CRS Report for Congress

The Department of State's Patterns of Global Terrorism Report: Trends, State Sponsors, and Related Issues

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Summary

This report highlights trends and data found in the State Department's annual *Patterns of Global Terrorism* report*, (Patterns 2003)* and addresses selected issues relating to its content. This report will not be updated.

On April 29, 2004, the Department of State released its annual *Patterns of Global Terrorism* report . Data at release showed minimal change in the number of terrorist attacks *worldwide* in 2003 over 2002 levels — a decrease from 198 attacks to 190. In 2003, the overall number of reported *anti-U.S.* attacks remained more or less constant as well, 82 anti-U.S. attacks in 2003 as opposed to 77 attacks in the previous year. In 2003, the number of *persons killed* in international terrorist attacks was 307, down from 725 in 2002. In 2003, *persons wounded* numbered 1,593, down from 2013 the previous year. In 2003, as in 2002, both the highest number of attacks (70) and highest number of casualties (159 dead and 951 wounded) continued to occur in Asia. Notably, the report defines terrorist acts as incidents directed against noncombatants. Thus, attacks in Iraq on military targets are not included.

Patterns, a work widely perceived as a standard, authoritative reference tool on terrorist activity, trends, and groups, has been subject to periodic criticism that it is unduly influenced by domestic, other foreign policy, political and economic considerations.

This year for the first time, data contained in *Patterns —* which some critics in Congress view as incomplete if not flawed — was provided by the newly operational Terrorist Threat Integration Center (TTIC). TTIC is providing an errata sheet, which will include, among other information, data on terrorist attacks after November 11, 2003.

It has been some fifteen years since Congress mandated the first *Patterns* report. At the time when the report was originally conceived as a reference document, the primary threat from terrorism was state sponsored. Since then, the threat has evolved with Al Qaeda affiliated groups and non-state sponsors increasingly posing a major threat. Given the increased complexity and danger posed by the terrorist threat, one option available to Congress and the executive branch is to take a fresh look at *Patterns,* its structure and content.

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Overview of 2003 Terrorist Trends

On April 29, 2004, the Department of State released its *Patterns of Global Terrorism* report (hereafter referred to as *Patterns 2003*).[1] Data, as originally published, show minimal change in the number of terrorist attacks *worldwide* in 2003 over 2002 levels — a decrease from 199 attacks to 190. In 2003, the overall number of reported *anti-U.S.* attacks remained more or less constant as well, 82 anti-US attacks in 2003 as opposed to 77 attacks in the previous year. The report indicates that *worldwide deaths* from international terrorist activity were down roughly 58% in 2003 (from 725 to 307) and the *number of wounded* was down roughly 21% from 2,013 to 1,593. In 2003, as in 2002, both the highest number of attacks (70) and highest number of casualties (159 dead and 951 wounded) continued to occur in Asia where the number of attacks declined roughly by one-third, and the number of casualties declined roughly 13%. The report emphasizes that most of the attacks in Iraq that occurred during Operation Iraqi Freedom do not meet the U.S. definition of international terrorism employed by *Patterns* because they were directed at combatants, that is, "American and coalition forces on duty."[2]

In additional to statistical charts, *Patterns,* includes in its Appendixes a summary chronology of significant terrorist incidents and background information on U.S. designated foreign terrorist organizations and other terrorist groups.[3]

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[1] *Patterns* is an annual report to Congress required by Title 22 of the United States Code, Section 2656f(a).

[2] See 22 United States Code, Section 2656f(d) which defines acts of *international* terrorism as meaning "involving citizens or the territory of more than one country." Thus, excluded here would be major *domestic* terrorist acts in a country which might have major national or international impact. "Terrorism" is defined as "premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience". N.B., *Patterns* includes in this definition attacks on military personnel who are unarmed, or not on duty, and attacks on military installations, or unarmed military personnel, when a state of military hostilities does not exist at the site.

[3] For a detailed and authoritative discussion of Foreign Terrorist Organizations and the criteria for their designation, see CRS Report RL32223, *Foreign Terrorist Organizations* by Audrey Kurth Cronin *et al.* and CRS Report RL32120, *The FTO List and Congress: Sanctioning Designated Terrorist Organizations* by Audrey Kurth Cronin.

