1994 bombing of a Jewish center in the Argentine capital that killed eighty-six people (*Reuters*, 11/24/97). In May 1998, Argentine authorities announced that they had proof Iran masterminded both the bombing of the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires in 1992 and the 1994 bombing of the Jewish Community Center. Argentina expelled seven officials of the Iranian embassy and detained eight Iranian citizens living in the capital (*Washington Post*, 5/21/98).
- In February 1997, on the eighth anniversary of the *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie, Ayatollah Sane'i, one of the most powerful members of the Iranian clergy, declared that the *fatwa* still stands and that the bounty would be increased, at least temporarily, to \$2.5 million (*London Times*, 2/13/97). On December 17, 1997, in an interview with Norwegian Channel 2 television, Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman affirmed that the *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie was still in effect. As in the past, the Iranian government argued that the *fatwa* was not a government action but is religiously binding, a position Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi reiterated at the United Nations (UN) in September 1998.
- Abdolhassem Mesbahi, a former high-ranking Iranian security official, who had testified in court that Tehran's leaders had ordered political killings in Germany and who served as a key witness in the 1996 Mykonos trial, said that Ayatollah Khomeini personally ordered the bombing of Pan Am 103. Mesbahi had no personal knowledge of or involvement in the attack but was rather stating what he had heard from others in Iran's Intelligence Ministry. The information was given to German prosecutors who began an investigation (*Iran Times*, 7/11/97).
- In June 1997, Swiss lawmakers accused the Iranian government of involvement in the 1990 assassina-

tion of Kazem Rajavi, a senior member of the Iranian opposition group, Mujahedin-e-Khalq, stating that there was ten times more evidence than in the Mykonos case (*Associated Press (AP)*, 6/13/97).

- In the ongoing investigation of the al-Khobar bombing in Saudi Arabia in 1996, U.S. and Saudi intelligence authorities reportedly linked Brig. Ahmad Sherifi, a senior Iranian intelligence officer and a top officer in Iran's Revolutionary Guards, to a group of Shi'a Muslims suspected of blowing up the American military compound. Sherifi had met with Hani Abd Rahim Sayegh, a Saudi Shi'a arrested in Canada in connection with the bombing, about two years prior to the bombing (*Washington Post*, 4/13/97). Yet, subsequent investigation was unable to provide compelling confirmation of these reports.

- There were some reports of Iranian involvement in the November 12 shooting deaths of four American oil workers in the port city of Karachi. Police in Pakistan detained eight Iranians for questioning in the murders (*Pinkerton's Global Intelligence Services*, 12/9/97). Yet, allegations of Iranian involvement were not proven.

Coordinating Radical Islamic Movements

An October 1997 meeting at Iranian intelligence service headquarters brought together several terrorist organizations and Iranian officials. According to an Arab press report, Iranian officials who were present included: General Mohsen Reza'i, former commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) who is now in charge of the reorganization of Iran's security apparatus; General Yahya Rahim Safavi, head of the IRGC; Information Minister Qorban 'Ali Najaf 'Abadi; former minister 'Ali Falahyan; Mohammed Mohammadi Rayshahri, special adviser to Iran's supreme leader Ali Khamene'i; and Hoseyn Shaykh ol-Eslam, former assistant foreign minister. Representatives from terrorist groups included: Ahmed Jibril, head of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC); Abdullah Ramadan Shallah, secretary general of Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ); 'Abd-al-Hadi Hammadi, head of security for Lebanese Hizballah; 'Imad Mughniyah, supervisor of

Hizballah in the West Bank and Gaza; a delegate from Gama'at al-Islamiyaa in Egypt; and three representatives of Hizballah groups in the Gulf monarchies. The Arab press report said that Reza'i informed the participants that Iran would double the amount of material and logistical support for those organizations engaged in "defending the revolution" and then laid out a plan for action on all fronts. Potential targets specified included: U.S. military targets in Kuwait and Bahrain, American interests in several Arab countries, Israeli interests, and Turkish diplomatic missions (*al-Watan al-'Arabi*, 10/14/97).

Another conference in late 1997 in Qom is said to have been attended by the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq, Kurdistan's Workers' Party (PKK), the Algerian Armed Islamic Group (GIA), Moroccan fundamentalists, the Armenian Secret Army, and the Greek 17 November Movement (*al-Watan al-'Arabi*, 11/21/97).

