

# **The Evolving Threat from Militant Jihadist Groups; a Discussion of Underlying Causes; Some Thoughts on the Future of Terrorism and Some Policy Recommendations**

**By Peter Bergen, fellow of the New America Foundation and adjunct professor at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies.**

**Thanks to my former student at SAIS, Alec Reynolds, for his valuable help on this paper.**

**Not for distribution or quotation without permission of the author**

Al Qaeda first registered as a threat with the U.S. government in 1996, when the bin Laden unit was established at the CIA. In 1997, bin Laden gave his first television interview and declared war on the West. Within four years, al Qaeda had carried out the bombings of the two U.S. Embassies in Africa, the attack on the USS Cole, and the 9/11 attacks, inflicting more direct damage on the U.S. than the Soviet Union did in the five decades of the Cold War. To a large degree, the threat from al Qaeda materialized quickly and somewhat unpredictably compared to the more conventional threats that the United States has faced, including those from Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union.

Therefore predicting with any specificity the nature of the terrorist threat in thirty or forty years is difficult. However, two important predictions can be made. First, the threat from Islamist terrorism will last a generation, as did previous waves of terrorism, such as the anarchist wave of the late nineteenth century and the leftist wave of the late twentieth century. Second, al Qaeda will likely provide a model and benchmark for as yet unknown groups with different agendas. The apocalyptic Japanese terrorist group, Aum Shinrikyo, which mounted chemical weapon attacks in Tokyo in 1995 can now be seen as a proto al Qaeda organization – tens of millions of dollars in resources, recruitment of the best and the brightest in Japan, operatives around the world from New York to Moscow, and interest in mass casualty attacks. With its organizational structure, communications strategy, financing, and global reach, al Qaeda provides a model for future groups that seek to harness the forces of globalization and the democratization of WMD knowledge to achieve their objectives.

Neither Aum Shinrikyo nor al Qaeda needed state sponsorship to operate, and so we have entered an era where the most deadly terrorist groups will be NGOs. This makes such groups especially deadly because they do not have “return addresses,” and they are not responsive to the carrots and sticks of traditional diplomacy. And paradoxically the very weakness of these groups from a traditional military perspective – they do not control territory or command battalions – makes them more likely to engage in acts of catastrophic terrorism.

Terrorism has been a hallmark of the modern era. The twentieth century dawned with an assassination in Sarajevo in 1914 that unleashed World War I. Future historians will likely see the 9/11 attacks as the beginning of the twenty-first century. Terrorism is with us for the long-term – it is after all a weapon used purposefully and by rational actors to achieve political ends. It is a tactic always available to the attacker, and al Qaeda has shown that motivated and well-organized individuals can use it to harm nation states and re-order global relations. As with nuclear technology, the notion of attacking civilians massed in urban areas cannot be dis-invented. These acts are now in the public consciousness and, in some deep and dark quarters, they are viewed as acceptable acts of war.

Bearing this in mind, it is perhaps useful to consider the evolving threat posed by al Qaeda today and consider how to counter this threat in the coming decades. Al Qaeda's political ideology can be summarized as a plan to rid the Muslim world, especially the Middle East, of Western influence in order to institute Taliban-style theocracies across the region. This ideology combines elements of anti-colonialism married to the dream of the return of the Caliphate. Al Qaeda's ideology must be shown to offer no real hope to Muslims searching for a new order and the righting of past wrongs. Until this political vision is buried, the threat of large-scale Islamist terrorist attacks will remain high.

## **Recent Trends**

### **1. Bin Laden**

The conventional wisdom now, of course, is that tracking Osama bin Laden down won't make much of a difference to the larger war on terrorism anyway. At a March 2002 press conference, President Bush referred to bin Laden as “a person who's now been marginalized.”<sup>1</sup> Although it is certainly the case that the global jihadist movement will carry on whatever bin Laden's fate, it would be dangerously wrong to assume that it doesn't really matter whether he is apprehended. Just as an account of Nazism would be nonsensical without reference to the persona and ideas of Hitler, so too our understanding of al Qaeda and the ideology it has spawned can only make sense with reference to bin Laden's leadership skills and his view of the world.

