

# CRS Report for Congress

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## **Combating Terrorism: Possible Lessons for U.S. Policy from Foreign Experiences, Summary of the Major Points of a Seminar**

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# Combating Terrorism: Possible Lessons for U.S. Policy from Foreign Experiences, Summary of the Major Points of a Seminar

## Summary

Participants in a CRS seminar on the possible lessons to be learned from other countries' experiences in dealing with terrorism, generally agreed on three things. First, terrorism is used by a wide variety of groups for a wide variety of ends. Second, the current threat that the United States faces from Islamist terrorism is most likely long-term. And third, policymakers must think through anti-terrorist actions in order to avoid consequences that may be worse than the original problem. Much of the seminar discussion focused on matters that two and a half years later became the subject of 9/11 Commission recommendations. A revised introduction highlights the discussion summarized in this report that is relevant to Commission recommendations. The remainder of the report has not been changed.

Discussions during the three hour seminar, held on January 22, 2002, centered on the relative utility of three main policy tools: (1) targeting members and leaders for arrest and assassination, or as speaker Christopher Hewitt labeled it, the "model of attrition," (2) negotiations, and (3) reforms. Hewitt, who has studied the effectiveness of anti-terrorism policies in five countries said that the only one that showed clear results was a "model of attrition," i.e., that arrest, internment, or killing of terrorists is the most effective means to significantly reduce levels of terrorist violence. Speaker Martha Crenshaw weighed the pros and cons of targeted assassinations, noting that for her the disadvantages — principally the difficulty of avoiding mistakes and the possibility that assassinations would just encourage others to take the place of those killed — outweighed the advantages — principally that it was relatively more humane than a massive military response.

The most controversial subject was the utility of political and economic reforms in countries that harbor terrorists. Many questions were raised about Hewitt's finding that improving economic conditions did not have any effect on levels of terrorism, and that fairly extensive political reforms might decrease, but did not end terrorism. Some raised the possibility that long-term educational reforms, and other methods of changing perceptions, might have more success.

The difficulties of achieving negotiated settlements to end terrorism were examined. Participants suggested ways to increase the chances for successful outcomes. These included international support for legitimate core issues in order to increase support for negotiations, international participation in the negotiations; and the adoption of measures that would isolate terrorists, including steps to increase the rule of law, and anti-corruption, educational, and cultural programs.

The utility of controlling supporting structures for terrorism and restricting civil liberties were also discussed. Speakers noted that international cooperation is necessary to control arms and funds that usually flow from abroad.

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