



CIA Red Cell special memorandum on "What If Foreigners See the United States as an 'Exporter of Terrorism'"

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Description

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This CIA "Red Cell" report from February 2, 2010, looks at what will happen if it is internationally understood that the United States is an exporter of terrorism; 'Contrary to common belief, the American export of terrorism or terrorists is not a recent phenomenon, nor has it been associated only with Islamic radicals or people of Middle Eastern, African or South Asian ethnic origin. This dynamic belies the American belief that our free, open and integrated multicultural society lessens the allure of radicalism and terrorism for US citizens.' The report looks at a number cases of US exported terrorism, including attacks by US based or financed Jewish, Muslim and Irish-nationalism terrorists. It concludes that foreign perceptions of the US as an "Exporter of Terrorism" together with US double standards in international law, may lead to noncooperation in renditions (including the arrest of CIA officers) and the decision to not share terrorism related intelligence with the United States.

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CIA Red Cell

A Red Cell Special Memorandum

5 February 2010

This memo was prepared by the CIA Red Cell, which has been charged by the Director of Intelligence with taking a pronounced "out-of-the-box" approach that will provoke thought and offer an alternative viewpoint on the full range of analytic issues. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the CIA Red Cell at (703) 482-6918 / 482-0169 or 44462/50127, secure. (C)

What If Foreigners See the United States as an "Exporter of Terrorism"? (S//NF)

Much attention has been paid recently to the increasing occurrence of American-grown Islamic terrorists conducting attacks against US targets, primarily in the homeland. Less attention has been paid to homegrown terrorism, not exclusively Muslim terrorists, exported overseas to target non-US persons. This report examines the implications of what it would mean for the US to be seen increasingly as an incubator and "exporter of terrorism." (S//NF)

Contrary to common belief, the American export of terrorism or terrorists is not a recent phenomenon, nor has it been associated only with Islamic radicals or people of Middle Eastern, African or South Asian ethnic origin. This dynamic belies the American belief that our free, open and integrated multicultural society lessens the allure of radicalism and terrorism for US citizens.

- Late last year five young Muslim American men traveled from northern Virginia to Pakistan allegedly to join the Pakistani Taliban and to engage in jihad. Their relatives contacted the FBI after they disappeared without telling anyone, and then Pakistani authorities arrested them as they allegedly attempted to gain access to al-Qa'ida training facilities.
- In November 2008, Pakistani-American David Headley conducted surveillance in support of the Lashkar-i-Tayyiba (LT) attack in Mumbai, India that killed more than 160 people. LT induced him to change his name from Daood Gilani to David Headley to facilitate his movement between the US, Pakistan, and India.
- Some American Jews have supported and even engaged in violent acts against perceived enemies of Israel. In 1994, Baruch Goldstein, an American Jewish doctor from New York, emigrated to Israel, joined the extremist group Kach, and killed 29 Palestinians during their prayers in the mosque at the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron which helped to trigger a wave of bus bombings by HAMAS in early 1995.
- Some Irish-Americans have long provided financial and material support for violent efforts to compel the United Kingdom to relinquish control of Northern Ireland. In the 1880s, Irish-American members of Clan na Gael dynamited Britain's Scotland Yard, Parliament, and the Tower of London, and detonated bombs at several stations in the London underground. In the twentieth century, Irish-Americans provided most of the financial support sent to the Irish Republican Army (IRA). The US-based Irish Northern Aid Committee (NORAID), founded in the late 1960s, provided the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) with money that was frequently used for arms purchases. Only after repeated high-level British requests and then London's support for our bombing of Libya in the 1980s did the US Government crack down on Irish-American support for the IRA. (S//NF)

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American Freedoms Facilitate Terrorist Recruitment and Operations (S//NF)

Primarily we have been concerned about Al-Qa'ida infiltrating operatives into the United States to conduct terrorist attacks, but AQ may be increasingly looking for Americans to operate overseas. Undoubtedly Al-Qa'ida and other terrorist groups recognize that Americans can be great assets in terrorist operations overseas because they carry US passports, don't fit the typical Arab-Muslim profile, and can easily communicate with radical leaders through their unfettered access to the internet and other modes of communication.