Finding bin Laden remains of utmost importance for two reasons. First, every day that bin Laden remains at liberty is a propaganda victory for al Qaeda. Second, although bin Laden and his deputy Ayman al Zawahiri don't exert day-to-day control over al Qaeda, they do continue to supply broad strategic guidance for the group's actions and for those of its affiliates. Statements from bin Laden and, to some degree, al Zawahiri have always been the most reliable guide to the future actions of jihadist movements around the world – this has remained the case even while both men have been on the run. Shortly after bin Laden called for assaults against Western economic interests in October 2002, an Indonesian disco was bombed, killing 200 mostly Western tourists, and a suicide attack was launched at a French oil tanker steaming off the coast of

---

<sup>1</sup> George W. Bush, “Press Conference by the President,” Washington, DC: March 13, 2002.

Yemen. In December 2003, after al Zawahiri condemned Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf for supporting the campaign against al Qaeda, Musharraf narrowly survived two assassination attempts. Around the same time, bin Laden called for attacks against members of the coalition in Iraq. Terrorists subsequently bombed a British consulate and a bank in Turkey and commuters on their way to work in Madrid.

It may take years, but eventually bin Laden will likely be captured or killed. So what are the implications of either of those outcomes? If bin Laden is captured alive, where, for instance, should he be put on trial? As his crimes have spanned many countries, a case could be made that he should be tried by an international tribunal, similar to those set up for crimes against humanity in Bosnia or Rwanda. The treatment meted out to Saddam Hussein after his capture in Iraq in December 2003 also provides a useful template for the capture of bin Laden, should he be taken alive. The pictures beamed around the world of Saddam submitting himself to a doctor's search for head lice did more to puncture the Iraqi dictator's mystique than anything else. Similar pictures would do much to deflate bin Laden's mythic persona. Of course, capturing bin Laden alive is unlikely. On several occasions bin Laden has said that he's prepared to die in his holy war – statements that should be taken at face value.

In the short-term, bin Laden's death would likely trigger violent anti-American attacks around the globe, while in the medium-term his death would be a serious blow to al Qaeda, the formal organization, as bin Laden's charisma and organizational skills have played a critical role in its success. However, bin Laden does have eleven sons, some of whom might choose to go into their father's line of work. Already 25-year old Saad bin Laden has played a significant role in al Qaeda. In the longer-term, bin Laden's 'martyrdom' would likely give an enormous boost to the power of his ideas. Sayyid Qutb, generally regarded as the Lenin of the jihadist movement, was a relatively obscure writer before his execution by the Egyptian government in 1966. After his death, Qutb's writings, which called for offensive holy wars against the enemies of Islam, became enormously influential.<sup>2</sup> The same process will likely happen with the death of bin Laden, but to an infinitely larger degree as bin Laden's prestige and fame far eclipse Qutb's. And so, in death, bin Laden's ideas will likely attain lasting currency.

Eliminating the top leadership of al Qaeda will not end the terrorists' war. Bin Laden's ideas have circulated widely and will continue to attract adherents for decades. Already three quarters of the top al Qaeda leadership have been captured or killed and more than 3,000 al Qaeda operatives have been arrested around the world, yet 2003 saw the highest incidence of "significant" terrorist acts in two decades, mostly carried out by groups inspired by bin Laden's ideology. And the number of "significant" acts more than tripled in 2004.<sup>3</sup> Arresting the spread of bin Laden's ideas will prove more problematic than arresting his lieutenants and foot soldiers.

---

<sup>2</sup> See Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones* and "The America I Have Seen" (1949).

