



Terrorism

Point #1 Global terrorist networks such as al Qaeda pose a serious threat to the United States; the number of attacks around the world increased during the Bush years.

Point #2 Distinguishing between different terrorist groups - as opposed to lumping them all together - drives wedges between extremists.

Point #3 Some Muslim political parties are strongly committed to democracy and the rule of law - we should work with them.

The Threat of Terrorism

September 11th inflicted casualties and material damages on a far greater scale than any other terrorist attack in recent history. Nearly three thousand Americans lost their lives, and a great American landmark – the Twin Towers – was completely destroyed, while the Pentagon was severely damaged. Lower Manhattan lost approximately 30% of its office space and several businesses ceased to exist.

In spite of the cost, the loss of life, and the psychological trauma, the United States recovered from 9/11. The threat of terrorism, however, remains. Terrorist organizations such as al Qaeda have stated their willingness to use weapons of mass destruction against the United States, and they must be taken at their word. After 9/11, the Bush administration rightly emphasized the danger posed by terrorism. But our success in the so-called “War on Terrorism” has been limited.

After striking a major blow to al Qaeda during the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan, the Bush administration turned its attention to Iraq, allowing al Qaeda and Taliban fighters to regroup in Pakistan, from where they now plan and launch attacks against U.S. and coalition forces in Afghanistan.

Terrorism and Iraq

Since the start of the Iraq War, terrorist attacks around the world have increased. According to Peter Bergen and Paul Cruickshank, who are research fellows at the Center on Law and Security at the NYU School of Law, there was a 607% rise in the average yearly incidence of attacks (28.3 attacks per year before and 199.8 after) and a 237% rise in the average fatality rate (from 501 to 1,689 deaths per year) from 2003-2006, not including attacks carried out by Palestinian organizations.

Even excluding Iraq, the average yearly number of jihadist terrorist attacks and resulting fatalities rose sharply around the world by 265% and 58%, respectively. And while these figures are the subject of some debate – as different researchers define “terrorist attacks” in different ways – the majority of analysts agree that the Iraq War has increased the number of terrorist attacks not only in Iraq, but also worldwide.

The Challenge

Devising a Strategy. These numbers prove that terrorism is alive and well and that the United States needs a coherent counterterrorism strategy more than ever. Devising such a strategy will take time and effort, as the task is complicated by the different means and ends espoused by different terrorist organizations.



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Terrorism and Pakistan

- In 2008, the number of terrorist attacks dropped by 55% in Iraq and 18% worldwide, from 2007 levels. The number of casualties fell by 30%. Although Iraq has seemingly improved, the situation in Pakistan has worsened in recent years.
- Since 2005, the number of fatalities has almost doubled every year, reaching at least 6,700 in 2008. Since U.S. intervention in 2001, the Taliban has been using tribal zones in northern Pakistan as launching sites for attacks in Afghanistan and al Qaeda has moved its headquarters there.
- The government risks losing control of large parts of the country. In fact, after the huge military offensive in the Swat valley in Spring 2009, it is more and more difficult to determine whether Pakistan is dealing with terrorists or with a broader insurgency.
- The presence of al Qaeda in the mountains of Pakistan has undoubtedly had an important role in driving this development, but it is critical that we understand that long-standing tribal, local, and religious identities are fueling the conflict; elements largely independent of the global jihadist movement.



Al Qaeda

Of all the terrorist organizations in the world, al Qaeda (AQ) poses the greatest threat to U.S. interests. However, “al Qaeda” takes many different forms and we must distinguish its various incarnations if we are to destroy it once and for all. We can divide al Qaeda into three separate headings whose differences are stark, yet poorly understood by the American public.



Al Qaeda is...

A small cadre of individuals on the Afghanistan/Pakistan border who conceived and executed the September 11th attacks. Al Qaeda’s Senior Leadership (AQL) - including Osama Bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri, and their top lieutenants - are the only network judged capable of conducting a large-scale attack within the U.S. Although the 2001 U.S. invasion of Afghanistan dealt al Qaeda a severe setback, various U.S. intelligence reports indicate that it has reorganized in Pakistan’s Federally Administered Tribal Areas and has begun to resume its activities. Although al Qaeda’s operational capacity does not seem to extend beyond Afghanistan and Pakistan, it is difficult to say whether it could ever again conduct another 9/11-style attack on the U.S. homeland. Yet the possibility remains.



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Al Qaeda is...