- Terrorist groups such as Al-Qa'ida have surely noticed the ease with which Headley was able to travel multiple times on a US visa between the US, Pakistan, and India without arousing suspicion from officials.
- Al-Qa'ida and other extremist groups have also probably noticed that the US Government has been more concerned with preventing attacks on the US by homegrown terrorists or foreigners than with Americans going overseas to carry out attacks in other countries. Most foreign governments do not suspect that American citizens would plot or perpetrate attacks against their citizens within their borders. Foreign terrorists have recruited homegrown US extremists for attacks abroad and are likely to increase the use of this method because so far it has slipped below the radar of the governments of the US and other countries.
- The ubiquity of internet services around the world and the widespread use of English on popular websites such as Youtube, Facebook, Myspace, Twitter and various blogs enable radical clerics and terrorist recruiters to bypass America's physical borders and influence US citizens. For example, a self-proclaimed recruiter for the Pakistani Taliban reportedly contacted the five men in northern Virginia via YouTube and then exchanged coded emails with the group. Terrorists apparently know that detection is especially difficult in cases where the potential US recruit is not affiliated with any known terrorist group. (S//NF)

Impact on Foreign Relations if US Seen as "Exporter of Terrorism" (S//NF)

If the US were seen as an exporter of terrorism, foreign partners may be less willing to cooperate with the United States on extrajudicial activities, including detention, transfer, and interrogation of suspects in third party countries. As a recent victim of high-profile terrorism originating from abroad, the US Government has had significant leverage to press foreign regimes to acquiesce to requests for extraditing terrorist suspects from their soil. However, if the US were seen as an "exporter of terrorism," foreign governments could request a reciprocal arrangement that would impact US sovereignty.

- Foreign regimes could request information on US citizens they deem to be terrorists or terrorist supporters, or even request the rendition of US citizens. US failure to cooperate could result in those governments refusing to allow the US to extract terrorist suspects from their soil, straining alliances and bilateral relations.
- In extreme cases, US refusal to cooperate with foreign government requests for extradition might lead some governments to consider secretly extracting US citizens suspected of foreign terrorism from US soil. Foreign intelligence operations on US soil to neutralize or even assassinate individuals in the US deemed to be a threat are not without precedent. Before the US entered World War II, British intelligence carried out information operations against prominent US citizens deemed to be isolationists or sympathetic to the Nazis. Some historians who have examined relevant archives even suspect that British intelligence officers assassinated Nazi agents on US soil. (S//NF)

Foreign perception of the US as an “exporter of terrorism” also raises difficult legal issues for the US, its foreign allies, and international institutions. To date, the US is not a signatory to the International Criminal Court (ICC) and instead, has pursued Bilateral Immunity Agreements (BIAs) with other countries to ensure immunity for US nationals from ICC prosecution. The US has threatened to terminate economic aid and withdraw military assistance with countries that do not accede to BIAs.

- If foreign regimes believe the US position on rendition is too one-sided, favoring the US, but not them, they could obstruct US efforts to detain terrorism suspects. For example, in 2005 Italy issued criminal arrest warrants for US agents involved in the abduction of an Egyptian cleric and his rendition to Egypt. The proliferation of such cases would not only challenge US bilateral relations with other countries but also damage global counterterrorism efforts.
- If foreign leaders see the US refusing to provide intelligence on American terrorism suspects or to allow witnesses to testify in their courts, they might respond by denying the same to the US. In 2005 9/11 suspect Abdelghani Mzoudi was acquitted by a German court because the US refused to allow Ramzi bin al-Shibh, a suspected ringleader of the 9/11 plot who was in US custody, to testify. More such instances could impede actions to lock up terrorists, whether in the US or abroad, or result in the release of suspects. (S//NF)

An hourglass graphic where the top bulb contains a globe of the Earth. The neck of the hourglass is narrow, and the bottom bulb is larger and contains a lighter, semi-transparent globe. The entire graphic is rendered in shades of blue and grey.

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