<sup>3</sup> Susan Glasser, "U.S. figures show sharp global rise in terrorism," *The Washington Post*, April 27, 2005. Statistics were not included in the U.S. State Department's mandated annual report on international terrorism for 2004, a break from past practice. They were released by the National Counterterrorism Center on April 27, 2005.

## **2. A Movement**

Al Qaeda is now one of the best known organizations in the world, with brand recognition seemingly only eclipsed by another successful franchise operation: McDonalds. Yet there is a great deal of ambiguity about what exactly constitutes al Qaeda. Is it a terrorist organization run in a regimented top-down fashion by its CEO, Osama bin Laden? Or is it a loose knit group of tens of thousands of Islamist radicals around the world whose only common link is that they once trained in Afghanistan? Or has al Qaeda evolved into an intensely anti-Western ideology that has now been adopted by a relatively large number of Muslims? Or is it all of the above? Just as light can be defined simultaneously as both a wave and a particle, al Qaeda is now at once a (damaged) organization and a larger political movement that has substantially benefited from the Iraq war.

## **3. The Iraq war**

Since the war in Afghanistan, al Qaeda (the base in Arabic) has lost its base and its training camps. This has wounded al Qaeda, the formal organization, but the war in Iraq has helped to promote the growth of the al Qaeda ideological movement. What we have done in Iraq is what bin Laden could not have hoped for in his wildest dreams: we invaded an oil-rich Muslim nation in the heart of the Middle East, the very type of imperial adventure that bin Laden has long predicted was the “Crusaders” long-term goal in the region. We deposed the secular, socialist Saddam who bin Laden had long despised, ignited Sunni and Shia fundamentalist fervor in Iraq, and provoked a classic “defensive” jihad that has galvanized jihad-minded Muslims around the world.

This is not an arcane matter of Islamic theology, but a key reason that Americans are dying in significant numbers in Iraq today, and also the reason that al Qaeda and its affiliates have been energized as the result of the Iraq conflict. The Koran has two sets of justifications for holy war; one concerns a “defensive” jihad, when a Muslim land is under attack by non-Muslims, while another set of justifications concerns grounds for an “offensive” jihad, which countenances unprovoked attacks on infidels. Generally, Muslims consider the defensive justifications for jihad to be the most legitimate grounds for war. It was, for instance, a “defensive” jihad that Muslim clerics invoked against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan during the 1980s.

To the extent that Sunni Muslims – the vast majority of Muslims – have a Vatican, it is the ancient al-Azhar University in Cairo, the preeminent center of Muslim thought. Before the Iraq war, al-Azhar released a fatwa, a ruling on Islamic law, to the effect that if “Crusader” forces attacked Iraq it was an obligation for every Muslim to fight occupation forces. The clerics of al-Azhar were not alone in this view. The prominent Lebanese Shiite scholar, Sheikh Fadallah, also called on Muslims to fight American forces in Iraq. This is in sharp contrast to what these clerics ruled following the 9/11 attacks. Sheikh Fadallah issued a fatwa condemning the attackers, as did the chief cleric of al-Azhar University. And so while leading Muslim clerics universally

condemned the 9/11 attacks, they have also universally condoned fighting against the American occupation of Iraq.

By any number of yardsticks, the Iraq war has damaged America's wider war on terrorism, while it has strengthened the hand of bin Laden and his fellow jihadists. One such yardstick is a worldwide opinion poll undertaken by the Pew Global Attitudes Project in March 2004. The Pew poll found that bin Laden is viewed favorably by large percentages in Pakistan (65 percent), Jordan (55 percent), and Morocco (45 percent), all key allies in the war on terrorism.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, 67 percent of Moroccans, 57 percent of Pakistanis, and 56 percent of Turks say that the war in Iraq hurt the war on terrorism.<sup>5</sup> (Interestingly, that view is also shared by 50 percent of those polled in Britain.)