A **branding operation** that has subsumed many regional movements and terrorist cells under the same name. Al Qaeda In Iraq (AQI) is one of the aforementioned “branding” partners. AQI does not take direction from AQSL, yet conducts anti-American operations in Iraq in hopes of leveraging the “al Qaeda” brand to attract recruits, money, and weapons. Currently on the run in Iraq, AQI does not likely have the capability to attack the U.S. The U.S. military believes that many of AQI’s top fighters are leaving Iraq to go fight in Afghanistan. The other most prominent al Qaeda “branding” partner is al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), an Algerian group previously known as the Groupe Salafiste pour la Predication et le Combat (GSPC). While AQIM has begun targeting western assets in its native Algeria, it does not likely have the intent or capability to strike the U.S.



Al Qaeda is...

A **cause that inspires** unconnected cells to undertake terrorism-related activities. Broadly speaking, the “al Qaeda cause” has fostered thousands of self-radicalized copy-cat groups seeking to conduct attacks against their home countries. For example, the cells that conducted the 2005 London bombings may have received training from AQ leaders in Pakistan/Afghanistan, but did not receive AQ funding, direction, or recruits. These cells may or may not reach out to AQSL for funds; they instead make use of internet resources, ideology, and how-to manuals to conduct home-grown terrorism.

The Challenge of Combating Terrorism

America faces five major challenges in the fight against terrorism:

1.) **Following the trends.**



- **Terrorism trends are constantly changing.** When one group executes an innovative attack, other groups will seek to adopt it, whether or not they are affiliated. Most of this innovation is decidedly low-tech -- fertilizer-based bombs worked in Casablanca in 2003, and were adopted in Madrid in 2004 and London in 2005. Groups value success over technology, and find ways to defeat defenses with simpler and simpler methods.
- **The recent attacks in Mumbai** – carried out by a Pakistani group – showed a different trend, though. That time, the terrorists used military tactics. Fighters were gunmen, not suicide bombers. Multiple assault teams attacked multiple targets, showing a degree of preparation and training unseen outside war zones. It took several days to root out the terror teams who managed to paralyze a city of 18 million, leaving 173 people dead and more than 300 injured. The self-confidence of the terrorists and their ability to penetrate the heart of a big city with military techniques is a very frightening development that clearly illustrates the threat posed by terrorism.



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2.) Distinguishing between different terrorist organizations.

- **Global and Local Terrorists.** Al Qaeda, Hamas and the Tamil Tigers are all terrorist organizations that are guilty of spilling innocent blood. Yet only al Qaeda has the international reach and stated desire to execute large-scale attacks against the United States. It is vitally important for the U.S. government to distinguish between terrorist organizations' differing goals, causes, and targets.

By recognizing the various motivations of terrorist organizations and by understanding their different historical backgrounds, we can better divide our enemies and protect ourselves from attack.

- **Iraq** presents an instructive case. Although not Islamic extremists, nationalist Sunni Arabs teamed up with al Qaeda to fight U.S. forces in Iraq after the war began in 2003. However, al Qaeda's brutality and rigid theology eventually caused most of Iraq's Sunni Arab insurgents to turn on al Qaeda. U.S. military commanders smartly took advantage of this opportunity and began to court Sunni Arabs with guns and money. Al Qaeda in Iraq is now severely weakened and radically unpopular.

The lesson is clear: not all Muslims who engage in violence are terrorists who wish to destroy the United States and its way of life. American leaders must seize every opportunity to sow division among extremists in order to destroy those who truly and consistently wish us ill.



3.) Distinguishing between violent and non-violent Islamist organizations.

- **"Islamism,"** also known as "political Islam," refers to a belief system in which Islam provides a blueprint for political life as well as religious life. As opposed to secular Muslims, Islamists believe that Islamic laws and values ought to be at the foundation of all political activity.
- **Non-Violent Islamist Parties.** Not all Islamists believe that violence must be used to force their vision of Islam on others. The Justice and Development Party of Turkey (AKP) and the Party for Justice and Development (PJD) in Morocco are examples of non-violent parties that participate in elections and abide by the results. These parties are more similar to Christian Democratic parties in Europe than to violent Islamist movements. Other Islamist organizations fall in-between, and are akin to Ireland's Sein Fein, which conducted political activities, but was allied with the violent Irish Republican Army. As with Sein Fein, a long, difficult political process may allow a legitimate non-violent political party to emerge and discredit the terrorist arm.

It is essential to distinguish between non-violent Islamist organizations, such as the AKP, and violent Islamist organizations, such as al Qaeda.

- **Importance of Islamist Parties.** Because some members of non-violent Islamist parties were formerly associated with violent organizations, this can be difficult to do. But Islamist parties enjoy greater popularity and legitimacy in the Muslim world than many secular parties. They are seen as less corrupt and less beholden to the West.

Consequently, if the United States is to foster democracy – or even simply reduce terrorist movements in the Islamic world – it will not only have to accept the existence of non-violent Islamist parties, it will have to actively seek their cooperation to ensure that they remain committed to the ballot box and do not become tempted by bombs.



