



The Department of State's Annual Report on Terrorism

Testimony of

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Before the House International Relations Committee
Subcommittee on
International Terrorism and Nonproliferation

May 12, 2005

THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE'S ANNUAL REPORT ON TERRORISM.
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INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM AND NONPROLIFERATION,
WASHINGTON, DC, 12 MAY 2005

Mr. Chairman, distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, my name is Raphael Perl. I am a senior foreign policy specialist with the Congressional Research Service of the Library of Congress. I thank you for the opportunity to be here today and to address issues relating to the Department of State's annual report to Congress on global terrorism, which is entitled this year, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2004*. In previous years this report was entitled *Patterns of Global Terrorism*, and prior to that, *Patterns of International Terrorism*. In my testimony I refer to this new report version as "*Country Reports*".

Focus of Testimony

My testimony will focus on two areas of potential concern to Congress:

1. The importance of numbers and data to sustain credibility of the report; and,
2. Options for consideration by Congress to strengthen the Department of State's reporting role in this area so vital to the security of our nation.

In discussing options, I remind the Committee that the Congressional Research Service (CRS) does not recommend any particular policy option or approach. Although I confine my discussion to selected options, CRS is prepared to address the merits and downsides of a full range of additional issues and options at the Subcommittee's behest.

This year's annual report to Congress has both a new title and a modified format. *Country Reports* continues to provide information on anti-terror cooperation by nations worldwide. It continues to list state sponsors of terrorism, which are subject to sanctions. However, this year statistical data on terrorist incidents are not included as an integral part of the report. They are provided and released concomitantly with the publication of *Country Reports* by the newly created National Counter Terrorism Center (NCTC). The NCTC will likely release more detailed statistical data later this year – perhaps as early as June 17th, the date that a new, congressionally-mandated report on terrorist sanctuaries is due.

It should be noted that this separation of the NCTC data from the *Country*

Reports may not be very user-friendly for readers of the reports. One option would be to include the NCTC data as an appendix.

The Importance of Data

As a researcher who has served both at the Congressional Research Service and at the National Academy of Engineering, I must stress the core importance of data. Data provide the context of, and basis for, subsequent analysis. Analysis without underlying data often lacks credibility. In the academic and scientific community, analysis without reference to data – even if logical and persuasive – is viewed with skepticism. For the purpose of maintaining credibility, an annual report to Congress on global terrorism would benefit from the availability of a significant compilation of relevant data. Although in most cases data are integrated either in the text or in an appendix of a report, at the very least data should be in some manner readily available elsewhere, in print or on the Internet, as appropriate.

Strengthening the Report

Overview

Looking at things afresh, what areas might an annual global report on terrorism address? What trends might it home in on? How might it be structured? How rigid or how loose might congressional reporting requirements be?

It has been some fifteen years since Congress mandated the first annual report on global terrorism. When the report was originally conceived as a reference document, the primary threat from terrorism was state-sponsored. But, since then, the threat has evolved, with Al Qaeda-affiliated groups and non-state sponsors of terrorism increasingly posing a major and more decentralized threat.

The terrorist threat we face today has greatly increased in complexity and danger. It has evolved to have a major economic aspect. Technology and the Internet are both major facilitators and mitigators of this threat, aiding both terrorists and those who seek to interdict them. It appears that, in today's globally interconnected world, the distinction between domestic and international is becoming increasingly blurred. And it appears that some terrorist groups may look to an expanding range of criminal activity to provide financial and logistical support for their causes.

Clearly the threat is becoming ever more global. The terrorist of the past wanted to change his country. The terrorist of today often wants to change the world. And as the gap between the haves and the have nots widens globally, increasingly the use of terror may become the "ballot box" for the dispossessed.

Many analysts suggest that terrorism today is rapidly assuming the characteristics of a global insurgency, with strong ideological and often religious motivations. More and more, the conflict is seen as a struggle for hearts and minds

of the vulnerable, with the media at the center of the battlefield.

Given these important changes since the report was originally conceived, how might they best be reflected in future reports?

Structural Issues and Options

The current report begins with several short chapters: legislative requirements, an overview, a brief analysis of global jihad and a description of international antiterrorism efforts. This is followed by country reports broken down by region, and finally, by a chapter on terrorist groups.

Much of the current report corresponds to the Department of State's structure of regional bureaus, which include Africa, Europe, East Asia and Pacific, Europe and Eurasia, the Near East and North Africa, South Asia and the Western Hemisphere. However, as international terrorism and, more particularly, Islamist militancy become more decentralized, regional or country-specific presentations alone may not reflect the wider picture, and an expanded transregional focus may add value.

A report which also includes a number of supplemental categories of information about terrorism could prove useful for congressional purposes, especially if it presents facts and data, along with understandable tables and graphics.

An integral question is who should prepare and publish such data and what should they measure? The NCTC might well be tasked by Congress or its own administrators to develop meaningful data compilations on terrorism, including and going beyond those eliminated from the State Department report this year. Ideally, some flexibility should be granted in the development and publication of this data. A series of seminars and workshops to explore these possibilities, with congressional participation, might prove useful in this regard.