The results of the 2004 Pew poll are similar to a 2003 Pew poll in which Indonesians, Jordanians, Pakistanis and Moroccans all expressed more "confidence" in bin Laden than in President Bush, by large pluralities.<sup>6</sup> Polls taken by Zogby International found that favorable views of the U.S. declined from 34 percent to 15 percent in Jordan between April 2002 and June 2004.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, during the same period in Morocco, favorable views of the U.S. went from 38 percent to 11 percent, while in Saudi Arabia they fell from 12 percent to 4 percent.<sup>8</sup> These numbers do not bode well for winning the war of ideas against bin Laden and al Qaeda – a war that was clearly damaged by the invasion of Iraq.

These poll findings are broadly mirrored by another yardstick that indicates that the war on Iraq has damaged the wider war on terrorism: the results of elections held in Muslim countries either in the run-up to the war against Iraq or following the invasion. Those elections produced unexpectedly good results for Islamists and fundamentalists across the Muslim world. In September 2002, Morocco held its first election in three years in which Islamists nearly tripled their representation in parliament, becoming the third largest party in the country. In Bahrain a month later, Islamists won half of the seats in the country's first legislative elections in three decades. That same month a coalition of Islamist parties gained control of Pakistan's North West Frontier Province, one of the country's four provinces, also doing well in Baluchistan, another province.

In the following month, the Islamist Justice and Development Party swept Turkey's election, winning over a third of the total votes and giving it a two-thirds majority in parliament. Surprisingly, even Kuwaitis, who one would expect to have welcomed the fall of Saddam, confounded expectations in July 2003 by voting for Islamist candidates. As CNN put it at the time, "Islamists swept to victory in Kuwaiti elections which had been predicted would herald a new era of liberalism. Islamists

---

<sup>4</sup> "A Year After Iraq War: Mistrust of America in Europe Ever Higher, Muslim Anger Persists," The Pew Global Attitudes Project, March 16, 2004.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> "Views of a Changing World 2003: War with Iraq Further Divides Global Publics," The Pew Global Attitudes Project, June 3, 2003.

<sup>7</sup> "Impressions of America (2004)," Zogby International (commissioned by the Arab American Institute), June 2004.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

strengthened their grip in the oil rich Gulf state, taking about a third of the all-male 50 seats in the national assembly.”<sup>9</sup> To be sure, in each of these elections there were probably some purely local concerns that were in some way favorable to Islamist candidates, but broadly speaking it’s reasonable to assume that the American rush to go to war against Saddam contributed to Islamists doing well at the polls.

It is, of course, not the case that admiration for bin Laden necessarily translates into a desire to do violence against Americans, nor does voting for an Islamist party make you a member of al Qaeda. However, it is the case that those prepared to do violence in the name of bin Laden admire him fervently and are, to a man, Islamists. The poll and election results discussed above therefore show that the pool of potential recruits for bin Laden’s cause expanded because of the war in Iraq.

This is also reflected in the 2003 terrorism figures released by the U.S. State Department which showed the largest number of significant terrorist attacks in two decades, a trend that would also have also shown up in its 2004 report were it not for the fact that, in a curious act of self-censorship, the U.S. government excluded these figures from this report for the first time in almost four decades. Additionally, the “foreign fighters” in Iraq, some 1,000 in number, are not going to go home and open falafel stands in their native countries whether the war ends tomorrow or five years from now. They will be the new battle-hardened shock troops of the militant jihadist movement.

