

## International Terrorism and Immigration Policy

by Steven Emerson

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## Introductory comments:

Good morning. Before I begin my prepared comments, I would like to take a moment to express my deepest appreciation to you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing, and, equally important, for standing up to the orchestrated campaign to stop me from appearing. Because of the investigative work I have carried out as a journalist and investigator in exposing the presence of militant Islamic fundamentalists and Middle Eastern terrorists in the United States (see attached bio), I have been the subject of a sustained campaign of vilification, defamation and even a threat to my life during the past five years by militant Islamic organizations operating as self-anointed representatives of the larger Muslim population, whom they decidedly do not represent. But without access to accurate information about my real background to correct the false claims being fabricated about me, some of those who receive this information are unfortunately subject to manipulation. In the end, the aim of this campaign is to prevent me, as well as others, from speaking and writing about the threat of militant Islamic fundamentalism on American soil, and thus prevent the public from being properly informed. The very success of these organizations and their supporters, fronting under the false veneer of being "moderate" and "mainstream," in creating a chilling climate where free speech on this issue has been suppressed, has become a factor in allowing foreign terrorists to operate in the United States below the radar screen and thus avoid the scrutiny from either the media, public officials or law enforcement. Just as significantly, the tactics of various Islamic organizations do a tremendous disservice to the vast overwhelming majority of Muslim Americans who do not support violence or terrorism. Mr. Chairman, your refusal to allow these militants to suppress free speech is to be applauded and lauded.

## Overview of international terrorist problem:

Thanks to the quick response of US Customs Agents to behavior deemed suspicious at the Canadian border in Port Angeles on December 14, 1999, Ahmed Ressam was caught trying to smuggle RDX explosives. A wide-ranging investigation, unprecedented in its sweep and scope, succeeded in identifying and arresting other members of the hitherto unknown terrorist cell to which Ressam belonged. A plot to bomb and destroy targets in the United States, although still not publicly identified, had been narrowly averted.

Today the United States and Canada serve as the home for a wide spectrum of international terrorist groups as well as indigenous "home-grown" groups. Certainly, today's hearing focuses our attention on the threat of international terrorism on American soil and the porous nature of US borders. While virtually all foreign terrorist organizations from throughout the world, including Latin America and Asia, have set up infrastructures in the United States, the primary threat of international terrorism on American soil stems from Middle Eastern terrorist organizations, a fact that FBI and CIA officials have repeatedly testified to. These organizations have set up fundraising operations, political headquarters, military recruitment and sometimes even command and control centers. The entire spectrum of Middle Eastern and Islamic terrorist groups now operates on American soil, including Hamas,

Hezbollah, the Algerian Armed Islamic Group, the Egyptian Al Gamat Al Islamiya, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, the Islamic Liberation Party, the PKK and Al-Qaeda, the organization of Osama bin Laden.

There are various reasons for the emergence of these groups in the United States, which include:

- Ability to operate under our political radar screen
- Ability to hide under mainstream religious identification
- Loopholes in immigration procedures
- Ease of penetration of borders
- Limitations on FBI and other agencies performing law enforcement functions, including INS and Customs
- More sophisticated compartmentalization of terrorist cells around loosely structured terrorist movements
- Exploitation of freedoms of religion and speech
- Absence of a vigilant media
- Exploitation of non-profit fundraising prerogatives and lack of government scrutiny
- Increasing cross fertilization and mutual support provided by members of different Islamic terrorist groups
- Ease of availability of student visas from countries harboring or supporting terrorism
- Failures by universities to keep track of foreign students and their spouses
- Protection afforded by specially-created educational programs
- Ease of visa fraud and the invention of false credentials, from passports, drivers licenses, credit cards and social security numbers
- Blowback from the anti-Soviet mujihadeen that the US supported in Afghanistan.

Despite passage of the anti-terrorism bill and a realization by law enforcement since the World Trade Center bombing that the threat of Middle Eastern terrorism had become part of the US and Canadian landscapes, militants and terrorists continue to use both countries as a base of operations. As water seeking its own level, terrorists will gravitate to those areas that give them the greatest freedom to maneuver. Unless choked off and stopped along the different points of entry—ranging from the visa granting process overseas to the hundreds of unmanned border crossing points between Canada and

the United States—terrorists will continue to come to the United States. The list of major international terrorists and militants allowed to enter the United States in recent years or actually granted green cards and citizenship is nothing less than staggering.

