

Statement of Steven Emerson

Before the

**United States House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on International Security, International Organizations and Human Rights**

**“INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND HUMAN
RIGHTS INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM IN BUENOS AIRES, PANAMA,
LONDON”**

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I think it is especially appropriate that you are holding this hearing today regarding the bombings in Argentina and Great Britain. The American public needs to understand that although the bombings took place thousands of miles away and victims were foreigners, the next time we could be the target. Although the media has devoted far less attention to this carnage than it did to similar acts of religious fanatical violence earlier this year in the Middle East, the attacks in Argentina and London were no less horrific.

I believe American public policymakers must begin to understand the depth of a new problem now facing the world. The bombings were not simply an "attempt by the enemies of peace to derail the peace process" as several senior U.S. officials described the attack in Argentina. Nor were they simply the "return of Middle Eastern terrorism" as a senior British law enforcement official described the London bombings.

Rather, the bombings are part of an escalating world wide battle between radical Islamic militants and the West. The perpetrators of these bombings are not motivated by what is known as "legitimate grievances."

Radical Islamic militants see the very existence of pro-Western nations, such as Israel and Egypt, or pluralistic systems such as democracy, or rival religions such as Judaism and Christianity and even moderate Muslims as a mortal threat to their very being. These militants see the continuation of a thousand-year conspiracy waged by the infidel to subjugate Islam. In this perspective, the West's publication of Salman Rushdie's book and the 1991 Persian Gulf War are simply extensions of the Crusader's assault on Islam.

The terrorism in the 1970's--largely attributable to Palestinian organizations--ultimately dissipated because the secular PLO compromised its maximalist goals to destroy Israel. Today, Yasser Arafat is either unwilling or unable to stop other Palestinian terrorists, but at least he has put an end to

most Fatah terrorism. Clearly, a Middle East peace agreement can stop some types of terror.

But radical Islamic militants are not susceptible to the same rational persuasion. They see any accord that accepts the legitimacy of a Jewish state or the existence of pro-American regimes in Egypt or Jordan as intrinsically offensive. To these groups, there can be no compromise; it is a duel to the death with infidels and heretics. The war is without borders. Unlike the peaceful version of jihad, these militants see and practice jihad only as a holy war. Becoming a martyr in the cause of Jihad is just as good as killing in the cause of Jihad. In this new clash between militant Islam and its enemies, political reconciliation is inherently impossible.

In Europe, Hizbullah-Iran assassination squads have murdered scores of dissidents. In Thailand, the Israeli Embassy narrowly missed being blown up this year by a car bomb made up of the same type of explosives that blew up the World Trade Center. In Bangladesh, a female writer has been driven into hiding, the subject of a religious death sentence for her writings perceived to be critical of the Qur'an. In Canada, several radical Islamic terrorists--including a member of Hizbullah and a member of the black Muslim Al-Fuqra group-- have been recently convicted for carrying out acts of terror. In Chicago earlier this year, several Jewish schools and institutions were torched by Palestinian youths, who were part of a larger Hamas community.

Despite attempts by some to paper over the differences between radical Islam and the West, the fact remains that radical Islamic leaders see the West as engaged in a conspiracy to wipe out Islam. In this context, Israel is the Little Satan and the United States is the Great Satan. Attacks on targets like the World Trade Center last year or in Buenos Aires two weeks ago are justified--indeed mandated--as part of the holy war against the infidels. For those perpetrating such attacks, they may indeed be motivated by distinct events--such as retaliation for specific acts--but the large local support network needed to carry out such terrorism could only arise because of the widespread acceptance of radical anti-western precepts.

At the outset, it is important to point out that the overwhelming majority of the nearly one billion Muslims in the world today do not support such concepts of jihad or violence. Those that support violence are only a very small minority and totally unrepresentative of the larger community. And as King Hussein of Jordan said the other day at a press conference at the White House, the bombings in Argentina had nothing to do with Islam. In the theological sense, he is right. Terrorism has nothing to do with mainstream Islam. Islam is an incredibly rich and peaceful religion that has given the world a wonderful legacy. But in the last half of the 20th Century, militancy and violence has everything to do with radical Islamic fundamentalism.

It would be the height of recklessness and naivete to deny that which has become a reality: In recent years, radical Islamic movements, for a variety of reasons, have proliferated not just throughout the Middle East but globally. These radical extremists have been able to set up a vast international network of supporters throughout the world, especially in the West, where they have amassed money and weapons, established recruitment centers, and even established command and control facilities. In the United States, the Gamala Islamiya, Hizbullah, Hamas, Islamic jihad, to name just a few, have established elaborate support systems. The same goes, in varying degrees, for Canada, Germany, France, Great Britain, Argentina and elsewhere.