When the Afghan war against the Soviets ended in 1989, Egypt, which had seen little terrorism during the 1980s, was subject to an intense terrorism campaign from veterans of that war that lasted from 1990 until 1997 when a ceasefire was established. Veterans of the Afghan war also bombed the World Trade Center in 1993 and presided over the 9/11 attacks. It is reasonable to assume that a similar blowback effect will be seen from the Iraq war when it finishes – a lingering aftershock that will last at least a decade. Yet there will be several important differences:

- The Afghan foreign fighters, known as the Afghan Arabs, only started to fight the Russians in 1987 at the battle of Jaji, seven years into the war. By contrast, the Iraqi foreign fighters started arriving before the war even began. They are far more battle-hardened than the Afghan Arabs. Instead of fighting the demoralized conscripts of the Soviet army, they are fighting the finest volunteer army in history.
- The Afghan Arabs had a negligible impact on the outcome of the Afghan war which was won with the blood of Afghans and the treasure of the US and Saudi governments. By contrast, foreign fighters in Iraq, despite their relatively small number,s are having a disproportionate effect on the conduct of the war. For instance, the Jordanian Abu Musab Zarqawi, is arguably the most effective insurgent commander in the field.

---

<sup>9</sup> “Islamists tighten grip in Kuwait,” *CNN*, July 6, 2003.

- The Afghan Arabs engaged in conventional guerrilla warfare against the Russians, while it is the foreign fighters who are doing most of the suicide bombings in Iraq.<sup>10</sup> The foreign fighters in Iraq are learning skills that will be more useful for terrorist operations than those that the Afghan Arabs learned in the 1980s. Learning how to make improvised explosive devices and conduct suicide operations has direct applications to urban terrorism.
- There are no Afghan members of al Qaeda, nor have Afghans engaged in transnational terrorism. The Afghans were happy to have Arab money during the jihad against the Soviets, but they did not identify with the Arabs' Salafism or Wahhabism. They were culturally, religiously, and psychologically quite removed from the Afghan Arabs. On the other hand, Iraqis are closer culturally to the foreign fighters, and some will likely engage in transnational terrorism in a manner that Afghans have not.

#### **4. Saudi Arabia**

Following the 9/11 attacks, the unpalatable facts emerged: fifteen of the nineteen hijackers were Saudi; Saudi charities and individuals had funded al Qaeda; militant Saudi clerics had provided the theological ballast for Osama bin Laden's anti-American fatwas, and the Saudi government had long obstructed U.S. inquiries into terrorist attacks against Americans. And, of course, bin Laden was a product of the Saudi system.

The Saudi regime is in a deep crisis. The underlying facts are well-known: a two-thirds fall in average income in the past two decades; a demographic bulge with teenagers accounting for half of the population; unprecedented demonstrations on Riyadh streets in the past two years; and a raging war with Islamic militants since the Riyadh bombings in 2003.

Saudi authorities have long been in a state of willful denial about the deep roots of al Qaeda in the kingdom. It took several months to acknowledge that their citizens played a critical role in the 9/11 attacks. Around the first anniversary of 9/11, the Saudi Interior Minister Prince Nayef made the appalling suggestion that the attacks were a Zionist plot. In 2003, he embarrassed himself further by declaring that al Qaeda was "weak and almost nonexistent" in Saudi Arabia.

Since May 2003, al Qaeda has taken its war to Saudi Arabia in an attempt both to eject Westerners from the country and bring down the House of Saud. The first phase of the government's strategy has been an aggressive military and intelligence effort to capture or kill terrorists. The results are favorable. Local units are weakened from a serial loss of senior commanders since late 2002 – Youssef al-A'iri, Khalid Ali Ali-Haj, Abdulaziz al-Muqrin. Of the twenty-six individuals on the most wanted list, twenty-three had been killed or apprehended by April 2005. Recent al Qaeda operations indicate a decline in planning, sophistication, and lethality. The second phase is a hearts-and-minds operation to persuade the Saudi public of the evils of terrorism. Public service

---

<sup>10</sup> John Burns, "Iraq's Ho Chi Minh trail," *The New York Times*, June 5, 2005.

announcements on Saudi television now routinely show the gruesome aftermath of terrorist attacks, while ATM machines print out messages conveying their harms.