Palestinian Islamic Jihad

Connections between Iran and the PIJ remained strong. According to Pentagon intelligence sources cited by the *Washington Times*, PIJ accelerated in 1997 its preparations for terrorist attacks in Israel. This planning appears to have been in response to pressure from the Iranian government on the PIJ to carry out more attacks inside Israel. According to a former CIA official, PIJ may be preparing for attempted assassinations of high-ranking PA officials (*Washington Times*, 6/2/97). According to *Ha'aretz*, Iran and PIJ reached an agreement whereby PIJ would receive a bonus payment for each terrorist attack launched against Israel (*Ha'aretz*, 7/31/97). Iran also held a ceremony at Tehran University to commemorate the second anniversary of the death of former PIJ leader Fathi al-Shaqqi. Attending the meeting were the Syrian and Lebanese ambassadors to Tehran as well as Hamas's and PIJ's representatives in Iran, Abu Hamdan and Abu Jihad, respectively (*IRNA*, 11/3/97).

Hizballah

- Over the years, Iran has had a hand in many of Hizballah's actions. *Patterns 1997* states that

Hizballah is "closely allied with, and often directed by Iran." Whether or not Hizballah guerrilla activities in southern Lebanon are deemed to be terrorist actions may be disputed by some. Southern Lebanon aside, Hizballah has attempted terrorist attacks inside Israel. In 1997, one such operation was revealed when Israeli police arrested a German citizen, Joseph Smirak, on suspicion of perpetrating a suicide attack in Israel. Smirak had been trained by Hizballah for two months in Lebanon in the use of arms and explosives and entered Israel in November, where he filmed various public locations and prepared a video explaining his motivation for a suicide attack (*Deutsche Presse-Agentur* 12/24/97).

- According to the Kuwaiti newspaper *al-Ra'i al-'Am*, sources close to Hizballah told the newspaper that the security command of Lebanese Hizballah was reorganizing its security set-up under the supervision of Amad Marnia, who lives in Tehran. The person coordinating the restructuring reportedly serves as the man in charge of security at the Iranian embassy in Beirut (*Middle East News Agency*, 1/26/97).
- Iran's weapons shipments to Hizballah were plentiful in 1997. The type of weapons shipped were more technologically advanced than before. In the first four months of the year, thirty-seven jumbo flights from Iran carrying weapons landed in Syria destined for Hizballah. (*AP*, 5/15/97). In September, IDF spokesman Brig. Gen. Oded Ben-Ami announced that Hizballah received a shipment of new Katyusha rockets from Iran. The new missiles had a range of twenty-five miles, compared to the thirteen-mile range of the missiles used by Hizballah up to that point (*Jerusalem Post*, 9/21/97). In late November, Israel said that mortar bombs from Iran were used in shellings that killed eight civilians in south Lebanon. The shells had "the official Iranian military factory" written on them (*Reuters*, 11/28/97).

Iranian Attacks on Opposition Groups Located Outside Iran

Patterns 1997 states that at least thirteen assassinations took place in 1997 for which Iranian agents were responsible. All of these appear to have been killings of Iranian dissidents. According to an Asso-

ciated Press report, eight Iranian dissidents were murdered abroad in the five months between President Khatami's August inauguration and the beginning of 1998 (*AP*, 1/9/98).

Many of the attacks by Iranian agents occurred against opposition bases in Iraq. There are several active Iranian opposition organizations, including Mujahedin-e-Khalq (MEK) and the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI). The Mujahedin is listed by the U.S. government as a foreign terrorist organization. Numerous clashes between the Mujahedin and Iranian forces occurred when the Mujahedin crossed into Iran or conducted operations from within Iranian territory. It is therefore not apparent whether these attacks should be considered terroristic or part of an ongoing armed conflict; the answer for each episode depends on whether innocent civilians were targeted. That said, the attacks were as follows:

Mujahedin-e-Khalq: On January 8, 1997, the Baghdad headquarters of the MEK was hit by mortar shells (*Reuters*, 1/8/97). In July, the MEK announced that Iranian agents attacked their military training camp in Kut, Iraq, with ten mini-katyusha rockets (*Reuters*, 7/29/97). In late September, Iranian warplanes crossed into Iraq and bombed two MEK bases, reportedly injuring two Iraqi civilians (*AP*, 9/29/97). On October 5, 1997, two members of the MEK were killed by Iranian agents in the region of Dyala, Iraq. According to the MEK, one of their members was killed in an ambush by Iranian agents near Baquba, Iraq (*Press Release: People's Mojahedin of Iran*, 10/26/97).

