Terrorism as war by other means: national security and state support for terrorism

Terrorismo como guerra por outros meios: segurança nacional e apoio estatal ao terrorismo

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Introduction

Terrorism has been a growing concern of the international community in the post-Cold War years. The rise in casualties resulting from terrorist attacks, the globalization of the reach and network of some terrorist organizations, and the frightening probability of nuclear terrorism have resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of scholarly articles and conferences aimed at shedding light on the causes of terrorism and how to fight against it.[1] Today, "terrorism studies" is a burgeoning sub-field of the discipline of International Relations. However, this new field of terrorism studies has significant weaknesses, one of which has to do with the very concept of terrorist organization. The conventional approach in International Relations has been to treat terrorist organizations as "non-state" actors of international relations. However, this approach is becoming problematic due to the fact that most terrorist organizations are backed or exploited by *some* states.

In this article, I seek to study the question of why states at times support terrorist organizations. I will argue that increasing threats to national security increase states' support for terrorist organizations that work against their "present and imminent enemies." I begin with an introduction to the concept of terrorism and take issue with the mainstream approach, which studies terrorist organizations as "non-state actors." I then highlight the role of national security in states' support for terrorist organizations and the role of terrorist organizations in contemporary states' "cold" wars. I continue by analyzing three cases of state-support for foreign terrorist organizations, namely Syrian support for the Kurdish PKK, Iranian support for the Palestinian Hamas, and American support for the Iranian MEK. It seems that for many states terror is nothing but war by other means. I conclude

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1 A new book on terrorism is published every six hours in the English language (SHEPHARD, 2007).

with an elaboration on the importance of my analysis for effectively fighting against global terror.

Terrorism

As is the case for many other concepts in social science, there is neither an academic nor a political consensus on how to define terrorism. Surely, there is virtue in scholarly disagreement. But, unlike in many other cases, the disagreement on the definition of terrorism is not just an intellectual matter; rather, it has grave consequences for states' policies toward particular militant or terrorist organizations.

A troubling weakness in the study of "war against" terrorism is that terrorism is typically defined in ways that absolve states both from their own terror-like crimes and from their complicity in terrorists' acts. The conventional approach in International Relations has been treating terrorist organizations as "non-state" actors of international relations (HOFFMAN, 1999; BYMAN, 2005) and terrorism as a "tool of the powerless" (JUERGENSMEYER, 2000; NICHOLSON, 2003). But there are two major problems with this "terrorists as non-state actors" and "terrorism as tool of the powerless" approach. First, some of the relatively concrete definitions of terrorism (such as the one adopted in a 2005 U.N. General Assembly report, "any action constitutes terrorism if it is intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians or non-combatants with the purpose of intimidating a population or compelling a Government or an international organization to do or abstain from doing any act"[2], or the one in the U.S. Code of Federal Regulations, "the unlawful use of force and violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives"[3]) could indeed cover certain acts of states as well, such as the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the United States (WALDRON, 2004, p. 18), Indonesia's campaign of violence in East Timor between 1975–1999 (TANTER, BALL, & KLINKEN, 2005), or "dirty war" in Chile during the Pinochet regime (DINGES, 2004). Yet, for a mixture of political and academic reasons, state terrorism has been marginalized in terrorism studies (JACKSON, 2008).[4]

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2 United Nations General Assembly, "In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All," 21 March, 2005. Available online at: <http://www.un-ngls.org/orf/UNreform/UBUNTU-1.pdf>.

3 28 C.F.R. Section 0.85. See <http://cfr.vlex.com/vid/0-85-general-functions-19677030>.

4 A personal anecdote of former American ambassador Edward Peck (DEMOCRACY NOW, 2006) is very revealing on the political nature of defining terrorism: "In 1985, when I was the Deputy Director of the Reagan White House Task Force on Terrorism, they asked us—this is a Cabinet Task Force on Terrorism; I was the Deputy Director of the working group—they asked us to come up with a definition of terrorism that could be used throughout the government. We produced about six, and each and every case, they were rejected, because careful reading would indicate that our own country had been involved in some of those activities. After the task force concluded its work, Congress got into it, and you can Google into U.S. Code Title 18, Section 2331, and read the U.S. definition of terrorism. And one of them in here says—one of the terms, 'international terrorism' means 'activities that,' I quote, 'appear to be intended to affect the conduct of a government by mass

The second major problem with the mainstream approach to terrorism, which is the subject matter of this paper, is that most terrorist organizations have been supported or exploited by *some* states. Terrorist organizations have been tools of the "powerful" as much as terrorism has been the tool of the powerless. Major terrorist organizations like the Palestinian Hamas, the Kurdish PKK, or the Iranian MEK have been exploited by multiple states as mercenaries against their enemies. It would be far-fetched to argue that terrorist organizations are creations of foreign states; however, it would be equally far-fetched to assume that such major terrorist organizations like Hamas, the PKK, or the MEK could have reached more than a fraction of their material capability without the support of foreign states. State support has played a key role in the strength and effectiveness of many terrorist organizations, if not in their birth—which moves us to the next section.