State Sponsors of Terrorism

In addition to data on terrorist trends, groups, and activities worldwide, the report provides a description as to why countries are on the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism that are subject to U.S. sanctions. Thus, included in *Patterns* are detailed data on the seven countries currently on the "terrorism list": Cuba, Iran, Iraq, Libya, North Korea, Sudan and Syria. U.S. Administration officials maintain that the practice of designating and reporting on the activities of the state sponsors of terrorism list and concomitant sanctions policy has contributed significantly to a reduction in the overt — and apparently overall — activity level of states supporting terrorism in the past decade. Libya and Sudan are frequently cited as examples of such success.

Countries designated as state sponsors of terrorism are subject to severe U.S. export controls — particularly of dual use technology. The Anti-Terrorism and Arms Export Amendments Act of 1989 (P.L. 101-222) prohibits export of dual use items, as well sales of military items and foreign economic assistance to countries on the terrorism list. Also, the Foreign Assistance Act prohibits providing foreign aid to these designated countries. Section 6(j) of the 1979 Export Administration Act stipulates that Congress must be notified at least 30 days in advance before any licenses are issued for exporting equipment or services that could be used for terrorist or military purposes. Other sanctions include denying foreign tax credits on income earned in those countries.

The degree of support for, or involvement in, terrorist activities typically varies dramatically from nation to nation. In 2003, of the seven on the U.S. terrorism list, Iran continued to be characterized on one extreme as an active supporter of terrorism: a nation that uses terrorism as an instrument of policy or warfare beyond its borders. Closer to the middle of the spectrum is Syria. Although not formally detected in an active role since 1986, *Patterns* reports that the Assad regime reportedly uses groups in Syria and Lebanon to export terror into Israel and allows groups to train in territory under its control. On the less active end of the spectrum, one might place countries such as Cuba or North Korea, which at the height of the Cold War were more active, but in recent years have seemed to settle for a more passive role of granting ongoing safe haven to previously admitted terrorists. Also at the less active end of the spectrum, and arguably falling off it, are Libya and notably Sudan, which reportedly has stepped up counter-terrorism cooperation with U.S. law enforcement and intelligence agencies after the attacks of September 11, 2001.

Country Highlights

Terrorism List Nations

Iran. *Patterns 2003* again designates Iran as the "most active" state sponsor of international terrorism. The report, which incorporates data from U.S. and allied intelligence services, notes that Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard and Ministry of Intelligence and Security were "involved in the planning of and support for terrorist acts and continued to exhort a variety of groups that use terrorism to pursue their

goals."[4] Actions cited include (1) providing safe haven to members of Al Qaeda; (2) providing money, weapons and training to HAMAS, Hizballah, and Arab Palestinian rejectionist groups; and (3) helping members of the Ansar al Islam group in Iraq transit and find safe haven in Iran. The report notes that Iranian officials have acknowledged detaining Al Qaeda operatives during 2003, but have resisted calls to transfer them to their countries of origin. On December 19, 2003, Iran announced it will sign an agreement allowing international inspections of nuclear sites. Iran is not considered to be a likely candidate for removal from the Department of State's Terrorism Sponsors List in the coming year.

North Korea. North Korea, designated a member of the "axis of evil" by President Bush in his 2003 State of the Union Address, is not known to have sponsored any terrorist acts since 1987 according to the report. However, it continued to give sanctuary to hijackers affiliated with the Japanese Red Army. *Patterns 2003* stresses that North Korea announced it planned to sign several antiterrorism conventions, but did not take any substantive steps to cooperate in efforts to combat terrorism. Although *Patterns* notes that North Korea's support for international terrorism appears limited at present, its efforts to restart its nuclear program and its role in proliferation of ballistic missiles and missile technology suggest that its removal from the terrorism list will not occur anytime soon.

Iraq. Iraq, under Saddam Hussein, had been cited in the 2002 *Patterns* report for a longstanding policy of providing safe haven and bases for terrorist groups and as having laid the groundwork for possible attacks against civilian and military targets in the United States and other Western nations throughout 2002. However, in the event of a substantive regime change, a nation may be removed from the terrorism list. Under U.S. law, (Paragraph 6 (j) (4) of the Export Administration Act, the President must first report to Congress that the government of the country concerned: (1) does not support terrorism and (2) has provided assurances that it will not support terrorism in the future. On May 7, 2003, President Bush suspended all sanctions against Iraq applicable to state sponsors of terrorism, which had the practical effect of putting Iraq on a par with non terrorist states. Iraq is expected to be removed from the terrorism list as soon as it has its own government in place that pledges not to support terrorist acts in the future, a requirement expected to be met shortly after June 30, 2004. The report notes that the line between insurgency and terrorism has become "increasingly blurred" in Iraq, as attacks on civilian targets have become more common. By the end of 2003, coalition forces had detained more than 300 suspected foreign fighters in Iraq[5].

