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## On-the-Record Briefing

### Ambassador Cofer Black, Coordinator for Counterterrorism

Remarks at On-the-Record Briefing on the Release of the Annual Patterns of Global Terrorism 2002 report

Washington, DC

April 30, 2003

**AMBASSADOR BLACK:** Thank you very much, [Mr. Secretary](#).

There were 199 international terrorist attacks during 2002. That represents a significant drop from the previous year – 44% fewer attacks. In fact, it is the lowest level of terrorism in more than 30 years. The last time the annual total fell below 200 attacks was in 1969, shortly after the advent of modern terrorism. This is a remarkable achievement.

There are several reasons for the decrease. First, there was a sharp drop in the number of oil pipeline bombings in Colombia. There were 41 such attacks last year, down from 178 the year before.

Second, there are increased security measures in place in virtually every nation. They are most noticeable at airports and at border crossings.

Third, a large number of terrorist suspects were not able to launch an attack last year because they are in prison. More than 3,000 of them are al-Qaida terrorists and they were arrested in over 100 countries.

Lastly, I would credit the overall post-9/11 worldwide security environment. Nations are on guard against terrorism. They are sharing intelligence and law enforcement information, they are arresting suspects, they are thwarting attacks. Governments and financial institutions are drying up the terrorist sources of revenue. Regional security organizations are steadily improving their counterterrorism capabilities.

Coalition military action in Afghanistan and Iraq has chased terrorists out of those countries and removed the safe haven

that terrorists had once enjoyed and upon which they had relied. Nations worldwide are fighting terrorism energetically, and they should take some measure of pride in the historically low number of attacks recorded that year.

It is not to say that we have turned the corner. Horrific attacks did occur in 2002, such as the bombings in Bali and Mombassa, and the hostage-taking in Moscow. Additional attacks are likely. We cannot lower our guard. Indeed, the worldwide counterterrorism coalition must maintain the political will to keep up the fight. The United States remains ready to assist nations to improve their capacity to fight terrorism on various fronts. The State Department and many other departments and agencies of the U.S. Government are deeply committed to helping those willing to fight terrorism.

During the past year, we have enhanced old programs and developed new ones aimed at helping interested countries develop or update needed counterterrorism legislation. We have helped countries strengthen information-sharing procedures and tighten border security and immigration controls.

We have assessed countries antiterrorist finance requirements and helped them develop tools to ensure greater financial transparency and accountability in the modern banking sector, and greater regulation of nontraditional remittance systems, such as halawas.

We have encouraged other countries to develop sound inter-ministerial crisis management and consequence management plans and practices.

The year 2002 underscored the importance of international commitment and international cooperation. As we move forward, and international activity becomes better organized, coordination, especially among the donor states, will be our next challenge.

The threat of international terrorism knows no boundaries. Thus, the fight against the threat must be global. We have made real progress, but we cannot rest until terrorism is defeated.

I'm open to questions.

**QUESTION:** Sir, could you comment on the arrests in Pakistan announced just a few minutes ago of Khalid bin Attash, a prominent al-Qaida figure?

**AMBASSADOR BLACK:** Right. I have no information on this at this time.

Yes, sir.

**QUESTION:** There are -- I'm sure you've seen the statements by the Libyan Foreign Minister on liability for the Pan Am bombing. Does this constitute progress in a resolution of this, your dispute with the Libyans?

**AMBASSADOR BLACK:** Is this the media reporting of alleged Libyan acceptance of civil responsibility; is that right?

**QUESTION:** Yeah. Well, I believe they've -- I think the Libyan Government actually put out a statement, official.

**AMBASSADOR BLACK:** Well, Libyan officials have made a variety of statements over the years to the press. Frankly, we're

not sure what any individual statement might be intended to say. What is important is whether Libya meets the UN requirements and what their officials might say to the press, and not what their officials might say to the press. Libya knows what it needs to do and there are no shortcuts.

**QUESTION:** Can I just follow up on that? Does that mean you haven't had any official communication with the Libyan authorities on this matter?

**AMBASSADOR BLACK:** What that says is that is not officially definitive of what people say to the press.

Yes, sir.

**QUESTION:** What does Sudan have to do now to become a -- to get off the state sponsors list? It doesn't appear that -- it doesn't appear that they're doing anything unhelpful in --

**AMBASSADOR BLACK:** Sudan does remain on the state sponsors list; however, I would like to underscore that we are pleased with their counterterrorism cooperation, certainly over the last couple of years. The Sudanese have granted us some access in the field of counterterrorism and to individuals of interest. They have offered access to financial institutions and records. They have ratified all relevant international counterterrorism conventions, 12 out of 12. They have publicly foresworn support for terrorism.