Analysis, including impacts – not merely reformulating the numbers – is another important element; Congress could specify subject areas of particular interest, such as terrorist involvement with weapons of mass destruction or narcotics trafficking.

Also useful would be a set of meaningful predictions, where possible based on trends, projections, survey data and intelligence inputs where available. Finally, clearly enunciated policy statements might be set forth, including goals and objectives, as well as criteria to measure progress.

The Government Accountability Office uses goals, objectives and measurement criteria in order to report on operational efficiency. These are also needed to facilitate decisions on funding and resource allocation. The Government

Performance and Results Act (GPRA) has similar requirements. And the Department of State already includes such criteria in its Mission and Bureau performance plans, and might be able to develop some variation appropriate to its report.

The more specific Congress can be about requirements and structure of the report, the more pertinent and responsive the product is likely to become. To the degree that many perceive the presentation by region and country as providing a useful and informative guide to international cooperation, this format could be retained. State might then also present analysis and predictions in a manner tailored to its own functional organization, which includes Political, Economic, Consular, Administrative, Public Diplomacy and Commercial components, plus Diplomatic Security and other lateral offices, with each component providing relevant but different outlooks on the challenges and impacts of terrorism .

In addition to required information and structure, the Department of State might be encouraged to provide supplementary facts, analysis, predictions, and other relevant information in separate chapters or annexes without prejudice for future years. This flexibility could maximize the use of the Department's expertise by including such topics as the linkage of terrorism to weapons of mass destruction, terrorist narcotics activities, and other areas of interest without the possibility of creating requirements that may outlive their usefulness. Some of this has already been legislated by Congress in Public Laws 108-458 and 108-487.

The public diplomacy elements of the report are of great relevance to terrorism policies, given the amalgamation several years ago of the Department of State and the U.S. Information Agency. Since the decommissioning of the Strategic Information Initiative, State appears to have the sole departmental charter for winning hearts and minds abroad, a critical strategic component of any long-term, reality-based, and forward-looking antiterrorism strategy.

Arguably, the report is an appropriate vehicle for describing, among other results, the trends in public opinion polls abroad concerning aspects of terrorism or Islamist militancy, when available or significant. The report might discuss current public diplomacy initiatives which attempt to mitigate support for terrorism and how successful they have been.

The report's usefulness to Congress would likely be enhanced by inclusion of classified appendices to inform Congress about sensitive issues and analysis. Often countries do not want it made public that they go out of their way to assist the United States in certain sensitive anti-terrorist operations. And often it may not be productive to strongly criticize countries in a public document if the feeling is that they can be won over. Yet, clearly this is information of interest and importance to Congress.

After the structure of the report is generally determined, the baseline content could also be defined. Further options concerning content and subject matter are discussed below.

Report Content

Regardless of whether information is presented in country reports or in separate chapters (or both), the report might include, at a minimum, information of potential interest to Congress such as the following, some of which is already present:

- *Levels of state cooperation* (or lack thereof) in antiterrorism efforts. Which states support or incite terror? Which states countenance or allow terror? Which states stand firmly opposed to it? Which countries are cooperative, but vulnerable? Which are exemplary?
- *Responsiveness of international organizations* to antiterrorism programs, going beyond the United Nations to encompass regional organizations and others, such as Interpol and the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).
- *Profiles and data on major terrorist groups*, as well as on emerging groups, including activities, capabilities and attributed significant incidents.
- *Trends*, including all reported incidents of major significance, categorized by location, target and method of attack, with emphasis on incidents affecting U.S. interests. Data on fund-raising and recruiting trends would likely be of interest to Congress as well.
- *Attitudes/factors contributing to terrorism* and its support.
- *Economic consequences of terrorism*.
- *Special Topics*: some options might include:
 - Terrorism and weapons of mass destruction.
 - Links to narcotics and organized crime.

- Fund-raising and money laundering.

 - Economic impact of specific major attacks.

 - Impact of technology, including the internet, on terror and counter-terror.
- *Proposed action agenda*; goals and objectives for the year ahead.

Conclusion

In combating terrorism, we are engaged in an ongoing campaign, not a war in the traditional sense. Both Congress and the Administration are heavily committed to this open-ended effort. Communicating the best information available as clearly as possible to the Congress will benefit the United States in this campaign.

As in the past, a major component of any meaningful annual report to Congress on international terrorism will likely focus on the successes and failures of diplomacy and the levels of cooperation provided by states in the global campaign against terror. A well-structured, comprehensive report could include supporting information, profiles on major and emerging terrorist groups, discussion of major developments or trends in terrorist activity – especially those directed against U.S. personnel or interests – and evaluation of the impact of terrorism on individual nations and the global economy.

The report would likely continue to include a potentially changing array of special topics, supplemented by presentation of a policy-driven action agenda with both short-term and long-term goals and objectives, in which the “war of ideas” plays a significant role. Such a report could serve congressional needs by providing an important reference tool and policy instrument in support of the nation’s global campaign against terror. Providing the Department of State with flexibility while mandating a periodic review of both structure and content could help ensure its ongoing effectiveness.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my formal testimony. I would be honored to answer any questions the Subcommittee might have.

Thank you.