Libya. In 2003 Libya reiterated assurances to the U.N. Security Council that it had renounced terrorism, had shared intelligence with Western intelligence agencies, had taken steps to resolve matters related to its past support of terrorism, and on December 19, 2003 announced it would rid itself of weapons of mass

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[4] *Patterns 2003*, p. 88

[5] See generally CRS Report RL32217, *Iraq and Al Qaeda: Allies or Not?*, by Kenneth Katzman.

destruction and allow inspections of its nuclear facilities.[6] The report states that in 2003, Libya held to its pattern in recent years of curtailing support for international terrorists, although Tripoli continued in 2003 to maintain contact with "some past terrorist clients." President Bush lifted sanctions against Libya on April 23, 2004, after successful intelligence cooperation on WMD issues and efforts by Libya to resolve compensation for Pam Am flight 103 survivors.

Syria. Syria, according to *Patterns 2003,* continued to provide political and material support to Palestinian rejectionist groups and continued to permit Iran to use Damascus as a transhipment point for resupplying Hizballah in Lebanon. On a positive note, the report notes that Damascus has cooperated with other governments "against al Qaeda, the Taliban, and other terrorist organizations and individuals," has discouraged signs of public support for Al Qaeda, including in the media and mosques, and has made efforts to tighten its borders with Iraq to limit the movement of anti-Coalition foreign fighters. On May 11, 2004, President Bush imposed economic and trade sanctions against Syria under the Syrian Accountability Act,[7] but also waived some of the provisions, notably provisions applying to the export of select items.[8]

Cuba. Cuba, a terrorism list carryover from the cold war has, according to *Patterns 2003*, "remained opposed to the U.S.- led Coalition prosecuting the global war on terrorism"[9] and continued to provide support to designated terrorist organizations. It is considered unlikely that Cuba will be removed from the terrorism list, absent a regime change.[10]

Sudan. Sudan is generally considered by observers to be a strong candidate for removal from the terrorism list. *Patterns 2003* claims that the nation has "deepened its cooperation with the U.S. Government," producing significant progress in combating terrorist activity, but "areas of concern" remain, notably the active presence in Sudan of Hamas and the Palestine Islamic Jihad (PIJ). In 2004, Sudan was removed from the list of countries designated by the Secretary of State as not fully cooperating with the United States in the war on terrorism.

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[6] See generally CRS Report IB93109, *Libya,* by Clyde R. Mark.

[7] P.L. 108-175.

[8] See CRS Report IB92075, *Syria: US Relations and Bilateral Issues* by Alfred B. Prados.

[9] See *Patterns 2003*, p.86.

[10] See generally, CRS Report RL32251, *Cuba and the State Sponsors of Terrorism List,* by Mark Sullivan.

Report Issues

Politicization of Report

Some critics of *Patterns* and its designation of state sponsors of terrorism charge that the *Patterns 2003* report generally, and specifically its reporting of activities of nations, is unduly influenced by a complex web of overlapping and sometimes competing political and economic agendas and concerns. As cases in point, they refer to activity cited in *Patterns* reports used to justify retaining Cuba and North Korea on the state sponsors list.[11] Others suggest that *Patterns'* heavy focus on state sponsors of terror make such reports less useful in a world where terrorist activity is increasingly neither state supported nor state countenanced. Still others ask whether, and to what degree, *Patterns* supports a sanctions policy that is unrealistically achievable and too unilateral when imposing sanctions on nations in which U.S. and allied economic and strategic geopolitical interests run high.

However, *Patterns* in its current form is not intended to set policy. Thus, one potential shortcoming of the criticisms cited above is that they are either policy oriented or revolve around disagreement with policy issues instead of centering on disagreement with the data and analysis presented in *Patterns* reports. Moreover, such criticisms, they maintain, arguably place too much emphasis on the state sponsors section of P*atterns,* with little or no emphasis on the plethora of useful data provided in the report on trends in terrorist activity and background on terrorist organizations.