??Sheikh Omar Abdul Rahman, head of the Egyptian Al Gamat Al Islamiya, and convicted leader of an interdicted plot to bomb US landmarks, bridges and tunnels in New York

??Musa Abu Marzook, one of the top three officials of Hamas (who founded and operated a "think tank" in Chicago and Virginia

??Ali Mohammed, a top lieutenant to Osama bin Laden (and not insignificantly, enrolled as a Special Forces sergeant at Fort Bragg)

??Wadih el Hage, secretary to Osama bin Laden

??Ramadan Abdullah Shallah, head of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (who served as a professor at the University of South Florida in Tampa)

??Sheikh Abdel Aziz Odeh, spiritual leader of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and unindicted co-conspirator in the World Trade Center bombing (who visited the United States multiple times for fundraising and political recruitment without any knowledge of the INS)

??Ayman Zawahiri, leader of the Egyptian Al-Gihad organization, lieutenant to Osama bin Laden and conspirator in the assassination of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat

??Rashhid Ghannoushi, head of the Tunisian Al-Nahdah

??Anwar Haddam, a leader of the Algerian Islamic Salvation Front (FIS)

??Leith Shbeilat, a militant Islamic leader implicated in an assassination plot against Jordan's King Hussein

??Khalid Mishal, a top leader of Hamas, who, in his speeches in the United States, has called for stabbings

??Kamal Hilbawi, a spokesperson for the Muslim Brotherhood, who has called for attacks on American targets and who has encouraged carrying out of suicide bombings

??Yusef Al Qaradawi, a leader of the Muslim Brotherhood and active supporter of Hamas and other violent groups, who has called for suicide bombings and taking over the United States

??Qazi Hussein Ahmed, leader of Pakistani Jamaat-e-Islami, a militant group that supports violent "jihad" or holy war

??Ramzi Yousef, the top organizer of the World Trade Center bombing

??Sheikh Abdulmunem Abu Zant, a militant Jordanian Islamic cleric, who has routinely called for violence

??Ishaq Al-Farhan, a leader of the militant Islamic Jordan Action Front who has issued numerous exhortations to carry out violence

??Wagdi Ghuniem, a militant Islamic cleric from Egypt, who has called for jihad against Jews and other "enemies of Islam." (Curiously, on one of his recent visits to the United States, Ghuniem was barred from entering Canada because of his terrorist affiliations and sent back to the United States, where he continued his tour exhorting Islamic groups to carry out violence.)

#### Loopholes and weaknesses of immigration controls:

Foreign nationals who are terrorist operatives routinely utilize false identity documents to illegally enter the US and/or remain here once they have entered. There are no shortages of examples in this regard - the recent Washington State and Vermont arrests clearly show this. The ability of Islamic Jihad leader Abdel Aziz Odeh to have entered the US numerous times, without leaving a record under his real name, is yet another example. Ghazi Ibrahim Abu Mezer and Lafi Khalil were arrested on July 31, 1997 in a Brooklyn apartment by police officers from the New York City Police Department, based on a tip that people in the apartment were intending to bomb the New York subway system. The arrests narrowly averted a series of bombings that could have killed hundreds of commuters. After the arrests, police determined that Mezer and Khalil were in the United States illegally. Mezer was apprehended three times by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) in the thirteen months prior to the arrest in New York for attempting to illegally enter the United States from Canada. At the time of arrest, the INS had begun formal deportation proceedings against him, but he was free on bail and had filed a request for political asylum based on his fear that the Israeli government would arrest him for membership in Hamas. False documents are as important to terrorists and their organizations as their guns and bombs -- they are tools that help them ply their international trade of death and destruction.

In addition to false documents, alien terrorists and their support operatives frequently engage in immigration benefit fraud. One of the most glaring examples would be asylum fraud. All one has to do is show up at a US port of entry, even without documents, utter the two magic words "political asylum," have any moderately truthful sounding story and one is likely to be processed in - at least temporarily. The tightening of the asylum process over the past couple of years has helped - but, be a fraudulent asylum claimant showing up at a very busy Point of Entry such as JFK Airport or Miami International Airport - and you are likely to remain in detention for only a short time before you are paroled out to (hopefully) appear at a later hearing! If a name (real or false) does not appear in any of the lookout systems and the applicant merely has an alleged "friend" to stay with in the US, then parole from detention is most likely. Of course, it goes without saying, terrorist aliens so released seldom show up again - and the INS, because of serious manpower shortages and conflicting priorities, rarely pursues such absconders. Of course, any number of other immigration fraud schemes abound - marriage fraud, other familial relation fraud, naturalization fraud, work visa fraud (H-1 and L-1 and "E" status - as used by Islamic Jihad officials Ramadan Abdullah Shallah and Bashir Nafi), investor fraud and religious worker fraud.