Radical Islamic groups are not a monolith nor are they not controlled by an Islamic Politburo. Many of the groups act independently of one another, yet often collaborate in various operations as a means of carrying out attacks on their common enemies. If there is one unifying factor among the myriad groups, it is the common enemy they confront. Because of the decentralized structure of these groups and their ad hoc collaboration--above and beyond the constitutional limits of democracies to take preventive action--the West faces serious challenges in the years ahead.

Although there is no one nation or organization that directs radical Islamic groups, Iran plays a pivotal role. In giving birth to the first modern Islamic republic, Iran has provided ideological and religious sustenance to ideological comrades around the world in its war with the Great Satan. As a microcosm of the larger splintered radical Islamic community, Iran is not controlled by any one person, and thus there are independent centers of authority running terrorist operations.

Yet, despite attempts by some American analysts to portray a jockeying for power between "moderate" and "radicals," the truth is-- as we should have learned in the Iran-contra episode--there is no thing as a moderate in the Iranian government. There are, however, "pragmatists" whom we confuse as moderates. And these pragmatists, like Ayatollah Rafsanjani, readily use terror as an instrument of foreign policy whenever it is deemed convenient. Money, weapons, training, directions, sanctuary, passports, diplomatic and commercial cover--this is what Iran has provided to its network around the world--directly through its embassies, export-import companies, consular offices, and airlines and indirectly through select mosques, charitable foundations, and various Islamic centers.

According to Israeli and American intelligence, there is very little doubt that Iran was the major party behind the Argentinean bombing. The modus operandi of the attack was virtually the same one as that which blew up the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires two years ago. That attack, based on electronic intelligence and other intelligence information, showed that the Iranian officials had coordinated the bombing against the Israeli embassy via smuggling

explosives in its diplomatic pouch. The attack was carried out by a suicide bomber from a local branch of Hizbullah, which has established a wide network in Argentina, particularly in the "tri-border" area.

Beyond the virtual similarity in the two explosions, investigators on the ground say they have acquired additional evidence linking Iran and Hizbullah to the blast. Similarly, the bombing of the Israeli embassy in London could only have been carried out through a well-planned and coordinated attack; the car containing the explosives was parked adjacent to the side of the Israeli embassy where the Israeli ambassador's office is. Fortunately, he was not in it at the time; the bomb obliterated his office. Although Iran was almost certainly behind the bombing in London, intelligence officials say that there is a strong possibility that other terrorist groups collaborated in the attacks.

In the past week, Hizbullah and Iran have gone to extraordinary public lengths to deny any involvement in the bombing. But those very denials are hallmarks of Iranian and Hizbullah tactics. Indeed, Iran and Hizbullah had long publicly denied any connection to the Americas held hostage in Lebanon. Iran, Hizbullah and their accomplice Syria-- despite electronic evidence to the contrary--consistently denied any involvement in the destruction of the Marine compound in Beirut which killed 241 Marines, or the two bombings of the American diplomatic facilities in Beirut in 1983 and 1984. Iran also denied any involvement in the multiple attacks and assassinations by Iranian hit squads in the past 14 years.

In Lebanon, the 5000-man fighting force of the Hizbollah (under the direct supervision of at least 500 Iranian Revolutionary Guards camped out in the Bekka Valley) has become an extension of Iran, enabling Iran to claim it has become a frontline battle state with Israel.

Hizbullah is organized in tightly compartmented cells, often by village, tribal or family lines. Not only does this make foreign infiltration virtually impossible; it insures that culpability is limited. Names of groups are routinely invented for new operations, then discarded to throw off the scent to intelligence agencies. During the 1980's, more than 25 different Lebanese groups were said to have been involved in the kidnapping and killing of American hostages. In truth, all the groups were simply re-named cells operating under one single umbrella organization--Hizbullah.

When the massive car bomb obliterated the building at Pasteur Street 633 in Buenos Aires, the perpetrators knew it was not housing their ostensible enemy, the Israelis, whom they have confronted in southern Lebanon and Israel proper for the past nine years. After all, if Hizbullah wanted to launch a massive suicide car bomb against Israeli forces, it could easily have done so. Despite Israeli and South Lebanese Army patrols of the South Lebanon security zone, Hizbullah has shown that it can carry out attacks with virtual impunity.