Kurdish Opposition Groups: In early April, according to the KDPI, sixty members of the organization were hospitalized after Iranian agents attempted to poison members with thallium (*Agence France Presse*, 4/7/97). On June 3, 1997, a member of the KDPI was reportedly murdered in the Khalkan region of Iraq, and the next day, a bomb blew up underneath a vehicle of the Khabat organization, a dissident Iranian Kurdish group, in Solaymania, Iraq (*National Council of Resistance (NCR) Press Release*, 6/5/97). On August 15, 1997, an Iraqi civilian and two members of the KDPI were killed in Sulaymania, Iraq, in an attack by Iranian representa-

tives (*NCR Press Release*, 8/15/97). On August 19, a bus carrying members of KDPI was attacked by Iranian agents when traveling near Dokan, Iraq. Three members of KDPI were killed. On October 18, Iranian agents attacked a vehicle of a dissident Iranian Kurdish group in Iraqi Kurdistan, killing one (*Pinkerton's Global Intelligence Services*, 10/22/97). On December 3, 1997, Iranian agents killed Seyyed Jamal Nikjouyan, a member of the KDPI (*NCR Press Release*, 12/5/97). Iran also assassinated five members of the KDPI on December 8, 1997, near the Iraqi towns of Doukan and Kouysaneq (*Pinkerton's Global Intelligence Services*, 12/10/97).

SYRIA

Syria, one of the countries that was placed on the original list of state sponsors of international terrorism in 1979, is the only state sponsor of terror with which the United States maintains a resident ambassador. Furthermore, compared to the actions taken against the other four Middle Eastern terrorist states, only minimal U.S. sanctions were imposed on Syria, namely prohibition of U.S. economic assistance and military sales, controls on dual-use equipment which could support terrorism or military activities, and prohibitions of support for multilateral economic assistance.

According to *Patterns 1997*, "there is no evidence that Syrian officials have been directly involved in planning or executing international terrorist attacks since 1986." Syrian support for international terrorism can be broken down into several areas of involvement: as a safehaven, conduit, and facilitator for coordinating terrorism; as a base for the issuing of terrorist propaganda; and as a base for operations of the PKK, a terrorist group directly launching attacks from Syrian soil.

Syria as a Safehaven, Conduit, and Facilitator

Syria's primary contribution to international terrorism is the fact that it serves as a safehaven for several terrorist organizations—allowing them to live and work out of Syria. *Patterns 1997* notes that "several radical terrorist groups maintain training camps

or other facilities on Syrian territory . . . (and that Syria) grants a wide variety of terrorist groups basing privileges or refuge in areas of Lebanon's Bekaa Valley under Syrian control."

Of the terrorist groups based in Syria, Hizballah is the most active in Lebanon, predominantly in the Bekaa Valley and southern Lebanon. Iran's support for Hizballah is made easier by Syrian compliance. Weapons shipments from Iran to Hizballah via Syria have provided Hizballah with much of its firepower which it uses against Israeli forces in the security zone in southern Lebanon. As described above, such shipments continued in 1997.

According to *al-Ittihad*, during Syrian president Hafiz al-Asad's brief July trip to Tehran, Syria agreed to support Hamas and PIJ in carrying out operations inside Israel. The sources also said that all the members of the Hizballah Central Shura Council led by Hasan Nasrallah were in Tehran before President Asad's visit (*Abu Dhabi al-Ittihad*, 8/4/97).

Israel stated that it suspected suicide bombers responsible for attacks in Jerusalem acted on orders from members of Hamas living in Damascus (*Reuters*, 9/30/97). Specifically cited was a September 4 meeting, just hours after the Jerusalem bombing on that same day, by leaders of several radical Palestinian groups, the first time in months that a meeting of this kind was permitted. At the meeting, Hamas was congratulated by the others for its "good work" with the Jerusalem bombings (*Christian Science Monitor*, 9/24/97).

