

STIGMA ENIGMA

Ending hypocrisy of terrorist designation

Friends are branded as enemies while real enemies are appeased

By Gen. Hugh Shelton



ILLUSTRATION BY UMES GARYTS

As two current high-profile cases demonstrate, the U.S. government's practice of listing "foreign terrorist organizations" (FTOs) has become an increasingly dangerous and hollow political exercise rather than a sober assessment of the real threats to America.

Last month, Afghanistan's ruthless Haqqani Network reportedly staged a brazen attack against the U.S. Embassy in Kabul. The Haqqanis, who conduct grisly terrorist attacks on hotels, embassies and other targets to advance their agenda to become power brokers in a future political settlement, reportedly are responsible for hundreds of American deaths since 2001. Some American military officers apparently are furious that the Obama administration decided not to designate the Haqqani Network as a terrorist organization because it was feared that listing the group would make it harder for the Afghan government to negotiate with the Haqqanis.

At the same time, the United States continues to list the Mujahedin-e-Khalq (MEK), Iran's main opposition group and a declared democratic ally, as an FTO even though it meets none of the criteria and long ago renounced violence. Importantly, the group was the first to reveal Iran's 20-year clandestine nuclear program and provided invaluable intelligence to the U.S. military in Iraq, which not only helped identify and neutralize Iran's proxy terrorist groups operating in that country but undoubtedly saved American lives in the process.

What gives? Listing organizations like the MEK and not listing groups like the Haqqanis sends the wrong message to friends and foes alike.

In the case of the MEK, the group was put on the State Department's list of

terrorist organizations in 1997 to appease the Tehran regime. The mullahs, who hate and fear the MEK, demanded that the group be listed as a precondition for potential negotiations with the United States. Those negotiations never materialized, and today, Iran remains the most dangerous player in the region. Ironically, the misguided FTO designation has given Iran and its proxies in Iraq a license to kill thousands of MEK members, including a massacre on April 8 that killed or wounded hundreds of unarmed men and women in their Iraqi base known as Camp Ashraf. The current drawdown of protective U.S. troops in Iraq means that almost certain annihilation awaits a group that has dedicated itself to a democratic, non-nuclear Iran.

There is a growing movement to

delist the MEK. It includes a bipartisan group of 96 members of Congress, including chairmen of the House Select Intelligence and Armed Services committees and an impressive roster of former high-level intelligence, law enforcement and security officials from the Clinton, George W. Bush and Obama administrations.

Today, there is once again a fierce debate inside the Obama administration on whether to put the Haqqani Network on the terrorist list.

As for the Haqqanis, sources indicate that during high-level discussions last year, Obama administration officials debated listing the group as an FTO, which would have allowed for assets to be frozen and could help dry up the pool of financial donors supporting the group. Though some political leaders and military commanders pushed for the designation in response to the group's escalating attacks on Americans, the administration decided

that such a move might alienate the Haqqanis and drive them away from the negotiating table. It also would have been perceived as another "provocation" in the already tenuous U.S.-Pakistani relationship. In late September, Adm. Michael Mullen, then chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, made a compelling case for Pakistani complicity in the attack against the U.S. Embassy in Kabul.

What began as a coordinated effort to identify, list, delegitimize and defang terrorist groups has instead become a symbol of appeasement: America put the MEK on the list to appease the Iranians and has kept the Haqqanis off the list to appease Pakistan as well as Afghanistan, which will have to deal with the network long after Americans leave.

Today, there is once again a fierce debate inside the Obama administration on whether to put the Haqqani Network on the terrorist list. At the same time, a debate rages over whether to delist the

MEK. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia has ordered the U.S. State Department to evaluate the designation as pressure mounts within the department for a new strategy for dealing with the Iranian regime, which it acknowledges is the No. 1 state sponsor of terrorism.

