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BELL: Joining us live now in our New York bureau, author Claire\Sterling, an expert on international terrorism. Her new book entitled, 'The Time of the Assassins,' will be published next month. Ms. Sterling, you heard the president today talk about a new kind of state-supported terrorism--that's just something we never had, haven't ever had to cope with before. STERLING: Yes.

BELL: Do you agree with that? STERLING: Well, it's a rather surprising statement, considering that his first secretary of state after election, Alexander Haig, at his first press conference, ah, after becoming secretary of state, announced that the number one priority for that, this administration would be the problem of international terrorism. Ah, state-supported international terrorism is, ah, is as old as international terrorism. So, it, I would have thought that after three years it would not be considered a new phenomenon. In fact, it seems to me that this, the real problem here with our forces in Lebanon is precisely this, that, ah, that there did not seem to be an anticipation of this kind of terrorist attack, that we were not prepared for a situation that we should have understood long ago.

BELL: Now, the president said he agrees with findings in a report still to be released that say in effect our military just isn't trained for this sort of thing because it's so new and different. Does that strike you as... STERLING: Well, ah, well, as I say, ah, we should have started training them at least three years ago, when his, ah, secretary of state pointed out the urgency of coping with the problem and giving it priority. I don't believe in fact that, that, ah, it is possible for us to have trained for the, adequately, for the new kind of terrorist attack which we are now facing, which is indeed a serious new problem, which is the suicide mission, which is a development in international terrorism we haven't had to cope with before. And, ah, I don't know how much, whether any amount of security precaution could really have saved, ah, our Marines in such a situation. The French have had the same problem. The Israelis have had the same problem. Palestinian groups have had the same problem. When you're dealing with a suicide mission it does require a special, ah, kind of preparation that obviously none of us have.

BELL: There's also talk of an intelligence gap, that, ah, we just aren't getting the kind of internal intelligence that, that we used to get and that there is something to be gained here and improved on. Do you think there is room for improved there.... STERLING: Oh, I....

BELL: ...that would make a difference? STERLING: Oh, absolutely. I, and here I think the question is not just the, the, ah, coordination of intelligence sources among the four powers of the multinational keep, ah, peacekeeping force or together with Israel or together also with the Lebanese. Here we have the, the, ah, suicide missions, the Shiite group, ah, carrying out these suicide missions are really very dangerous enemies of a great many other countries and forces with competent intelligence forces--Saudi Arabia, other moderate Arab states, ah, the whole branch of the Palestine resistance headed by Arafat still. All of these forces are being threatened. All have a common interest in stopping this kind of attack. And, to, to my knowledge, we have very poor, we have allowed frictions, hostilities, old suspicions and distrusts and national jealousies to keep us from pooling our information.

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BELL: In other words, when the president said today that we're going to have to have more unity, more cooperation among governments, more sharing of intelligence information, this is something that can and should happen. STERLING: Oh, yes, indeed. Well, it should happen--I don't know if it can.

BELL: Claire Sterling, thank you very much for joining us tonight. STERLING: Thank you.

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