



MINORITY STAFF  
COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
JUNE 22, 2004

## Fact Sheet

---

# State Department Issues Revised Terrorism Data

---

Today, the State Department issued revised data for its annual report, *Patterns of Global Terrorism 2003*. The new data, which represents a good-faith effort by the State Department to correct serious mistakes in its initial 2003 report, shows a major increase in deaths and injuries from terrorist attacks in 2003. The number of “significant” terrorism attacks reached a 20-year high in 2003.

### NUMBER OF SIGNIFICANT TERRORIST ATTACKS

When the State Department released the initial terrorism report in April 2004, the report stated that terrorist attacks in 2003 were “the lowest annual total of international terrorist attacks since 1969.”<sup>1</sup> According to Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage, the data in the report was “clear evidence that we are prevailing in the fight” against terror.<sup>2</sup> In a letter transmitting the report to Congress, the State Department said the data was “an indication of the great progress that has been made in fighting terrorism.”<sup>3</sup>

The revised report undercuts these assertions. The State Department now reports that there were 175 significant terrorist events in 2003. This is the highest level of significant terrorist events in 20 years. Since 2001, the number of significant terrorist attacks has increased by 41%.

### NUMBER OF FATALITIES AND INJURIES

In addition, the number of fatalities and injuries reported in the new data is more than double the number reported in the initial report. According to the new data, 625 people were killed in terrorist attacks in 2003, more than double the 307 people reported in the April report. Similarly, the number of people injured in the attacks also more than doubled, rising from 1,593 in the initial report to 3,646 in the new report.

### EXPLANATION OF THE CHANGES

There are several explanations for the major changes in the data reported by State Department. The new report identifies 26 significant terrorist events that occurred after November 11, 2003, the day the previous version of the report stopped counting attacks. Moreover, the Incident Review Panel (IRP), the interagency body charged with counting terrorist attacks, re-reviewed all terrorist attacks that occurred before November 11, 2003. This review increased the number of fatalities and injuries reported in the initial report. It also resulted in ten formerly significant events being redesignated as nonsignificant.

### TRENDS IN NONSIGNIFICANT EVENTS

The State Department defines a nonsignificant terrorist incident as one that does not result in

“loss of life,” “serious injury,” or “major property damage,” which is defined as damage exceeding \$10,000. According to State Department officials, there has been a large decline in nonsignificant events since 2001. The major explanation for this decline is a reduction in the number of terrorist attacks on oil pipelines in Colombia, from 178 in 2001 to 41 in 2002.<sup>4</sup>

### **UNDERESTIMATION**

Although the revised data is an improvement, there are still large omissions. For example, the report does not include hundreds of attacks on oil pipelines and electricity plants and transmission lines in Iraq. According to John Brennan, director of the Terrorist Threat Integration Center, the rationale for excluding these attacks on nonmilitary targets was uncertainty over (1) who perpetrated the attacks and (2) whether the Coalition Provisional Authority possessed a “property” interest in the attacked facilities. Mr. Brennan said that attacks by Iraqis on Iraq-owned facilities would not be considered an international terrorist attack, while attacks that involved foreign terrorists or that involved facilities held by the United States or other foreign interests would be. Lacking definitive answers to these questions, the IRP excluded all attacks on infrastructure in Iraq unless U.S. citizens or other foreign nationals were killed or injured.<sup>5</sup>

Another example of underestimation is the exclusion of hundreds of attacks in Colombia. The Assistant Secretary for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) at the State Department testified before Congress on June 17, 2004, that “INL aircraft took more than 380 hits” in 2003 alone.<sup>6</sup> These events, however, were apparently not counted in the revised report. According to Mr. Brennan, many nonsignificant events occur throughout the world that are not counted in the report.<sup>7</sup>

### **SOURCE OF THE ERRORS**

According to officials from the State Department and the Terrorist Threat Integration Center, a variety of factors contributed to the errors in the initial report. These officials reported that the process of compiling the list of terrorist events and writing the report had been a low priority. Only a single CIA analyst and two contractors were assigned to collect data, and members of the IRP changed frequently. The databases used in preparing the report were old, awkward, and subject to technical glitches. Moreover, the criteria for including or excluding events were applied inconsistently.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism 2003* (Apr. 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Statement of Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage, *Release of the 2003 “Patterns of Global Terrorism” Annual Report* (Apr. 29, 2003) (online at [www.state.gov/s/d/rm/31961.htm](http://www.state.gov/s/d/rm/31961.htm)).

<sup>3</sup> Letter from Paul V. Kelly, Assistant Secretary of State for Legislative Affairs, to Members of Congress (Apr. 29, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism 2002* (Apr. 2003) (citing decrease in terrorist attacks on Colombian oil pipelines as the “main reason” for decrease).

<sup>5</sup> Briefing by Ambassador Cofer Black, Coordinator for Counterterrorism, U.S. Department of State, and John Brennan, Director, Terrorist Threat Integration Center, to Minority Staff, House Committee on Government Reform (June 21, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> Statement of Robert S. Charles, Assistant Secretary for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, U.S. Department of State, before the House Committee on Government Reform (June 17, 2004) (online at <http://www.state.gov/g/inl/rls/rm/33663.htm>).

---

<sup>7</sup> Briefing by Ambassador Cofer Black, Coordinator for Counterterrorism, U.S. Department of State, and John Brennan, Director, Terrorist Threat Integration Center, to Minority Staff, House Committee on Government Reform (June 21, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*