We leave sensitive aspects to the Sudanese Government to provide details. That is in their preserve, not ours. They have made very good progress. We're very pleased. There is a ways to go yet. We remain concerned about the presence of Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad in Sudan. We encourage the Government of Sudan to continue cooperation and for us to move forward positively.

**QUESTION:** Does that mean that if they expelled whoever these people are, that you say are there, then --

**AMBASSADOR BLACK:** That means that would be a step in the right direction of our cooperation.

Yes, ma'am, in the back.

**QUESTION:** Could you also speak about Syria's kind of mixed bag on terrorism? You've said that you have cooperation on some aspects of al-Qaida, but are still displeased with the --

**AMBASSADOR BLACK:** Sure, okay. We designate Syria as a state sponsor of terrorism despite some cooperation on al-Qaida. Syria continues to host and support terrorist groups, including Hezbollah, Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. We continue to be concerned about Syria's behavior in support of terrorism.

Syria provides support to Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas, claiming that they host only political offices in Damascus. We reject this distinction. Syria permits resupply flights of Hezbollah through its territory. Syria rejected a U.S. request to close the Palestinian Islamic Jihad office in Damascus.

There are some good things. Syria quickly condemned the attacks of September 11th, and has provided valuable information

on al-Qaida that has helped save American lives.

Nonetheless, we want to make absolutely clear to Syria that nothing short of full cooperation against all terrorist groups is acceptable.

Yes.

**QUESTION:** What does the State Department think about the ceasefire that was signed between the MEK and the U.S., U.S. CENTCOM, in Iraq?

Since this group is still on the terrorist list, as I understand it, Americans are not supposed to deal with them at all. And that's always been kind of a -- there is a problem in Washington, D.C., because they keep an office open here.

So can you tell me how this squares with the MEK's terrorist status?

**AMBASSADOR BLACK:** Sure, I'll be happy to, happy to try. The Secretary has recommended that the President determine that the laws that apply to countries that support terrorism no longer apply to Iraq. The President's determination to provide greater flexibility in permitting certain types of trade with and assistance to Iraq; thus, we can treat Iraq like any other country not on the terrorist list.

I think it's important to underscore some facts here. MEK is designated by the U.S. Government as a Foreign Terrorist Organization. This organization mixes Islam and Marxism in their battle to establish what they claim would be a secular state in Iran.

Until the recent war in Iraq, they were allied with the government of Saddam Hussein and received most of their support from this regime. They have assisted the Hussein regime in suppressing opposition within Iraq, and performed internal security for the Iraqi regime. MEK, or as some recently referred to as the People's Mujahedin, has also attacked and killed Americans.

The MEK and its many aliases, including the political NCRI, are designated as Foreign Terrorist Organizations. The United States Government does not negotiate with terrorists. MEK's opposition to the Iranian Government does not change the fact that they are a terrorist organization. We understand the agreement on the ground in the field is a prelude to the group's surrender. Commanders make tactical decisions to end conflict with enemy combatants successfully.

There's a lot of activity in various areas underway in Iraq -- of which this is one -- I would refer you to CENTCOM and their briefers to get better insight to the decision-making and the actions of our commanders, coalition commanders on the ground.

This is a pretty special group. They are a Foreign Terrorist Organization. They are not well liked in Iraq; they could not be put with the general prisoner population. They are following the orders of the coalition commanders, and their situation will be addressed in the coming days and weeks.

Yes, sir.

**QUESTION:** Mr. Ambassador --

**AMBASSADOR BLACK:** Yes, sir.

**QUESTION:** With respect to the bombing that just occurred, the suicide bombing in Israel yesterday, you are about to release the roadmap. Is there anything that you want to tell these terrorist groups specifically, that they have to disband, military will be sent in after them, whatever?

And the financing appears to be now also coming from religious entities. Is there any warnings or any types of counterterrorism tactics that you can pursue against those religious entities?

**AMBASSADOR BLACK:** I am not going to address the roadmap for the future in this briefing. In terms, there are 36 Foreign Terrorist Organizations who we are intimately interested in. We seek to have them halt and desist from acts of terrorism. The United States uses all aspects of statecraft in that -- focused military activity, intelligence, law enforcement, as well as cutting financial links and ties.

We cooperate with a great majority of the countries of the world, specifically those that have proven financial links from their countries to terrorists. We have been able to freeze more than \$134 million last year. Working with our partners overseas, we froze over \$20 million. So all aspects of the global war on terrorism, as defined by the President of the United States, is moving forward.

