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ONE HUNDRED EIGHTH CONGRESS

# Congress of the United States

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May 17, 2004

The Honorable Colin L. Powell  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Last month, the Department of State released its annual *Patterns of Global Terrorism* report, announcing that international terror was on the decline in 2003. It appears, however, that the decline in terrorism reported by the State Department results from manipulation of the data, not an actual decline in terrorism incidents. This manipulation may serve the Administration's political interests, but it calls into serious doubt the integrity of the report.

According to the report, the number of international terrorist attacks per year has declined by 45% since 2001. The report claims that the 190 attacks in 2003 represent "the lowest annual total of international terrorist attacks since 1969."<sup>1</sup> These findings led Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage to claim in his briefing that the report demonstrates "clear evidence that we are prevailing in the fight" against terror.<sup>2</sup>

Despite these claims of success, the data show an increase in "significant" terrorist incidents since 2001. The report includes a chronological list of these incidents, defined as any international terror attack that "results in loss of life or serious injury to persons, major property damage, and/or is an act or attempted act that could reasonably be expected to create the conditions noted."<sup>3</sup> Since 2001, the number of significant attacks has increased by more than 35%.

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<sup>1</sup>U.S. Department of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism 2003* (April 2004).

<sup>2</sup>Statement of Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage, *Release of the 2003 "Patterns of Global Terrorism" Annual Report* (April 29, 2003) (online at [www.state.gov/s/d/rm/31961.htm](http://www.state.gov/s/d/rm/31961.htm)).

<sup>3</sup>U.S. Department of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism 2003* (April 2004).

Two independent experts – Professor Alan Krueger of Princeton University and Professor David Laitin of Stanford University – have analyzed the State Department report in detail. They conclude that significant terrorism attacks actually reached a 20-year high in 2003.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, the actual increase in significant terrorist attacks appears to be undercounted in the State Department report. The report lists 169 significant terrorism attacks in 2003. But a close review of the document reveals that the list of significant incidents stops on November 11. This is not because terror stopped for the last seven weeks of the year. In fact, there were multiple international terror attacks after that date – including the deadly bombings of two synagogues, a bank, and a British consulate in Turkey. A State Department representative told my staff that the list was cut off due to a printing deadline.<sup>5</sup>

The State Department's claim that terrorism is on the decline is based solely on a steep decrease in the number of "nonsignificant" terror attacks since 2001. According to the data in the report, these attacks have declined by more than 90% in two years.<sup>6</sup> But the report does not provide any explanation for how or why this drastic decline in nonsignificant attacks has occurred.

In an effort to understand why the State Department reported that nonsignificant terrorism attacks dropped from 231 in 2001 to less than 21 in 2003, my staff asked for a list of the nonsignificant attacks. The Department, however, refused to disclose either the list of total attacks or the process by which these attacks are selected for inclusion on the list.<sup>7</sup> This leads to the bizarre conclusion that each significant terror attack is detailed in a public report, but information regarding the nonsignificant attacks is withheld from Congress.

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<sup>4</sup>Professors Alan B. Krueger and David Laitin, *Faulty Terror Report Card*, Washington Post (May 17, 2004).

<sup>5</sup>Telephone conversation between Joseph W. Reap, Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, U.S. Department of State, and Minority Staff, House Committee on Government Reform (May 12, 2004).

<sup>6</sup>The 2003 report lists 355 total attacks for 2001 and 190 for 2003. The 2001 report details 124 significant attacks, leaving 231 non-significant attacks. The 2003 report details 169 significant attacks, leaving at most 21 non-significant attacks.

<sup>7</sup>Telephone conversation between Joseph W. Reap, Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, U.S. Department of State, and Minority Staff, House Committee on Government Reform (May 12, 2004).

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The secrecy surrounding the nonsignificant incidents prevents independent verification of the State Department's claims. According to Professors Krueger and Laitin, "[b]ecause 'significant events' include such things as destroying an ATM in Greece or throwing a molotov cocktail at a McDonald's in Norway without causing much damage, it is easy to imagine that nonsignificant events are counted with a squishy definition that can be manipulated to alter the trend."<sup>8</sup>

I have been a vigorous critic of the politicization of science by the Bush Administration. A report I released last year<sup>9</sup> and a similar report released this year by the Union of Concerned Scientists<sup>10</sup> documented numerous instances of the manipulation of science across a range of science-based federal agencies. It now appears that the State Department is also manipulating data for political purposes.

Simply put, it is deplorable that the State Department report would claim that terrorism attacks are decreasing when in fact significant terrorist activity is at a 20-year high.

In January, I raised concerns about a report from the Department of Health and Human Services that had been manipulated to minimize the impact of health care disparities.<sup>11</sup> To his credit, Secretary Thompson conceded that "there was a mistake made" and ordered the release of a revised report.<sup>12</sup> I urge you to take similar action. You should acknowledge that the Patterns of Global Terrorism report is flawed and take immediate steps to release a revised report that accurately presents the data.

In addition, to facilitate my investigation of this incident, I request that you provide by June 1:

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<sup>8</sup>Professors Alan B. Krueger and David Laitin, *Faulty Terror Report Card*, Washington Post (May 17, 2004).

<sup>9</sup>Minority Staff, House Committee on Government Reform, *Politics and Science in the Bush Administration* (Aug. 2003) (online at [www.house.gov/reform/min/politicsandscience](http://www.house.gov/reform/min/politicsandscience)).

<sup>10</sup>Union of Concerned Scientists, *Scientific Integrity in Policymaking: An Investigation into the Bush Administration's Misuse of Science* (March 2004) (online at [www.ucsusa.org/global\\_environment/rsi/index.html](http://www.ucsusa.org/global_environment/rsi/index.html)).

<sup>11</sup>Letter from Rep. Henry A. Waxman to Secretary of Health and Human Services Tommy Thompson (Jan. 13, 2004).

<sup>12</sup>*Washington in Brief*, Washington Post (Feb. 11, 2004).

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1. Detailed annual listings of all "total international terrorist attacks" since 1995;
2. The complete listing of "significant terrorist incidents" in 2003, including those that occurred after November 11;
3. The identities of the members of the U.S. Government Incident Review Panel who decide which incidents will be included in the *Patterns of Global Terrorism* report; and
4. An explanation of the procedures for defining an act as an international terrorist attack and whether those procedures have changed in recent years.

I hope you will give this matter your prompt and thorough attention.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Henry A. Waxman". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Henry A. Waxman  
Ranking Minority Member