State supporters of terrorism

Although all governments have condemned terrorism in rhetoric, many states provided valuable support to terrorist organizations at one time or another. Indeed, most modern terrorist organizations have been backed (or at least tolerated) by at least one state. "During the 1970s and 1980s, almost every important terrorist group had some ties to at least one supportive government," notes terrorism expert Daniel Byman (2005, 1). Unfortunately, things have not changed much since then.

Why have so many terrorist organizations been supported by states in the post-WWII era? Motives that lead states to support foreign terrorist organizations are many. Ideology (as in the case of Cuban support for the Marxist FARC), religion (as in the case of Iranian support for Shiite Hezbollah), and domestic/electoral concerns (as in the case of early Indian support to Tamil Tigers [LUTZ & LUTZ, 2004, 218-9]) can be cited among factors that motivate a state to support a terrorist organization. But a more common state motivation for supporting terrorism is national security. In almost all major cases of state support for terrorism (such as Syrian and Greek support for the PKK, Iranian and Iraqi support for Hamas, Iranian support for Hezbollah, Iraqi and American support for the MEK, American support for Cuban CORU, or Pakistani support for several militant and terrorist organizations in Kashmir), the fact that the supported terrorist organization is or was fighting against a threatening enemy state is or was the major reason for these states' support for the given terrorist organizations. In all these cases, states' support for terrorist organizations was driven by a desire to weaken an enemy by using proxies and/or to use this support as a bargaining chip against their enemies. As advancement in military technology has made modern wars extremely costly and devastating, hence almost "unthinkable," all-out wars between established states

destruction, assassination or kidnapping.' Yes, well, certainly, you can think of a number of countries that have been involved in such activities. Ours is one of them. Israel is another. And so, the terrorist, of course, is in the eye of the beholder…".

with comparable powers are nearly "a thing of the past" (KALDOR, 1999, 5; see also KEEGAN, 1993, 59). A conventional war between Turkey and Greece, Israel and Iran, Pakistan and India, or Colombia and Venezuela will bring to both parties of the conflict enormous devastation, regardless of who wins the war eventually. In such a context, terrorist organizations have provided many states a less costly alternative to direct confrontation with the enemy in both economic and political terms. Indeed, as early as 1987, the then U.S. Deputy Secretary of State, John C. Whitehead, recognized that terrorism was "a new pattern of low technology and inexpensive warfare against the West and its friend" (WHITEHEAD, 1987, 70). Whitehead was most probably right, except that terrorism and terror organizations are used not just "*against* the West and its friends" but "*by* the West and its friends" as well.

For the state supporters of terrorist organizations, these organizations have not only been less expensive mercenaries, but they have also allowed a degree of "plausible deniability." (CHOMSKY, 2003, 6; BYMAN, 2005, 22; BYMAN & KREPS, 2010, 6). States supporting foreign terrorist organizations against their enemies avoid direct responsibility for the violent acts of their "agents," thereby lessening the chances of retaliation from the enemy. Additionally, given the clandestine nature of the support, the domestic cost is likely to be less than that of an open coercive operation in case of failure (STOHL, 2003, 13). Thus, increasing costs of modern wars and deniability of state-sponsored terrorism have led both parties of such rivalries as India-Pakistan and Iran-Israel to forego real wars in favor of engaging in a "Cold War" wherein both parties aid terrorist groups in the other country (LUTZ & LUTZ, 2004, 61; PARSI, 2007, 177-9; HERSH, 2006). In the eternal game of balance of power/threat, terrorist organizations are the new balancing tools.

In the remainder of this section, I analyze three cases of state support for terrorist organizations that target an "enemy state."

Iran and Hamas

The *Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya* (Hamas)—Islamic Resistance Movement—is a Palestinian militant organization that emerged in the 1980s. Its charter calls for the destruction of the state of Israel and the creation of a Palestinian Islamic state in the area that is now Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza (MISHAL & SELA, 2006, 175). Hamas has been targeting Israeli civilians since 1993. Hamas militants have carried out dozens of suicide bombings in Israeli property as well as in occupied Palestinian territories, claiming hundreds of lives. Since 2002, the group has also been firing Qassam rockets into Israel, in a campaign that has not been very fatal but has nevertheless terrorized Israeli citizens in southern Israel. Hamas has been listed as a terrorist organization by the U.S., the European Union, and a few other countries. Hamas is certainly not the most militant group

in Palestine, but it is the most influential because of its size, social network, and popular support (ROY, 2003).