The decision to kill as many innocent Jewish civilians and residents of Argentina as possible was taken in the same manner as was the decision to bomb the World Trade Center. "We can hit you on your turf" in the very belly of the beast was the message. And like the bombing of the World Trade Center, Buenos Aires was also chosen by radical Islamic militants because of similar factors that made it easy to carry out: Radical Islamists have an extensive support infrastructure in Argentina and in neighboring countries. Hizbullah and other radicals have easy access in and out of Argentina. The Argentinean government has not effectively cracked down on Iranian diplomats who have set up surveillance operations and abused their diplomatic privileges. And Argentina has not yet clamped down on the embryonic radical neo-Nazi alignment with the radical Islamic militants.

By selecting Buenos Aires twice in two years, this also insured that everyone would know Iran and Hizbullah were behind the bombing while still enabling Iran and Hizbullah to fiercely deny any connection. Like the United States, Argentina was deemed a special target of recruitment because of the presence of so many Muslim immigrants. In the 1980's, Iran intensified its worldwide outreach program, and began providing money and sending Iranian clerics to foreign Islamic communities. The significance Buenos Aires was accorded by Iran was indicated by the fact, as pointed out by Islamic scholar Khalid Duran, that Iran sent Ayatollah Rabbanni--one of only 40 Ayatollahs--to serve as the leader of a Shiite mosque in Buenos Aires in the mid-1980's. There have been at least a dozen special trips by Iranian and Afghan jihad leaders to Buenos Aires to raise money and recruit volunteers for the jihad in Afghanistan and elsewhere. There were even organizational links established to Jihad organizations in the United States.

For the past decade, Iran has directed assassinations and car bombings throughout Europe and Southeast Asia. Although in some cases authorities have prosecuted those found to be involved, in just as many cases, authorities have let go known terrorists believed to have been involved rather than incur the wrath of radical Islamic militants or their Iranian backers.

According to figures compiled by European intelligence services, Iran has been responsible for killing or wounding more than 100 Iranian dissidents, foreign nationals, journalists and other designated "enemies."

To list just a handful of attacks:

* July 1991, Tokyo: The Japanese translator of Salman Rushdie's book, the *Satanic Verses*, was stabbed to death in Japan. His Italian counterpart was stabbed ten days earlier but survived the attack.

* August 1991, Paris: Former Iranian leader Shapur Bakhtiar, despite being

under heavy French guard 24 hours a day in a safehouse outside Paris, had his throat slit. His perpetrators were Iranians, although French intelligence soon determined that indigenous Islamic militants provided surveillance and helped carry out the operation.

* September 1992, Berlin, Germany: In the backroom of a restaurant called Mykonos, two gunmen suddenly burst in and sprayed the eight men having dinner. The guests were senior officials of the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan. Four of them died on the spot. Shortly thereafter, German authorities arrested two Lebanese Hizbullah operatives who had been directly recruited to carry out this carnage. German authorities subsequently learned that an Iranian cleric named Kazem Darabi, who had been living in Germany for several years, had provided the weapons, money and safehouses for the killer. He had arranged the terrorist killings in meetings held at a Berlin mosque. Later, it was found that Darabi had arranged the killings directly under the orders of Iranian diplomats.

* 1992 and 1993, Turkey: Iranian-trained hit squads killed several popular Turkish journalists, Iranian dissidents, and an Israeli security officer; and attempted to kill a leader of the Turkish Jewish community. Turkish police found that the perpetrators were trained in Teheran.

* Spring 1994, Bangkok, Thailand: A booby trapped car filled with the same type of nitrate-based explosive used in the bombing of the World Trade Center was found a short distance from the Israeli and American Embassies in Bangkok. The car was found hours before the bomb was set to go off. Weeks later, several Iranians were arrested by Thai police which had found links to the attempted bombing. But they were soon released.

Although Iranian officials have told western interviewers that they have had nothing to do with these strings of murders, we should listen to what they say among themselves. In an extraordinary interview on Iranian television in August 1992, Ali Fallahian, head of the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence, openly took credit for the killing of opponents abroad. "Our services follow members of these groups abroad... and have been responsible for blows delivered to the opposition groups outside the country." Fallahian even admitted that Iran operates an extensive espionage operation in other countries, "In some countries, we have spies in the highest level of leadership."