Over- or Under-Emphasizing Levels of Cooperation

Particularly strong have been suggestions by some that *Patterns* plays down undesirable levels of counter-terrorism cooperation and progress in the case of nations seen as vital to the global campaign against terror. *Patterns 2003*, in contrast to pre "9/11" report versions, is silent about Pakistan's alleged ongoing support for Kashmiri militants and their attacks against the population of India. Some critics argue that *Patterns 2003* also falls far short of criticizing Saudi Arabia, perceived by many analysts as a slow, unwilling, or halfhearted ally in curbing or cracking down on activities which support or spawn terrorism activities outside its borders. In contrast, *Patterns 2003* cites Saudi Arabia as "an excellent example of a nation increasingly focusing its political will to fight terrorism." Some suggest, however, that often at play here is simply a desire to put the best face on terrorist related relationships in the hopes of obtaining better cooperation in the future.

On the flip side of the coin is an issue, yet to be resolved, of how to inform Congress and give countries credit in *Patterns* for cooperation in such matters as intelligence or renditions when, for domestic political concerns, they do not want this made public. One option might be to produce more frequently a classified annex to the *Patterns* report which has been done in the past. A downside, however, is that

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[11] See CRS Report RL32251, *Cuba and the State Sponsors of Terrorism List* by Mark Sullivan.

preparation of a classified version is much more time consuming for those tasked with simultaneously preparing the public document.

Review and Restructuring of *Patterns*

Some also suggest that *Pattern*s reports could be stronger in their coverage of the ideological and economic impact of terrorism on individual nations and the global economy. One issue here, as raised by some observers, is whether *Patterns* places too much emphasis on quantifying and measuring terrorist success in terms of physical damage to persons and property when terror groups may increasingly be measuring mid-and long term success by economic and political criteria.

Going beyond the question, raised by some, of any perceived shortcomings in data, which may or may not be found in *Patterns 2003*, is the question of the quality of strategic analysis of the data provided. To what degree might such analysis be enhanced? Some observers suggest the issue here is the degree to which *Patterns* is designed to reflect, or might be construed to reflect, a "body count" reporting mentality.[12] Would there be benefits to Congress and the counter-terrorism policy community if the focus of *Patterns* reports was less on presenting statistics and facts, and more on gaining meaning from the data? And if so, how might Congress effect such a change in policy focus? Admittedly, overall numbers by themselves may not always present a complete picture. For example, each small pipeline bombing in Colombia is cited as one incident in *Patterns* as would be a major terrorist incident as the multiple train bombings in Madrid in March 2004. Another possible shortcoming, some note, is that *Patterns* sometimes may not include, or adequately note, incidents that are not international in nature but which may have a major political or economic impact on the target nation and well beyond it.

Indeed, *Patterns 2003* has been subject to criticism on the issue of data completeness or accuracy, as well as on the issue of data relevance.[13] In a May 17, 2004 letter to Secretary of State Colin L. Powell, Henry A. Waxman, Ranking Minority Member of the House Committee on Government Reform, suggests that data in *Patterns 2003* which indicate that non-significant terrorist attacks have declined in the last two years is in sharp contrast to independent analysis of the same data which concludes that significant terrorist attacks (acts causing, or reasonably expected to cause: death, serious personal injury or major property damage) actually reached a 20-year high in 2003.[14] Also questioned is completeness, if not factual accuracy, of the data relied upon in the *Patterns 2003* report. The list of significant incidents in *Patterns 2003,* as originally disseminated*,* concludes abruptly on

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[12] Note that this is part of a much broader policy debate, in which CRS takes no position, regarding the place in U.S. anti-terror strategy of short-term measures designed to produce physical security versus long-term strategic measures designed to win "hearts and minds." Arguably, some suggest the course of wisdom is a mix of policies designed to win "both the battle and the war", policies which require reporting, data, and analysis supportive of both tactical and strategic objectives.

[13] See "Faulty Terror Report Card," by Alan B. Krueger and David Laitin, *Washington Post* guest editorial, May 17, 2002, p. A21.

[14] See note 13, *supra*.