It appears we are dangerously inconsistent when it comes to the FTO list. Potential friends are branded as terrorists, and avowed enemies avoid a stigmatized identity that could help sap their mystique, funding and support. Both decisions should be reversed immediately, and the whole FTO strategy needs to be examined. The FTO list should be an instrument for counterterrorism, not a tool of negotiation in which hundreds of lives — not to mention American prestige — are used as leverage.

Gen. Hugh Shelton is a former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

COUNTDOWN TO UPHEAVAL

By William M. Isaac and Richard M. Kovacevich

President Obama recently challenged House Majority Leader Eric Cantor, Virginia Republican, to explain what he didn't like in the president's jobs bill. Mr. Obama didn't ask our opinion, but we'll give it anyway: The bill wouldn't have turned around the economy, and it wouldn't have created meaningful jobs.

Forget, for a moment, whether you are Republican, Democrat, Libertarian, Tea Party, independent or none of the above. Ask yourself whether we have addressed during the past three years the root causes of our nation's economic decline.

Have we changed the fiscal policies that played a major role in the crisis of 2008 and resulted in a historic downgrade of U.S. debt? Have we addressed the housing crisis and tended to mortgage giants Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, without which there would not have been a mortgage crisis and all that followed? Have we tackled regulatory reform to create more effective and less obtrusive regulation of businesses? Have we reformed the credit-rating and regulatory agencies that allowed speculative growth to get out of hand?

Mr. Obama inherited a mess, to be sure. The economy and jobs pictures warranted his undivided attention. There should have been no higher priority for the president and Congress.

What we got instead was health care reform; the Dodd-Frank financial legislation; federal spending on a scale unprecedented in peacetime; monetary policies that give new meaning to the word "loose"; a depreciating dollar,

America's moment of truth

Only tough leadership can save economy

The last conservative, Pat Buchanan



SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

By Jeffrey T. Kuhner

Is America in its twilight years? Patrick J. Buchanan argues it is. Americans, especially conservatives, should heed his warnings. The very future of our republic is at stake. Mr. Buchanan has written the political book of the year — and maybe of our time.

In "Suicide of a Superpower" (Thomas Dunne Books, 2011), the nationally syndicated columnist and TV commentator delivers a damning indictment of the past two decades. His thesis: America is in decline. Unless it is reversed, the United States — like great republics before it — will be swept into the dustbin of history.

Mr. Buchanan argues that our leaders have embraced the "New World Order." Unlimited immigration, free trade, open borders, strident multiculturalism, globalism, a cradle-to-grave welfare state, neo-pagan morality, massive deficit spending and democratic imperialism — together they have triggered the moral, economic and spiritual disintegration of America.

Mr. Buchanan was one of the few conservatives to directly challenge the Great Society Republicanism prevalent throughout the George W. Bush admin-

istration. He opposed No Child Left Behind, the Medicare prescription-drug benefit, runaway spending, amnesty for illegal aliens, economic globalization and the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP). He argues that the GOP establishment had lost its ideological way, abandoning principle in favor of power. Niccolò Machiavelli trumped Ronald Reagan.

The author insists that President Obama has accelerated — and deepened — the failed Bush policies. Mr. Obama is seeking to

Mr. Buchanan states that the exploding debt threatens our economic future. It will force America into default or to devalue our currency, leading to Weimar Germany-style inflation.

erect a European-style nanny state. Bailouts have propped up big business and big banks, as Middle America was forced to pay for it. Mr. Obama's trillion-dollar deficits have brought us to the brink of bankruptcy. His economic stimulus failed to create jobs, while it ex-

panded the reach of government — providing more beneficiaries and voters loyal to the Democrats. Obamacare is another massive entitlement program Americans cannot afford. Mr. Buchanan states that the exploding debt threatens our economic future. It will force America into default or to devalue our currency, leading to Weimar Germany-style inflation. Heighers programs — Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid,

and regulatory burdens that are suffocating the economy. Health care reform was not an urgent priority; The legislation did little to fix the primary problems with health

care delivery and will add at least \$1 trillion to the federal deficit. The Dodd-Frank bill failed to address the problems that caused the financial crisis of 2008 and will make it more difficult to han-