Both militant and non-militant Palestinian groups have received significant economic and political support from almost all Muslim parties to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Since early 1990s Iran has been one of Hamas' major foreign supporters (MISHAL & SELA, 2006, 97-8). Currently, Iran is a major supporter of Hamas' official non-conciliatory stance on Israeli-Palestinian peace process (even at times more so than Hamas itself). Iran also has provided valuable economic support to the organization through various channels. Although the total sum of Iranian financial aid to Hamas is unknown, it is estimated to be several million dollars (ABU-AMR, 1994, 88; LEVITT & ROSE, 2007, 172) According to GlobalSecurity.com, Iran contributes US$ 3 million annually to Hamas funds (which is 6% of Hamas' estimated US$ 50 million budget).[5]

There is a good amount of controversy over Iranian motives for supporting Hamas. Ideology, religion, geo-strategy, and national security are among potential motivations. Notwithstanding what the Islamic Republic's persistent anti-American and anti-Israeli rhetoric might *prima facie* suggest, an overall assessment of the post-revolution Iranian foreign policy and some Iranian overtures in the last decade suggest that Iranian support to Hamas is more about geopolitics and security than ideology and religion. To start with, an emerging consensus among scholars of Iranian politics is that Iranian foreign policy has been guided more by "geopolitical realism" than by ideological zeal, particularly since the end of Iran-Iraq War (KARSH, 1989; ABRAHAMIAN, 1993; ALAM, 2000; RAMAZANI, 2004; PARSI, 2007; MAFINEZAM & MEHRABI, 2008; WEHREY et al., 2009). "[T]he behavior of Khomeini and the Islamic Republic has been determined less by scriptural principles than by immediate political, social, and economic needs. The more we dig under the surface, the less we find of fundamentalism and more of pragmatic—even opportunistic—populism," asserts Ervand Abrahamian, one of the leading experts on modern Iranian politics (1993, 4).[6]

Although both Hamas and the regime in Tehran are Islamists, the former is Sunni fundamentalism, whereas the latter is Shiite. The historical rivalry between the two sects of Islam is well-known. A telling manifestation of the religious rift between Hamas and Iran was Hamas' (along with other Sunni Arabs) siding with Iraq in the Iran-Iraq war. When we consider the traditional prudence in Iranian foreign policy and the religious rift between Hamas and the Iranian regime,

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5 GlobalSecurity.org, *Hamas Funding*. Available online at: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/hamas-funds.htm>.

6 Former Deputy Foreign Minister of Iran Abbas Maleki endorses this point: "Ideology means that we must have pro-Muslim policies in all of the world. Yes we claim to be pro-Muslim in all of the world… but we didn't support Chechen Muslims" (quoted in PARSI, 2007, 263). In line with Maleki's statement, former Iranian President Rafsanjani famously said in two occasions: "Our ideology is flexible. We can choose expediency on the basis of Islam," and "To put the country in jeopardy on the ground that we are acting on Islamic basis is not at all Islamic" (ibid).

two major geo-strategic and security motives stand out behind Iranian support for Hamas. The first is to win Arab hearts and minds in order to achieve Iran's overarching national objective, which is hegemony and/or leadership in the Persian Gulf. Standing up for the Palestinians has been a *sine qua non* for any major Muslim country in the Middle East with aspirations of regional leadership. "In my view," states former foreign minister of Israel, Shlomo Ben-Ami, "this remains the main purpose of Ahmedinejad's incendiary rhetoric," quoted in Parsi (2007, 265). In the face of rising Iranian-Israeli hostility since early 1990s, the second major Iranian motive has been to use Hamas (as well as Hezbollah) as a deterrent capability[7] against Israel as well as a bargaining chip against both Israel and the United States (MISHAL & SELA, 2006, 97; BAHGAT, 2007, 13). Supporting this security-driven approach, Iran made conditional offers to Israel and the U.S. in 2003 in which Iran offered to end its support for Hamas and Hezbollah. In return, Iran asked the U.S. to recognize its regime, lift sanctions, and end hostile policies, and asked Israel to withdraw to the 1967 borders and end hostilities.[8] The fact that both offers had the endorsement of the Ayatollah Khamanei is a major testament to Iranian leaderships' geo-strategic and security motives behind supporting Hamas and other anti-Israeli Arab militant groups.