More important, a number of senior Saudi clerics have released statements condemning the terrorists. Most prominent among them is the Grand Mufti, Sheikh Abdulaziz al-Sheikh, a direct descendant of Muhammad bin Abdul-Wahab, the cleric whose religious and military alliance with the Saudi family in the eighteenth century created the first Saudi kingdom. In a statement published in al Madinah newspaper, al-Sheikh said that “attacking a building and throwing explosives, killing innocent people, frightening the populace and undermining the stability of society run contrary to the teaching of Islam.” Al Sheik also condemned the 9/11 attacks as “gross crimes and sinful acts.”

While such statements are open to the criticism that they come from “government sheiks” toeing the new Saudi line, the fact remains that there has been widespread condemnation of terrorism by senior clerics in the past year. In addition, some 2,000 of the Kingdom's 100,000 clerics have lost their jobs for making inflammatory statements, although, after what one Saudi official describes as “retraining,” most of those fired clerics have been reinstated.

The Saudis are also turning one of al Qaeda's key weapons, the Internet, against the group. For the past several years, al Qaeda's Saudi arm has maintained two web-based magazines, al Battar and Sawt-al-Jihad, where one can find training tips about how to clean AK47s and strategic advice urging attacks on economic targets. Saudi clerics are now using the Internet to persuade al Qaeda sympathizers that they have strayed from the path of true Islam.

Despite these steps by the Saudi government, bin Laden has given operations in Saudi Arabia his direct attention, evidenced by his statement in December 2004, and the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) estimates that “there may be hundreds, if not thousands, of extremists and extremist sympathizers in the Kingdom”.<sup>11</sup> Concerns about foreign fighters returning from Iraq, infiltration of the intelligence services, and the government's secret negotiations with terrorists remain prevalent.

The Saudis are essentially exporting their jihadist problem as the Egyptians did during the Afghan war in the 1980s. Several studies have examined the composition of foreign fighters and suicide bombers. There are some discrepancies, but the role of Saudis is significant by any measure. Reuven Paz, the terrorism expert, studied the nationalities of 154 Arab fighters killed in Iraq in the six months ending March 2005 – 61 percent were from Saudi Arabia.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Evan F. Kohlmann developed a list of 235 suicide bombers named on web sites since mid-2004, and calculated that more than 50

---

<sup>11</sup> Admiral Lowell E. Jacoby, “Current and projected national security threats to the United States,” February 16, 2005.

<sup>12</sup> Reuven Paz, “Arab volunteers killed in Iraq: an Analysis,” *Prism Series of Global Jihad*, No 1/3, March 2005.

percent were Saudi.<sup>13</sup> And so, blowback from the Iraq war is likely to have a destabilizing effect, in particular, on Saudi Arabia.

## 5. Afghanistan

The conventional wisdom is that President Hamid Karzai is only the mayor of Kabul; the Taliban are resurgent; the cabinet is dominated by Tajik members of the Northern Alliance; warlords control much of the country; and Afghanistan is becoming a narco-state beset by political violence. This assessment is a year past its sell-by date.

President Karzai is a genuinely popular leader, having won 55 percent of the votes in the October 2004 presidential election against more than a dozen candidates in a reasonably fair contest. Karzai has proven to be a deft politician in edging out the warlords or promoting them to politically irrelevant positions. In the new cabinet, the only significant holdover from the Northern Alliance is Foreign Minister Dr. Abdullah Abdullah whose qualifications for that job are unmatched. Former Defense Minister, Field Marshal Mohammed Fahim, is now without a job, while Ismail Khan lost the key governorship of Herat, receiving instead the Ministry of Energy and Water. One-third of the officials in the Afghan cabinet have PhDs.