Other terrorist groups mentioned in *Patterns 1997* that are reputed to have training bases or headquarters in Syria or in the Syrian-controlled Bekaa Valley include PFLP-GC, PFLP, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), and the Abu Nidal Organization.

Syria as a Base for Terrorist Propaganda

Damascus is a haven for groups issuing claims for attacks and threats of new attacks, for organizing meetings and rallies, and for circulating general propaganda from terrorist organizations. In January, at the start of Ramadan, representatives of Hizballah, the PIJ, and Hamas spoke at a rally in Damascus

marking the first anniversary of the death of Hamas leader Yahya Ayyash, renewing their threats of suicide bombings in Israel (*Pinkerton's Global Intelligence Services*, 1/13/97). In October, PIJ leader Ramadan Shalah addressed by telephone from Damascus a PIJ rally in Gaza to mark the anniversary of the assassination of Fathi al-Shaqaqi (*Jerusalem Post*, 10/24/97). A month later, the Hamas military command in Damascus threatened new terror attacks on Israel (*Jerusalem Report*, 11/13/97).

Syria as a Base for the PKK

A major source of contention between Turkey and neighboring Syria has been Syrian operational support for the terrorist actions of the PKK. The focus of PKK attacks is southeastern Turkey where the PKK seeks to establish an independent Kurdish state. According to *Patterns 1997*, the PKK continues to receive "safehaven and modest aid from Syria, Iraq, and Iran." On May 21, Turkey accused these countries of sheltering PKK fighters (*Middle East Economic Digest*, 5/25/97). In September, Turkey's president Süleyman Demirel accused Syria of backing the PKK against Turkey (*Mideast Mirror*, 9/16/97). At the end of the year, Turkish television said five armed men were killed in a gunfight with security forces as they tried to cross the border from Syria (*BBC News*, 12/21/97).

SUDAN

Sudan has been on the list of state sponsors of international terrorism since August 1993. From 1993 through mid-1997, Sudan faced few U.S. sanctions, much like Syria. On November 3, President Clinton issued Executive Order 13067, which blocked all Sudanese assets in the United States and prohibited trade with Sudan except the import of gum arabic.

Sudan provides training ground for several of the world's international terrorist organizations. While the Sudanese government has been accused by several neighboring countries of sponsoring violent revolutionary movements—including insurgent groups in Eritrea, Ethiopia, Uganda, and Tunisia—it has also been very active in providing "refuge, lo-

gistical support such as training facilities, travel documents, and weapons to a variety of radical terrorist organizations" (*Statement by George E. Moose, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, before the Senate Subcommittee on Africa, 5/15/97*). As of 1997, Sudan provided a safehaven for three terrorists wanted in connection with the assassination attempt of Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak in 1995 as well as terrorists from organizations including Gama'at al-Islamiyya, GIA, Hizballah, the PIJ, the Abu Nidal Organization, and Hamas. Furthermore, *Patterns 1997* states that Sudan has also "condoned many of the objectionable activities of Iran, such as funneling assistance to terrorist and radical Islamic groups operating in and transiting through Sudan."

- In January 1997, *al-Ahram* reported that Egyptian state security police arrested five terrorists who came from Sudan after having trained in camps near Khartoum (*Cairo MENA, 1/27/97*). Shortly thereafter, Sudanese opposition leader Brig. Gen. 'Abd-al-'Aziz Khalid 'Uthman was noted as saying that his men found training camps where Iranian experts trained Sudanese in the areas of state security, intelligence and civil defense (*Al-Akhbar, 2/19/97*).
- The Egyptian government claimed that at least twenty international training camps exist in Sudan, seventeen of which are believed to be directly administered by the Sudanese government with the intention of training Muslim militants. One camp was reported to specialize in the training of individuals with the purpose of assassinating heads of state and other high-ranking political and governmental officials (*Jane's Intelligence Review, 3/1/97*).
- Following the Mubarak assassination attempt, Sudan announced that it had closed the Afghan and Arab training camps. However, in mid-1997, sources noted that all but one of the camps were relocated, with the one taken over by the Sudanese Popular Defense Forces (*al-Watan al-'Arabi, 8/9/97*).
- Information emerged in 1998 about Sudanese involvement with Saudi-born terrorist financier Osama Bin Laden. Although Bin Laden was told to leave Sudan in 1996, his terrorist Al Qaeda group retained an active presence in the country. According to a September 14, 1998 complaint requesting a warrant for