Syria and the PKK

The *Partiya Karkaren Kurdistan* (PKK)—Kurdistan Workers' Party—is a Kurdish militant organization that was established in the 1970s by a marginal group of Kurds in Turkey with the aim of creating an independent Kurdish state in the area that the PKK referred to as historical Kurdistan (an area that covers much of southeastern Turkey, northern Iraq, northwestern Iran, and northeastern Syria). The PKK defined its ideology as Marxist-Leninist (BARKEY & FULLER, 1998, 24-5). The PKK and its wings sporadically fought against Iran and rival Kurdish groups in northern Iraq, but its main target has been the Turkish state and military. The PKK also ruthlessly targeted hundreds of Turkish civilians as well as hundreds of unsupportive Kurdish civilians. The three-decade fight between the PKK and the Turkish state has claimed over 35,000 lives (MANGO, 2005, 31). Along with Turkey, about two dozen countries and organizations, including the U.S. and the European Union, have listed the PKK as a terrorist organization.

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7 Hamas' politburo chief in exile Khaled Mashaal stated in December 2005 that the Palestinians and the Islamic Republic are "a united front, and if one member of this front is attacked it is our duty to support them," *Al Jazeera English*, "Hamas springs to Iran's defence," 15 December 2005. Available online at: <http://english.aljazeera.net/archive/2005/12/2008410111928749358.html>.

8 For the details of the Iranian offers, see Parsi (2007, pp. 243-53). See also *BBC News*, "Washington snubbed Iran offer," 18 January 2007, available online at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/6274147.stm>, and Gareth Porter, "Iran Proposal to U.S. Offered Peace with Israel," *Inter Press Services*, 24 May 2003, available online at <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=33348>.

Mainly due to mutual historical grievances, the Turkish Republic did not enjoy friendly relations with any of its neighbors until recently. Turkish-Syrian relations have been particularly strenuous, making both countries perceive one another as enemies and threats during most of the 20th century. Two major elements of the enmity between Syria and Turkey have been Syrian irredentist claims over Alexandretta (Hatay), which joined Turkey in 1939, and disputes over sharing the waters of the Euphrates River, in which Turkey is the upstream country.[9] The third element on the Syrian side was Turkey's recognition of Israel and later forming a strategic partnership with the number one enemy of the Arab states. An additional reason for hostility on the Turkish side was Syrian support for the PKK.

Like all other states in Turkey's vicinity that had an interest or a stake in weakening or destabilizing Turkey, Syria provided valuable support to the Kurdish militants fighting against the Turkish state.[10] Syria provided training facilities for the PKK militants in Syrian-controlled Bekaa Valley in Lebanon and hosted the PKK leader, Abdullah Ocalan, from 1980 to 1998, until the Turkish military issued an ultimatum to Syria to expel Ocalan from Syria or else face military confrontation with Turkey (BARKEY & FULLER, 1998, 31-2; MANGO, 2005, 36). Syrian support for the PKK increased as the Turkish threat to Syria escalated on two fronts during the 1980s and 1990s; Turkey's massive dam projects on the Euphrates River and Turkey's increasing partnership with Israel posed serious threats to its already water-scarce southern neighbor, who had an inimical relationship with Israel. Syrian support for the PKK was mainly driven by the "enemy-of-my-enemy" mentality, using the PKK militants as a tool to weaken Turkey and as a counter-balancing "bargaining chip" against Turkey's "water weapon." For Syria, the PKK was "a valuable tool with which to punish Turkey" (BARKEY & FULLER, 1998, 31). There was neither an ideological nor a moral reason for Syria to support the PKK. Syria was itself a minority-dominated autocracy. More importantly, Syria has its own Kurdish minority, and supporting Kurdish rights has never been high on the Syrian agenda, as was evident in the comparable suppression of Kurdish civil, cultural, and political rights within the country (BRANDON, 2007). Indeed, a high number of Kurds in Syria (estimated to be over 200,000) have long been non-entities, stripped of their citizenship and rights (HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, 1996).[11]

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9 During the Cold War years, the fact that the two countries were in opposite camps also strained relations between Syria and Turkey.

10 Syria was the foremost foreign supporter of the PKK, but it was not the only state to provide valuable support to the PKK. Greece, Iran, and Armenia provided significant support to Kurdish militants for their own security and political reasons (GUNTER, 1997, 108-12). Several other European countries tolerated the organization and provided political support. The PKK's media outlets long operated in Belgium and Britain, and the current major outlet (ROJ TV) broadcasts from Denmark. Europe's aggregate support amounted, at times, to a "life-support system" for the PKK (RADU, 2001, 54).