Yes, sir.

**QUESTION:** On your report regarding Greece, in the second paragraph you said that the Greek Government's record against transnational terrorist groups is mixed. And after that, you don't elaborate. What do you mean by a mixed record on this issue? Could you elaborate more on that?

**AMBASSADOR BLACK:** I would like to -- I would like to make a specific statement in terms of the Greek contribution. In the global war on terrorism, the practitioners of counterterrorism, I think, around the world that do this can take great satisfaction in the tremendous progress made by the Greek Government against terrorism in 2002 and the present. They have made, by counterterrorism standards, a historical progress, certainly against 17 November. They've taken an organization that has been the subject of decades of law enforcement activity and investigation, made tremendous progress there. People have been arrested, trials are underway, and we expect justice to be done.

So I would say that the progress that has been made by Athens is significant and it is on the sort of leadership level in the world. There are some terrorist groups that have offices in Athens, and it's the position of the United States that, you know, we would like these, these offices closed. But comparatively, I want to underscore in terms of the Greek contribution, a true effectiveness as well as their forceful preparation for the 2004 Olympics.

**QUESTION:** Can you be more specific?

Yes, sir. In the back.

**QUESTION:** Since you reject Syrian claims about involvement in terrorism, Syria been on the terrorist list for decades, what

kind of measures do you think will make Syria change its policy except maybe change of regime? I mean --

**AMBASSADOR BLACK:** I'm in the counterterrorism business. I can describe to you what we wish them to do. We wish them to stop the facilitation and support for terrorist groups that are carried on our Foreign Terrorist Organization list; as an example, Hamas, Hezbollah and the like. They have been facilitators for a long period of time, movement of equipment and personnel, and they have actively supported the movement of explosives, as an example, from Iran to Lebanon for use against Israel.

This list is pretty -- you know, we don't have a lot of time here, so I can't go into all the aspects of it, but it is pretty comprehensive. Their involvement has been longstanding. And we seek to work with the government in Damascus to stop their support and facilitation of these terrorist groups. It is their choice. It is their decision. We can encourage it and we can point it out to them.

Yes, sir.

**QUESTION:** In the report, you say the Saudi Government has expanded its cooperation in some areas. In what areas haven't they expanded their cooperation and what do you still need from them? What do you still need them to do, especially in regards to al-Qaida?

**AMBASSADOR BLACK:** The Saudi Government has made significant strides, certainly in the last year. They are a strong partner in the war on terrorism. In the past several months, we have made significant strides in our counterterrorism cooperation. The Saudi Government continues to work with us in identifying and working to counter al-Qaida and other terrorist groups.

In recent months, I've made two separate trips to Saudi Arabia to work with senior officials. This is, in part, what we believe to be a long-term pattern of close coordination on terrorism issues. We think that we have -- that we're really heading in the right direction here.

We are pleased with the steps the Saudis are taking to ensure that all charitable donations by Saudis reach their intended good works and that no funds from Saudi Arabia are diverted by those who would use them for evil purposes.

Yes, sir.

**QUESTION:** Can we go back to the Secretary's recommendation? It appeared from, I think, because I was a bit surprised that you said it, but it seemed from what you said that the Secretary has recommended to the President something that's -- that falls short of removing it from the list of state sponsors but changes in status?

**AMBASSADOR BLACK:** Right. What we are talking about here -- let me go into this a little bit, a little bit more so we can clarify some points here. Let me see if I can encapsulate this for you.

The Secretary has recommended that the President exercise special authority provided in the war supplemental to suspend the Iraq Sanctions Act and make inapplicable, with respect to Iraq, Section 620A of the Foreign Assistance Act and any other provisions of law that applies to countries that have supported terrorism.

Essentially, what we're talking about here is that the designations can only be rescinded, in other words, the state sponsors of terrorism -- these are the seven countries that we're dealing about here. It is Congress that has passed laws, under which states are designated state sponsors of terrorism, that provide that the designation can only be rescinded when the country's fundamentally changed government no longer supports international terrorism.

Obviously, it is no longer the Saddam Hussein regime in power. Essentially, what we are seeking to do, recommend to the President, that essentially, all the negative rules that would apply to that would be immediately overturned and moved forward, and we will be working, proposing to the Congress that they -- that they remove Iraq from the state sponsors of terrorism.

So you see my point. It's -- there is a time issue involved with the removal, but we are taking all practical steps to effectively negate any negative aspects of being on the state sponsors of terrorism list.