extradition from Germany of Al Qaeda lieutenant Mamdouh Mahmud Salim, during the period 1992–1996 while Bin Laden lived in Sudan, al Qaeda and the Sudanese government worked closely together on training and arming terrorists. The FBI complaint stated that al Qaeda "agreed to put aside its differences with Shi'a Muslim terrorist organizations, including the Government of Iran and its affiliated terrorist group Hizballah, to cooperate against the perceived common enemy, the United States and its allies," and that al Qaeda, Iran, and Sudan formed a "tripartite arrangement . . . to work together against the United States, Israel, and the West." It is unclear, however, if Bin Laden had a disguised financial interest in the pharmaceutical factory that the United States hit with cruise missiles in August 1998. The United States argued the factory was being used to produce chemical weapons, possibly for terrorist use.

LIBYA

Libya was one of the original countries placed on the U.S. list of state sponsors of international terrorism in 1979. According to *Patterns 1997*, Libya continued to provide support to several radical Palestinian groups, including the Abu Nidal Organization, the PFLP–GC, and the PIJ. Foreign concern with Libya as a state sponsor of international terrorism is largely because of Libya's involvement in two terrorist attacks nearly a decade ago: the bombings of Pan Am flight 103 in 1988 and UTA flight 772 in 1989.

- During 1997, Libya refused to turn over the two Libyan agents indicted for the Pan Am 103 bombing. The Libyan government proposed to resolve the crisis between it and the United Nations by turning over the Libyan agents to be tried under Scottish law in a neutral setting like the Netherlands. Although Britain and the United States agreed to this proposal in August 1998, Libya has not yet handed over the suspects.
- In addition, in January 1998, French officials ended their investigation of the UTA 772 bombing and concluded that Qaddafi's brother-in-law, Muhammad al-Sanusi was the mastermind behind

the attack. Six Libyans in total will be tried in absentia by a French criminal court in 1998 or 1999.

- In another decade-old incident, Musbah Abulgasem Eter, wanted in connection with the 1986 bombing of a Berlin discotheque, was arrested in Italy for extradition to Germany. Eter, a former member of the Libyan secret service, was detained in Rome as a result of a police phone tap in Germany, which traced calls to and from public phones in a Rome neighborhood known as the "African quarter." Three other people, two Libyans and an Italian, were also arrested and charged with aiding and abetting Eter (*Pinkerton's Global Intelligence Services*, 8/29/97).
- Libya's main support for current terrorism is financial. Brig. Gen. Abu-Bakr Yunus, commander-in-chief of the Libyan Armed Forces, voiced Libya's commitment to support the Palestinian opposition factions. Palestinian sources noted that PFLP and

DFLP have not received any financial aid from Libya since 1982. Meanwhile, other factions, such as Fatah the Uprising, PFLP-GC, and the Popular Struggle Front, are still receiving about \$50 million annually, less than they used to receive in the 1980s (*Amman al-Dustur*, 6/3/97).

- In addition, Libya continues to attack Libyan dissidents abroad. According to Libyan sources abroad, a bomb blew up at a residence of Libyan dissident Abdelmunem al-Houni's in Egypt. It is believed that Libyan government agents were behind the explosion. Egyptian authorities denied that the explosion was a bomb, instead saying that it was a gas pipe explosion (*Libya: News and Views*, 5/16/97).

Eytan Fisch was a 1997-1998 research assistant at The Washington Institute.

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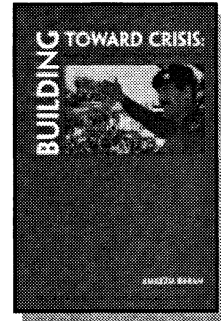
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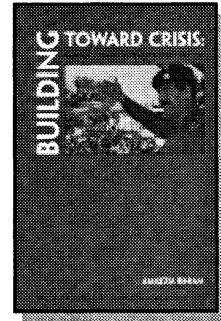
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