11 Maybe the most telling evidence of the pragmatic nature of the Syrian-PKK alliance was the fact that Ocalan "has not only refused to provide assistance to the Kurds in Syria, he cooperated with the government in Damascus that brutally oppressed them" (RADU, 2001, 52).

The 1998 Adana Accords, which was signed a few days after Ocalan's extradition from Syria and in which Syria mainly agreed to end its support to the PKK, and the subsequent protocols on water-sharing in the following years started a new era of good-neighborliness in Turkish-Syrian relations (KIBAROĞLU, 2007, 188-9; ARAS & POLAT, 2008, 509-10). Turkey's downgrading its strategic partnership with Israel and adopting a policy that sought a subtle balance between Israel and the Arab world since the "post-Islamist" AKP assumed power in late 2002 made Turkey even dearer and more reliable in Damascus' eyes. Turkish-Syrian relations are currently on a historical high point with rising trade ties, visa-free entries across the border, multiple security arrangements, and cooperation against the PKK (ARAS & POLAT, 2008; WORTH, 2009; ARSU, 2010). Improvements in Syrian security perception as a result of water agreements, change in Turkish-Israeli relations, and the end of the Cold War have transformed Syria from a PKK-supporter to a PKK-hunter.[12]

The United States and the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK)

The Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK), which literally means people's fighters[13], is an Iranian militant organization founded in the 1960s to fight against the pro-Western regime of Shah Muhammad Pahlavi. Its ideology is an interesting blend of Marxism, feminism, and Islam (DEPARTMENT OF STATE, 2008, 292). The MEK targeted and killed dozens of military and political figures as well as civilians during the Shah era. Although, since they were joint dissidents of the Shah regime, the MEK members and Ayatollah Khomeini's followers joined forces during the Shah era, the MEK (along with other leftist groups such as the communist Tudeh Party) found itself sidelined by the Khomeini regime after the 1979 revolution. As a result, since the early 1980s the group has opposed and targeted the Islamic regime in Iran using similar violent methods it had used during the Shah era. The

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12 Byman (2005, 152) explains Syria's abandonment of the PKK in contrast to Damascus' continued support to Hamas and Hezbollah on account of relative insignificance of the Euphrates water vis-à-vis that of the Golan Heights and lack of a strong pro-Kurd movement in Turkey compared to the widespread support the Palestinian movement enjoyed. I believe that this is an erroneous analysis. Although the Adana Accords did not provide concrete gains to Syria in sharing of the Euphrates waters, the treaty allowed an atmosphere of "cautious optimism," that paved the way for subsequent water agreements, which resulted in an increased flow of water into Syria (ARAS & POLAT, 2008, 509). As the agreements on water sharing eased, if not eliminated, a major reason for animosity between Turkey and Syria and thus diminished the PKK's value as a "bargaining chip" in Syrian eyes, downgrading of relations between Turkey and Israel during the AKP rule solidified even more the good-neighborly relations between Damascus and Turkey. Thus, more than anything else, it was specific Turkish steps that improved Syrian security (from Damascus' perspective) that transformed Syria from a PKK-supporter to a PKK-hunter. As for the Damascus' continuing support for "Israel's enemies," it is precisely the lack of such moves on the Israeli side that keeps Syrian relations with Hamas and Hezbollah well and alive. Indeed, in repeated inconclusive peace agreements between Damascus and Tel Aviv, Syria agreed to end its support to both Hamas and Hezbollah in return for Israel's withdrawal from the Golan Heights and normalization of relations with Israel (See, for example, *Haaretz*, 16 January 2007, "Israeli, Syrian Representatives Reach Secret Understandings," available online at: <http://www.haaretz.com/news/israeli-syrian-representatives-reach-secret-understandings-1.210158>).

13 The MEK is also referred as the Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization (MKO).

MEK even allied with Saddam Hussein in the later years of the Iran-Iraq war and provided valuable intelligence as well as mercenary capabilities to Iraq (CLARK, 2007, 65-8; BAHGAT, 2009, 100-1; WOOD et al., 2009, 89-90).