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4.) Attacking Current Terrorists Without Creating More

Terrorists are not a finite group; their ranks can swell following U.S. actions that help recruitment, and can diminish when they overplay their own hand—as occurred when terrorist groups in Pakistan began targeting Pakistani civilians and saw their support in that country plummet.

If the United States is to succeed at defeating terrorists around the globe, it must act on the reality of what motivates terrorists, not on political rhetoric. If al Qaeda remains a highly capable, top-down organization in control of thousands of followers, then it will sometimes make sense to launch invasions and introduce conventional ground forces into Islamic countries where al Qaeda is suspected of hiding.

However, if the hard core of al Qaeda has been reduced to fewer than 200 militants in northwest Pakistan – as research by terrorism expert Marc Sageman indicates – and the next generation of terrorists is motivated not by al Qaeda’s theology, but by seeing fellow Muslims killed in Iraq, then large scale ground invasions would have the effect of increasing terrorism.

If that is the case, killing and capturing the few remaining hardcore al Qaeda members – who still remain dangerous – is a job best done by local law enforcement or military action, intelligence organizations, or, as a last option, by as light a U.S. military action as possible. Success will thus require the United States to both equip itself with the right military and intelligence tools, as well as foster ties with other governments and nations that have the capabilities and the wherewithal to tackle problems closer to their own borders.

5.) Capture and Kill versus Hearts and Minds

Mitigating the threat of Islamic extremism requires a judicious balance between:

- The use of force to kill and capture active terrorists.
- The use of our economic and political might – as well as our moral standing – to win over hearts and minds in the Islamic world.

When intelligence reports indicate that an ongoing terrorist plot is progressing to an operational stage, America and its allies must act in self-defense. The 2001 U.S. invasion of Afghanistan represented a justified use of military force because it seriously crippled al Qaeda. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the former leader of al Qaeda in Iraq, was one of the most vicious terrorists in recent memory, responsible for beheadings and indiscriminate attacks on civilians. It took two 500 pound guided bombs from U.S. F-16s to end his life and his reign of terror in Iraq. For individuals like Zarqawi and organizations such as al Qaeda, force is an absolute necessity in the event that arrests and prosecutions – which do have a track record of success – do not suffice to get the job done.

For the vast majority of Muslims, however, the use of force will accomplish little. According to a six-year polling project recently released by Gallup, 92% of all Muslims interviewed condemned the 9/11 attacks. In other words, although the Osama bin Ladens of the world remain dangerous, they also remain few and far between. However, winning hearts and minds means more than simply preventing Muslims from joining terrorist organizations: it is a matter of inspiring Muslims to take an active part in the fight against Islamic extremism.



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Winning the War against Terrorism

Terrorist-Run Social Programs. Terrorist organizations such as Hamas, Hezbollah and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood find support and succor from local populations because they provide myriad social services by funding schools, hospitals and orphanages. Indeed, experts believe that Hezbollah alone spends hundreds of millions of dollars per year on social programs.

The people who benefit from these services may be morally opposed to seeing suicide bombers target Israeli civilians, but if they cannot ensure their survival by any other means, we can safely assume that they will accept help wherever they can get it. Not all sympathizers of these organizations will be won over by aid or social programs, but some can be; and every Muslim who decides that America is a friend, not an enemy, is one more victory for the United States.

U.S. Response to Terrorist-Run Social Programs. The United States has the economic and political resources to compete on this playing field through strategic giving and targeted foreign aid. Without a friendly population to blend into, terrorists would have nowhere to hide and no one to recruit. By lending a helping hand to struggling populations in the Islamic world, we can give Muslims fewer reasons to turn to terrorism or tolerate terrorists in their midst.

Must Prove U.S. Not at War with Islam. After engaging in two wars in Muslim countries, the United States has left far too many Muslims with the mistaken belief that it is conducting a “War on Islam.” Making headlines by giving – not just bombing – would help dispel this myth and allow Muslims to focus their attention on the murderous brutality of Islamic extremists.

Yet drying up international support of terrorism need not always require giving. In many cases, all the United States needs to do is act according to its values.

Torture. The Abu Ghraib scandal and reports of torture have turned away potential informers and prompted many otherwise apolitical Muslims to engage in terrorist activities. In the words of one FBI counterterrorism expert:

“I am persuaded that revenge, in the form of a catastrophic attack on the homeland, is coming, that a new generation of jihadist martyrs, motivated in part by the images from Abu Ghraib, is, as we speak, planning to kill Americans and that nothing gleaned from the use of coercive interrogation techniques will be of any significant use in forestalling this calamitous eventuality.”

We will never win Muslims’ hearts and minds if we do not respect their human dignity. Ensuring our own safety thus demands that we act according to the values of freedom and dignity that animate our Constitution and make our own nation great.

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