November 11, 2003, presumably therefore, not counting major multiple terrorists attacks that occurred later in the year.[15]

The statistical data which forms the basis for *Patterns* have traditionally been provided to the State Department by the CIA. More recently this function has been transferred to the newly operational Terrorist Threat Integration Center (TTIC).[16] TTIC is providing an errata sheet to correct incomplete data.[17]

Conclusion

It has been some fifteen years since Congress mandated the first *Patterns* report. At the time the report was originally conceived as a reference document, the primary threat from terrorism was state sponsored. Since then, the threat has evolved, with Al Qaeda affiliated groups and non-state sponsors increasingly posing a major threat. Over the years, the report has increased in length and expanded in scope. It has been disseminated on the internet, translated into five additional languages, and is widely recognized as a primary resource on terrorist activities and groups. However, in view of the earlier- noted data issues, the report may be subject to increased criticism and scrutiny. In light of the high level of international attention attached to the report and the increased complexity and danger posed by the terrorist threat, some observers have suggested that a thorough Executive/Congressional review of *Patterns*, its structure and content, may be timely and warranted.

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[15] [http://www/house.gov/reform/min/pdfs_108_2/pdfs_inves/pdf_admin_global_terror_report_may_17_let.pdf]
Note that conversations between a CRS analyst and State Department and TTIC staff in May 2004 produced suggestions that the end of year data omission may have been to some degree the result of a desire to meet the publication deadline for the printed version of the report. Note also that data and analysis provided CRS by Larry Johnson, a former Officer in the State Department's Office of Counter Terrorism and now Director of Berg Associates, indicates that the ratio of significant terrorist incidents to total terrorist actions rose fairly steadily from 10% in 1981 to 90% in 2003. See [http://www.berg-associates.com].

[16] For information on TTIC, see CRS Report RS21283, *Homeland Security: Intelligence Support* by Richard Best. President Bush, in his State of the Union address delivered on January 28, 2003, called for the establishment of a new Terrorist Threat Integration Center (TTIC) that would merge and analyze all threat information in a single location under the direction of the Director of Central Intelligence [DCI]. Included in TTIC are representatives of the CIA's Counterterrorist Center (CTC) and the FBI's Counterterrorism Division, along with elements of other agencies, including DOD and DHS. TTIC began operations on May 1, 2004.

[17] Some observers suggest that TTIC's omissions of data may well give rise to questions about the overall ability and effectiveness of TTIC in assuming and performing newly assigned tasks.

Patterns of Global Terrorism Data, 2002-2003

	2002	2003	% Change
Worldwide Overview			
No. of attacks [a]	198	190	- 4.04
No. of deaths	725	307	- 57.66
No. of injured	2,013	1,593	- 20.86
No. of anti-American acts [b]	77	82	+6.49
No. of American casualties [c]			
Dead	27	35	+29.63
Wounded	35	17	- 51.43
Attacks by Region			
Africa	5	4	- 20.0
Asia	101	70	- 30.69
Eurasia	8	2	- 75.0
Latin America	46	53	+28.26
Middle East	29	37	+27.59
North America	0	0	0
Western Europe	9	24	+166.67
Casualties by Region			
Africa	12	11	- 8.33
Asia	1,283	1,110	- 13.48
Eurasia [d]	615	5	- 99.12
Latin America	54	12	- 77.78
Middle East	772	760	- 1.55
North America	0	0	0
Western Europe	6	2	- 66.67
Attacks by Target Category			
Business	122	93	- 23.77
Diplomat	14	15	+7.74
Government	17	13	- 23.53
Military	1	2	+100.0
Other	83	84	+1.20

Note: Based on data originally published in *Patterns 2003*. Traditionally, this data had been provided to the State Department by the Central Intelligence Agency. More recently this function has been transferred to the newly operational Terrorist Threat Integration Center (TTIC). Periodic requests from analysts at the Department of State and from analysts at the Congressional Research Service in April 2004 for quarterly access to an unclassified version of the data base of terrorist incidents have, to date, not resulted in access to the data desired.

a. Compared with 487 attacks in 1982.
b. In 2003 the highest percent of targets were businesses (67%); the most common method of attack was bombing (71%).
c. Casualties include dead and wounded.
d. 2002 figures include relatively high casualties in a number of anti-Russian attacks, such as the October 2002 Moscow theater attack.