The U.S. Department of State designated the MEK as a terrorist organization in 1992 and the MEK has since remained on the State Department's list of terrorist organizations. In a 2002 address to the U.N. General Assembly, former U.S. President George W. Bush even cited Saddam's support for the MEK as yet another indicator of Saddam's evilness: "Iraq continues to shelter and support terrorist organizations that direct violence against Iran, Israel, and Western governments."[14] However, despite this formal condemnation of the organization, the U.S. has taken a tolerant approach to the MEK in recent years and even deliberately aided the survival of the organization. Despite being listed as a terrorist organization, the MEK maintained an office in Washington, D.C., until 2003 (PARSI, 2007, 246). Top MEK leaders were allowed to flee to Europe and the United States right before the start of the 2003 invasion of Iraq. In the same vein, the U.S. rejected the Iranian demand for the extradition of the MEK members in Iraq and instead designated the famous MEK camp in Iraq near the Iranian border, Camp Ashraf, as "protected persons" under the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention (BAHGAT, 2009, 101-3).[15]

The MEK has also received considerable political support from the neoconservative circles in Washington since the early 2000s. In 2002, 150 members of the U.S. House of Representatives signed a petition that called for the removal of the MEK from the Department of State's list of terrorist organizations (HIGGINS & SOLOMON, 2006). Although the petition was later turned down by the U.S. Supreme Court, MEK's friends in Washington continued lobbying for the organization. Among the most vocal supporters of the MEK were Congressman Tom Tancredo (R-CO) and Congressman Bob Filner (D-CA), who in various occasions argued that the MEK should be removed from the State Department's list of terrorist organizations and the U.S. should increase its support for the Iranian dissident group.[16]

When one asks why the U.S. has been more tolerant and supportive of the MEK in recent years, the answer does not seem unfamiliar. Just as in the case of Saddam's support for the MEK, the motives behind the American shelter provided to and political lobbying on behalf of the MEK turn out to be two-fold, both of which have to do with the increasing threat the U.S. perceives from the Iranian

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14 See, for example, *CNN*, "President Bush's address to the United Nations," 12 September 2002. Available online at: <http://archives.cnn.com/2002/US/09/12/bush.transcript/>.

15 It was not only the Iranians, but also the Iraqi interim government in 2003 who wanted (and ordered) the removal of the MEK members from the Iraqi territory, only to be overruled by Paul Bremer, then the chief U.S. administrator in Iraq (BAHGAT, 2009, p. 105).

16 See, for example, "Group on U.S. terror list lobbies hard," *United Press International*, May 31, 2005. Available online at: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/org/news/2005/050531-terror-list.htm>.

regime in general and the Iranian nuclear program in particular: the MEK provides valuable intelligence on Iran, especially on the Iranian nuclear program, and the MEK can come in handy in the case of an American military campaign against the current regime in Iran (FAYAZMANESH, 2008; BAHGAT, 2009, 104).[17] In one of his 2008 addresses to the House of Representatives, Tom Tancredo likened the Iranian threat to the Nazi threat in the 1930s and wanted the U.S. to form alliances with enemies of the Iranian regime, just as it did with enemies of the Nazi regime.

> Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill were willing to enter into an alliance with Joseph Stalin and the Soviet Union in 1941 in order to defeat Hitler. We used every ally and every resource to defeat the Axis Powers. Yet today, in dealing with the terrorist regime of Iran, a regime that daily threatens to destroy Israel and the U.S. (the "Great Satan") and is actively seeking the means of fulfilling that threat, we cannot find it in our interest to render aid to the People's Mujahideen of Iran because of its checkered past.[18]

Daniel Pipes, a conservative thinker, and Patrick Clawson, currently the Deputy Director for Research of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, were also very clear on why the U.S. should support the MEK: "[W]hen the secretary of state next decides whether or not to re-certify the MEK as a terrorist group, he should come to the sensible conclusion that *it poses no threat to the security of the United States* or its citizens, and remove it from the list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations" (emphasis mine, PIPES & CLAWSON, 2003). The title of their article is even more revealing: "A Terrorist U.S. Ally?". Retired General Thomas McInerney was even more blatant in his argument for the American support for the Iranian dissident groups. He said on FOX News:

> Here's what I would suggest to you. Number one, we take the National Council for Resistance to Iran off the terrorist list that the Clinton Administration put them on as well as the Mujahedin-e Khalq at the Camp Ashraf in Iraq. Then I would start a tit-for-tat strategy, which I wrote up in *the Wall Street Journal* a year ago: For every EFP that goes off and kills Americans, two go off in Iran. No questions asked. People don't have to know how it was done. It's a covert action. They become the most unlucky country in the world.[19]

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17 According to some reports, the U.S. is already using "covert operations" against the Tehran regime (SYNOVITZ, 2009). The MEK members and supporters are likely collaborators in these covert ops just as the Cuban exiles were in the Bay of Pigs case (See Richard Sale, "Cat and mouse game over Iran," *UPI*, 26 January 2006, available online at <http://www.upi.com/Business_News/Security-Industry/2005/01/26/Cat-and-mouse-game-over-Iran/UPI-38761106777400/>).

18 The transcript of the speech is available online at: <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CREC-2008-07-14/pdf/CREC-2008-07-14-pt1-PgE1445.pdf>.