**QUESTION:** Okay. So they're still on the list, but no sanctions apply?

**AMBASSADOR BLACK:** They're still on the list. That's exactly right, essentially. That's exactly right.

**QUESTION:** You say the Secretary has recommended this. But has the President taken a decision on it? I don't recall you saying that any decision has been made.

**AMBASSADOR BLACK:** It has been recommended and the President will have to -- we'll be looking at it -- and making his decision, and that's where we stand on that.

**QUESTION:** Okay, and just a quick follow-up.

**AMBASSADOR BLACK:** Yes, ma'am.

**QUESTION:** Can I just have a quick follow-up on that?

**AMBASSADOR BLACK:** Yes, ma'am.

Sir, I answered your question. Let me get this lady here.

**QUESTION:** The Secretary in his remarks at the UN said that there was an al-Qaida cell in Baghdad, and that there was a training camp. Can you tell us what you all have found since the U.S. military has been there, evidence of the al-Qaida cell and the training camp?

**AMBASSADOR BLACK:** Right. I am sort of unprepared to talk about that because the intelligence community has collected information, is looking at it, assessing it, and when it is -- when they are finished, it will be made available. I can only refer to the Secretary's remarks in front of the UN Security Council when he was talking about the Zarqawi net. It was in Baghdad with individuals there, as well as the setup of their facility that was -- security of which was provided by Asbat al-Ansar. And I also recall the Director of Central Intelligence in open hearing stating that he fully expected to find weapons of mass destruction.

Let's see, someone who has not -- you, sir, in the blue shirt with the white.

**QUESTION:** Quick follow on that. There were reports yesterday that an associate of Mr. Zarqawi was apprehended by coalition forces in Baghdad,

**AMBASSADOR BLACK:** Yes, right.

**QUESTION:** Can you at least confirm that and say whether that's a significant development?

**AMBASSADOR BLACK:** Yeah. Unfortunately, I cannot because that has not reached me yet. Obviously, the military forces in the field, as well as American intelligence and coalition armed forces and coalition intelligence, are collecting tremendous amounts of information. They are in the process of processing it and collating it, and it will be moved back to Washington, as appropriately.

Okay. Who has not -- sir, in the back, perhaps?

**QUESTION:** Can you say what has the Reward for Justice Program accomplished? How much have you paid out? How many arrests have resulted as a result of --

**AMBASSADOR BLACK:** I'll have to take that for the record. I don't know that right off the top of my head, but we will get back to you, sir.

Yes, sir.

**QUESTION:** Yes, on al-Qaida's recent recruiting efforts -- I mean, recruiting efforts by al-Qaida and other related groups -- has the war in Iraq helped or hurt that effort? And what's your anticipation for the future, in terms of recruiting for --

**AMBASSADOR BLACK:** I, essentially, would refer you to the intelligence community that does that. But, certainly, the President's global war on terrorism is motivated by that very fact -- terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. And I think evidence of the United States and its coalition doing the right thing, in terms of removing oppression from the people of Iraq, I think, potential future recruits see it now and will see it in the future as we facilitate the process of having -- allowing them to have an equitable representative government, access to education and health.

And I think actions like this are certain to reduce the number of potential terrorists in the future that would find a radical brand of Islam that puts terrorism as a cornerstone. People will find that far less attractive, and over time this will greatly facilitate the global war on terrorism and ease or facilitate our ability to identify the terrorists, and to stop them before they launch attacks.

Yes, sir.

**QUESTION:** Sir, you wrote North Korea is not known to have sponsored any terrorist act since 1987. But last year, they explicitly admit kidnapped a Japanese citizen in the past, and that they are still selling drugs to Australians.

**AMBASSADOR BLACK:** Sure, yeah.

**QUESTION:** And is it terror, Mr. Ambassador?

**AMBASSADOR BLACK:** In this case, I certainly recalled very quickly when you asked this question the statement of our Deputy Secretary, Mr. Richard Armitage. He said this is like a terrorist-like act. I recently traveled to Tokyo and met with Japanese officials, and I would like to make absolutely sure that the Japanese people are made certain of the sympathy that we have for this -- for the individuals associated with this situation.

The United States has raised this issue repeatedly with North Korean officials. This issue was discussed in our most recent Human Rights Report. The UN Human Rights Commission has also just passed a resolution expressing concern. We certainly stand by our designation of North Korea as a sponsor of terrorism, and our hearts go out to those that were abducted and their family members, as well as their family members that were forced to be left behind in North Korea. It is a heartbreaking situation.

Thank you very much.

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