Iran often collaborates and networks with other radical Islamic groups as well. The Islamic Palestinian group Hamas has a fulltime representative in Teheran, has received millions of dollars from the Mullah regime, and has used Iran as a meeting ground for top level conferences. Iran has an even closer alliance with Palestine Islamic Jihad, a rival Palestinian fundamentalist organization. Fat'hi Shiqaqi, head of one of six Islamic jihad factions, has openly admitted accepting funds and receiving training from Iran in his war

against the "Western-Zionist-Crusaders." In 1993, Sheik Shiqaqi openly advocated that Iran resume its abduction of American hostages. In fact, it is Shiqaqi who has openly talked about the impending clash of civilizations between the Satanic West and Islam. In his view, every Muslim has an obligation to carry out Sheik Ayatollah Khoumeni's fatwa that the "Zionist entity" be destroyed, and that Israel's existence is only the extension of the United States conspiracy against Islam.

Israel has already declared it will avenge the attacks in Buenos Aires and London. Already in Israel, a new debate has emerged about whether to revive the type of covert intelligence hit squads that sought to avenge the planners of the notorious Munich massacre in 1972. But Israel cannot be the only country on whose shoulders the responsibility of deterring this types of attacks. Moreover, it is all but guaranteed that no matter what Israel does, it will not be able to shut down the world wide network of radical Islamic terror alone.

Such a resolution, if at all possible, can only come about through the offices of the United States. Last week, Secretary of State Warren Christopher told this body that Hizbullah and Iran "must be contained." He articulated a criticism of those countries that continue to engage in commercial trade relations with Iran.

But isolating Iran is still not enough. Hizbullah today operates under the full protection of Syria. In fact, all of Hizbullah's main training bases are located in the Bekka Valley, under the total sovereignty of Syria. Much of Hizbullah's weapons are sent through Damascus by air and then by truck convoy through Syrian military lines. Syria uses Hizbullah to attack Israeli targets in the south as an appendage of its foreign policy: Syria believes such attacks place pressure on Israel while giving Syria plausible deniability that it is involved in terror. The charade works because the West goes along with it.

Today, Lebanon is the largest geographic terrorist base in the world, thanks to Syria. Although there is no evidence that Syria approves of or is aware of the attacks in Argentina or Great Britain, Syrian complicity cannot be removed in the same way that Israeli complicity could not be removed from the massacre of Palestinians by Phalangist squads in Sabra and Chatilla in 1982. As the guarantor of Lebanon, Syria cannot avoid responsibility for the operations of a terror group it sustains and protects.

Ironically, it is the United States itself where many of the groups have established political and financial headquarters. According to law enforcement and intelligence officials, most Middle East terror organizations and radical Islamic militant groups have established an extensive presence--and in some cases their political headquarters--right here in the United States. For the most part, many of these groups have not carried out terror attacks on American

soil for fear of spoiling what has become a political safehaven. They use the United States to raise millions of dollars, organize politically, and even command military operations in their native lands by remote control.

On the other hand, the intensity of the fierce anti-Western and anti-American ideology of these radical Islamic groups increasingly conflicts with their short-term pragmatic considerations. Hence the bombing of the World Trade Center. Despite the freedom afforded those who were living here, in the end it was that very freedom that was despised. It is this paradox that we in the West will have to confront.

Some Western security officials with whom I have recently spoken believe the bombing of the Jewish and Israeli targets in London and Buenos Aires can be "contained" to Jewish and Israeli targets. Not only is such a distinction invidious, it is only a matter of time before the ideology driving these attacks escalates into attacks on "non-Middle East" targets.

As I said earlier: The notion that "peace" in the Middle East will assuage radical Islamic groups or that some form of Western reconciliation is possible with radical Islamic groups is woefully mistaken. Hizbullah's and Iran's argument with Israel is not over specific Israeli acts. Contrary to the point raised by a distinguished columnist in the New York Times last week, the terrorist causes of the bombings in Argentina and England cannot be rationally solved anymore than the death threat against Salman Rushdie can be resolved by appeasing the radical fundamentalists making the threat.

These bombings should finally force the West to wake up to the new battlefield it is facing--an era of unalterably violent anti-western, anti-Jewish, anti-Christian rage and anti moderate Muslim rage. Coupled with the bombing of the World Trade Center last year, these bombings show that radical Islamic militants have now taken their battle from their homelands into the heart of enemy territory-- the West.

It will require concerted action by all countries to coordinate their intelligence, asylum, security procedures, and immigration policies to protect civilians from increasingly becoming the new frontline in the unfolding wave of terrorism.