19 A video of McInerney's talk on Fox News can be found at <http://crooksandliars.com/2008/05/15/pentagon-propagandist-general-calls-for-us-to-sponsor-terrorism-against-iran/>.

The American politicians and scholars who lobby on behalf of the MEK go to great pains to portray the organization as pro-Western, democratic, and moderate.[20] However, in reality the MEK is an anti-Western, anti-American, undemocratic, and cult-based organization. The MEK not only killed dozens of American military personnel and technicians in Shah's Iran but also supported the hostage-taking of American diplomats after the revolution, even more fiercely than the Khomeini regime (FLETCHER, 2008; BAHGAT, 2009, 103). Reports of human rights abuses within the organization are widespread (HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, 2005). What is more striking is that, just as in almost all other communist/Marxist militant political movements of the 20th century, the MEK has also evolved into a personality cult with ruthless disdain for any internal dissent (RUBIN, 2003). An ex-MEK member, who is now in Europe, is candid about the dangerous game the U.S. would be playing by supporting the MEK for a regime change in Iran: "This would only replace a snake with a crocodile. I hope America is not going to be that stupid" (HIGGINS & SOLOMON, 2006). Thus, behind the façade of idealistic rhetoric, the American support for the MEK follows a logic that is similar to the one in American support for the Contras against the socialist Sandinista government in Nicaragua (GARVIN, 1992) and for the Cuban militants against Castro's Cuba (ARBOLEYA, 2000): the enemy of my enemy is my friend, even if he is a terrorist.[21]

Concluding remarks

In this study, I examined the relationship between national security and state support to foreign terrorist organizations. Questioning the conventional approach that treats terrorist organizations as "non-state" actors of international relations, I argued that so many terrorist organizations have been exploited as mercenaries in states "cold" wars. Presence of imminent (real or perceived) threats to national security, increases state leaders' willingness to support foreign terrorist organizations

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20 See, for example, Tancredo and Filner, "MEK sense," *The Washington Times*, 15 June 2007, available online at: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2007/jun/14/20070614-085518-9253r/>.

21 Unfortunately, the MEK is not the only Iranian dissident terrorist organization that gained the favors of some American politicians. In a less evident fashion, the U.S. was argued to be providing clandestine support to PJAK, the Iranian wing of the Kurdish terrorist organization PKK (see Dennis Kucinich's letter to George W. Bush on 18 April 2006 at <http://kucinich.house.gov/News/DocumentSingle.aspx?DocumentID=42505> and Seymour Hersh's article in the *New Yorker*, "The Next Act," on November 27, 2006, available online at <http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2006/11/27/061127fa_fact>). PJAK's leader, Haj-Ahmadi, was able to make an unhindered visit to Washington, DC, in 2007 to lobby for the group (THE WASHINGTON TIMES, 2007). In a recent interview with a Turkish daily, former U.S. national security advisor Brent Scowcroft admitted that the U.S. "supported and encouraged" the PJAK against Iran during the Bush Administration (Aksam, "PKK'yi kullandik" [We Used the PKK], 3 April 2009, available online at <http://www.aksam.com.tr/2009/04/03/haber/siyaset/1426/pkk_yi_kullandik.html>). However, the U.S. Treasury under new Obama Administration took a different stance toward PJAK and declared the organization terrorist, thereby freezing the organizations' economic assets in the U.S. See, for example, *Reuters*, "U.S. brands anti-Iran Kurdish group terrorist," 4 February 2009, available online at <http://www.reuters.com/article/latestCrisis/idUSN04297671>.

that work against their enemies. Just as states have all-so-frequently resorted to terror during warfare (SELDEN & SO, 2003),[22] they have also exploited terrorist organizations against their threatening states. It seems, for many states, terror has been nothing but war by other means.

The arguments and analyses in this study also suggest that support for terrorism is present across different cultures and societies and it is driven more by security concerns than by culture or ideology. A substantial number of politicians in many countries follow the guidelines of *realpolitik* and view terrorism as politics (or war) by other means. Thus, a conclusion of this study is that there is no such thing as an "axis of evil"; or if there is one, it is a global axis. Regardless of region, culture, or ideology, security trumps ethics in international relations.[23]

There are important research and policy implications of the analyses in this study. The first is that the conventional approach in studies of terrorism that treats terrorist organizations as non-state actors and terrorism as a tool of the powerless is untenable scholarly and unhelpful policy-wise. Almost all modern terrorist organizations have been backed by at least one state and many terrorist organizations have partially acted as mercenaries in wars of nation-states. As such, the conventional "non-state" approach in International Relations regarding terrorist organizations prevents us from understanding the real power and role of many terrorist organizations and from effectively fighting against terrorism. Therefore, as Blakeley (2007) put it, it is time to bring the state back into terrorism studies.

