

Symposium hosted by
The Saban Center for Middle East Policy

How to Win the War against Terrorism

Thursday, September 22, 2004

9:00am - 2:00pm

Brookings Institution

Panel 2 – “Dealing with state sponsors in the war against terrorism”

Moderated by: [Kenneth M. Pollack](#)

Director of Research, Saban Center for Middle East Policy, and Senior Fellow, Brookings

Panelists:

[Stephen P. Cohen](#)

Senior Fellow, [Foreign Policy Studies](#), the Brookings Institution

[Paul R. Pillar](#)

Georgetown University

[Ray Takeyh](#)

Senior Fellow, Middle Eastern Studies, Council on Foreign Relations

Pillar initiated the second panel with a basic discussion of the term “state-sponsored terrorism,” indicating the various ways that “sponsorship” can be interpreted. He questioned whether sponsorship could be asserted definitively in any but the most obvious cases, claiming that the term is misleading and lies within a “grey area.” Pillar asked if the term should be applied to a country that is not actively dismantling terrorist organizations? He also questioned how one could ascertain whether a state is unwilling or simply unable to do so. Given these concerns, Pillar questioned the accuracy and motivations behind the U.S. government’s list of state-sponsors of terrorism, a sentiment echoed by subsequent speakers.

Pillar went on to discuss appropriate strategies for dealing with state sponsors of terrorism, suggesting Libya as an example of a successful strategy. He argued that the reduction of state sponsorship of terrorism requires the management of a bilateral relationship, within which a system of incentives and punishments can be brought to bear to alter target state behavior. Pillar cited Libya as having shifted away from sponsoring terrorism over the last twenty years, attributing the change in Libya attitude to a mixture of tailored sanctions, United Nations Security Council resolutions and an appropriate set of incentives.

Takeyh’s presentation dealt primarily with Iran, and the rationale behind its support for terrorism. He argued that despite the transfer of power to a new generation of politicians, the Iranian government is still as dogmatic as ever. Takeyh blamed the Iran-

Iraq War (1980-1988) for instilling the new generation of Iranian political leaders with a deep suspicion of international organizations and countries such as the United States that did nothing to prevent Iranians being killed during that war. He argued that the only difference between the new government in Iran, and the previous administration, is that the new one is indifferent to the United States whereas under the previous government the radicals blamed the United States for all of Iran's problems while the moderates saw the United States as the solution to all of Iran's problems.

Takeyh noted that Iran has stopped conducting certain terrorist operations such as the assassinations of Iranian dissidents abroad, but he argued that was only because Iran is aware that the consequences of such behavior are no longer worth the risk of economic sanctions or political isolation. Likewise, Iran will not target countries such as the United States or do anything that will lead to increased confrontation with the United States. This is in contrast to the behavior of groups such as al-Qa'ida that do not place any limits on their actions and seem unafraid of confrontation and its consequences.

Iran does, however, continue to support terrorism against Israel for what are in its view ideological and moral reasons. Furthermore, by supporting groups such as Hizbollah, which conducts operations in several countries in the Middle East including Lebanon and Syria, Iran is essentially extending its influence to areas where it would otherwise not have any influence. By sponsoring terrorist groups in Lebanon and the Palestinian territories, Iran is also attempting to realize its longtime transnational Islamic aspirations.

Takeyh then turned his attention to Libya whose sponsorship of terrorism is also motivated by ideology. For Libya, terrorism was a means of challenging the international system. As such, Libya committed acts of terrorism all around the world and sponsored any terrorist organizations that did likewise. However, Takeyh argued that while Iran's ideology has remained consistent, Libya's had changed. In the 1990's, Libya directed its terrorist operations away from the Middle East, focusing them instead on Africa. Libya was able to execute terrorist operations in Africa with little interference, and soon became the "terrorism leader" of Africa, due to the international community's disinterest in the continent after the Cold War.

Stephen Cohen focused primarily on Pakistan. Cohen denoted three types of terrorist groups within Pakistan: first, those run by the Pakistani army which plan attacks against India, usually in Kashmir; second, groups formed by men who at one time belonged to a Pakistani state-sponsored terrorist group; and, third, terrorist groups that are beyond the control of the government. The third category includes groups such as Al Qaeda whose Pakistani members include mostly middle class intellectuals who oppose Pakistan's support of the United States and are attracted intellectually to al-Qa'ida's message.

Cohen went on to discuss U.S. policy towards Pakistan, criticizing what he felt were important shortcomings and offering alternatives. At present, he argued, the United States is simply demanding too much from Pakistan, which makes it relatively easy for Pakistan to fend off U.S. requests. Pakistan, he believes, cannot possibly comply with U.S. demands on its nuclear program, on terrorism, on negotiations with India (especially considering India's reluctance to pursue such talks), to democratize, and to improve women's rights. Cohen argued that when pressured, Pakistan adopts the tactic of

complying just enough with what the United States wants, which thereby precludes any real long-term structural changes. Cohen argued that the United States needs to use carrots and sticks in its dealings with Pakistan. The United States should offer incentives for reform, perhaps promising a certain amount of aid based on Pakistan's progress, or threaten to, for example, become draw closer diplomatically to India should Pakistan not make any strides forward.

Discussion

Takeyh suggested that for there to be a genuine change in Iranian behavior, something dramatic needs to happen. He suggested that this could be the offer of a big carrot, a significant incentive, or the threat of a big stick. He suggested that it is possible that the Iran will go the way of the China, that it will; gradually lose its Islamist nature. At the end of such a process, Iran would be Islamist only in name, just as today China is only nominally Communist.