Smuggling of alien terrorist operatives - apart from the noted utilization of false documents: alien terrorists use established alien smuggling pipelines across both the US-Mexico and US-Canada border. Maritime smuggling along the coasts, particularly via the Caribbean as well as East and West Coast seaports, occurs. How easy can it be for a terrorist operative to bribe his/her way onto a freighter destined to a busy US seaport, and simply be hidden aboard the vessel until Customs and INS have done their routine inspections, then to simply disembark the vessel?

The issue of classified evidence in immigration proceedings is now under assault by editorialists in the media and from some members of Congress. What they forget is that these proceedings are administrative in nature - not criminal - and such evidence, in spite of all the recent hoopla, is only rarely and very selectively utilized. Deportation proceedings ultimately result in a person being removed from the US - not sentenced to prison (as in criminal proceedings) - even though aliens may be detained while those proceedings go forward. As such, it should be remembered that aliens detained hold their own cell keys - all they have to is simply agree to be deported and they can be free - just not in the US. Moreover, Congress itself approved of the Classified Information Procedures Act, in which classified information can be introduced in criminal trials without releasing this information to the defendant.

Unfortunately, too many senior INS managers do not recognize the critically important role INS enforcement branches, particularly the Investigations Division, can and should play in the counter-terrorism and national security arena. These are officials at both the HQ and field levels. INS has but a small contingent of agents dedicated to this work - and, often those do not receive the recognition and support from higher management they should. INS should have at least a hundred field agents assigned to these missions - at least the same it has assigned to Organized Crime Drug Task Force efforts - but in fact INS has less than half that assigned to counter-terrorist efforts in the field. I have been told that it is not unusual for very senior INS officials - especially at headquarters (who should know otherwise), when the topic of counter-terrorism arises in senior staff meetings, to state, "that's the FBI's responsibility" and "what does INS have to do with that"! Certain key, senior INS managers fail to even understand and recognize the very statutes within the Immigration and Nationality Act they are charged with enforcing!

New information on the Algerian and Jordanian terrorist plots:

Last fall, a stateless Mauritanian flew from Germany to Montreal. Within days before and after his visit to a group of Algerian nationals living in Montreal, several members of that group flew to Chechnya; another group traveled to Vancouver and another headed for the Vermont border.

According to a superseding federal indictment released last week, Ressam and a still fugitive accomplice Abdelmajid Dahoumane plotted "to destroy or damage structures, conveyances or other real or personal property within the United States." The plot, which stretches back to at least 1998, according to federal authorities, called for compartmentalized cells to be activated in the United States. No one cell would know about the others, in the event that any of the participants got arrested. Members of another cell belonging to the same group and entering the United States through Vermont border crossings were to rendezvous in a still undisclosed location in the northeast. Ressam was to be met in Seattle by a Brooklyn based Algerian Abdel Ghani Meskini. While Ressam had planned to fly to London after leaving the explosives laden car for someone else to pick up, Meskini was to fly from Seattle to Chicago to help secure additional funding for the Islamic terrorist group. Telephone toll records, released by prosecutors, show that the Seattle cell was in contact with the Vermont-based cell through third party numbers.

**Border Issues**  
**Oversight hearing on Terrorist Threats to the United States**  
**January 26, 2000**

Committee on the Judiciary Hearing Testimony Presented to Subcommittee on Immigration and Claims

Oversight hearing on Terrorist Threats to the United States – January 26, 2000

News Advisory, Witness List, Honorable Lamar Smith, Honorable Sheila Jackson Lee Ambassador Martin Collacott, Mr. Steven Emerson, Mr. David Harris, Mr. Christopher Sands, Mr. Gary Stubblefield, Mr. John Thompson, Ambassador Philip C. Wilcox (prepared testimony not available)

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**Statement of the Honorable Lamar Smith, Chairman**  
**Subcommittee on Immigration and Claims**  
**House Committee on the Judiciary**  
**Hearing on Terrorist Threats to the United States**  
**January 25, 2000**

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