As for policy implications, given the above-mentioned nature of support for terrorism, it seems that we have two general options of dealing with terrorism. We can give in to the realist pessimism that war is an inevitable reality in an anarchic world and terrorism as well as support for terrorism is just politics by other means. In that case, "war on terror" will be an eternal fight and our highest achievement will be "containing" terrorism. An alternative, and more optimistic, approach

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22 Probably the most extensive state terrorism that included multiple states was the NATO's "Operation Gladio" (WILLAN, 2002; GANSER, 2005). Facing the threat of a Soviet invasion of Western Europe, NATO members under the guidance of American and British intelligence services created a network of stay-behind armies to be used in the case of Soviet invasion. Although initially designed as a precaution against a hypothetical situation, Gladio was later used in some NATO member countries to suppress the rise of Communist parties, the so-called "fifth column." Gladio networks usually recruited right-wing extremists (including, in some cases, former SS members) who engaged in a secret war that included massacres, torture, coup d'états, and cooperation with left-wing terrorist organizations (to carry out "false flag" operations with the aim of demonizing the Communist side). In this case, too, the external threat from the Soviet Union as well as the internal threat from Communist parties (which were also viewed as the long arms of the Soviet Union) convinced a good number of politicians within the NATO alliance to justify using and supporting terrorism for the sake of national security.

23 Some recent scholarship found that the link between threat perceptions and support for terrorism is present at the individual level as well. Using the 2002 Pew Global Attitudes Survey, Fair and Shepherd (2006, 179) found that "those who believe that Islam is under threat are much more likely to support terrorism than those who do not share this view." Using the same dataset but additionally studying the perceived American threat among Muslims, Bueno de Mesquita (2007, 23) found that "the perception of the United States as a threat to Islam is positively correlated with strong support for terrorism." Thus, not just some evil states or unscrupulous statesmen, but people in general seem to abandon their principles in favor of supporting terrorism as they feel more threatened.

will argue that "global war on terror" has to be rooted in a more comprehensive endeavor to enhance global security and the security of states. That comprehensive endeavor will require, first and foremost, that the international community work on strengthening the idea and mechanisms of global collective security to alleviate the pressure on states to follow the guidelines of "self-help" and realpolitik. As the overall risks and threats to states' national security become more manageable, nation-states will have fewer reasons to resort to immoral military options to balance those threats. The insights one gains from a closer analysis of both terrorism and state-sponsored terrorism in the Middle East also suggest that a comprehensive and sustainable global security arrangement will have to address such issues as equitable share of vital resources in the face of resource depletion and global warming, egalitarian and safe utilization of nuclear technology, and a genuine respect for the principle of self-determination.

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Abstract

The conventional approach in the discipline of International Relations is to treat terrorist organizations as "non-state" actors of international relations. However, this approach is problematic due to the fact that most terrorist organizations are backed or exploited by some states. In this article, I take issue with the non-stateness of terrorist organizations and seek to answer the question of why so many states, at times, support terrorist organizations. I argue that

in the face of rising threats to national security in an age of devastating wars, modern nation states tend to provide support to foreign terrorist organizations that work against their present and imminent enemies. I elaborate on my argument studying three cases of state support for terrorism: Iranian support for Hamas, Syrian support for the PKK, and American support for the MEK. The analyses suggest that, for many states, terror is nothing but war by other means.

Keywords: state-sponsored terrorism; national security; war.

Resumo

A abordagem convencional na disciplina de Relações Internacionais é tratar as organizações terroristas como atores "não estatais" de relações internacionais. Entretanto, essa abordagem é problemática em virtude do fato de que a maioria das organizações terroristas são apoiadas ou exploradas por alguns Estados. Neste artigo, discorda-se da não estatalidade das organizações terroristas e busca-se a resposta para por que tantos Estados, às vezes, apoiam organizações terroristas. Debate-se que em vista de crescentes ameaças à segurança nacional em uma época de guerras devastadoras, Estados modernos tendem a suprir apoio a organizações terroristas estrangeiras que trabalham contra seus inimigos atuais e iminentes. Elabora-se o argumento no estudo de três casos de apoio estatal para o terrorismo: o suporte do Irã ao Hamas, o suporte da Síria ao PKK, e o apoio dos EUA à PMOI. As análises sugerem que, para muitos Estados, o terrorismo nada mais é que guerra por outros meios.

Palavras-chave: terrorismo patrocinado por Estados; segurança nacional; guerra.