Yet there is disquieting news from Afghanistan. Beyond the several days of anti-American protests, the level of political violence is rising. Recent indicators include the assassination of the cleric, Maulavi Abdul Fayaz, and the bombing of a mosque during his funeral which killed twenty, including the Kabul police chief who “was widely regarded as one of the most authoritative police commanders and was respected across the spectrum of the country's various ethnic groups”.<sup>14</sup>

While the Taliban was unable to disrupt the presidential election, it is mounting insurgent operations with greater frequency in advance of September's parliamentary elections. In early May, a U.S. patrol encountered sixty to eighty Taliban fighters gathered in Zabul Province. This followed other fights in April and alongside reports of supporters coming in from Pakistan and the increased use of suicide and roadside bombings against U.S. forces.<sup>15</sup> This takes place as the government tries to stamp out drug trafficking, widely understood to be critical to its national security. This campaign

---

<sup>13</sup> Anthony Cordesman, “Iraq's Evolving Insurgency (Working Draft),” Washington, DC: CSIS, May 19, 2005. Nawaf Obaid is the director of the Saudi Arabia National Security Assessment Project and formerly was a senior research fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. Evan F. Kohlmann is an international terrorism consultant.

<sup>14</sup> Carlotta Gall, “Afghan mosque attack seen as effort to hinder political process,” *The New York Times*, June 8, 2005.

<sup>15</sup> N.C. Aizenman, “Violence linked to Taliban swells in Afghanistan,” *The Washington Post*, June 9, 2005. Carlotta Gall, “Despite years of U.S. pressure, Taliban fights on in jagged hills,” *The New York Times*, June 4, 2005.

has met only limited success – a thirty percent reduction is forecasted for this year against the largest harvest (4,200 tons) since 1999.<sup>16</sup>

There have been considerable grounds for optimism about Afghanistan in the past couple of years. Some three million refugees, more than 10 percent of the population, for instance, have returned to the country. However, these gains could be endangered by the drug trade in the country that accounts for some 40 percent of GDP. In short, some of the key gains of the past three years in Afghanistan have been called into question by the events of the past several months.

## **6. No attacks in the U.S. and little evidence of U.S. sleeper cells**

The U.S. “terrorism” cases that American officials have prosecuted since 9/11 have often followed the trajectory of a tremendous initial trumpeting by the government only to collapse or be revealed as something less than earth shattering when the details emerge months later. Who can forget Chaplin James Yee, the al Qaeda spy at Guantanamo Bay, who turned out to be cheating not on his country, but on his wife? Or the unfortunate Oregon lawyer who was busted for his role in the Madrid bombing attacks, but who was, in fact, thousands of miles from Spain at the time of the bombings? Or how the Justice Department held a press conference to announce the disruption of a Buffalo, New York “al Qaeda terrorist cell,” when in reality those arrested had made the dumb mistake of lying to federal investigators about briefly attending a Taliban training camp before 9/11 at a moment in time when it was not clear that this was a crime. There was no evidence that those arrested in Buffalo were involved in terrorism of any kind. The Buffalo case was, in sum, the post facto criminalization of bad judgment and making the Martha Stewart mistake of lying to the feds, not about the discovery of an al Qaeda cell or the prevention of a terrorist attack.

Indeed, a recent analysis by the Washington Post revealed that only 39 individuals have been convicted on terrorism or national security charges since the 9/11 attacks.<sup>17</sup> This stands in sharp contrast to the Bush Administration’s repeated assertions that more than 400 suspects have been charged and more than half of these convicted.<sup>18</sup> The Post found that most of the remaining convictions were on immigration or false statement charges and that only 14 of the 39 individuals convicted on terrorism or national security charges “have clear links to the group (al Qaeda)”.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Paul Watson, “Afghanistan: a harvest of despair,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 29, 2005.

<sup>17</sup> Dan Eggen and Julie Tate, “U.S. campaign produces few convictions on terrorism charges,” *The Washington Post*, June 12, 2005. The Washington Post obtained the U.S. Justice Department’s list of 361 cases, defined by the Department’s criminal division as terrorism investigations as of September 2004. The Post could not evaluate thirty-one cases which were sealed or redacted. Since September 2004, forty cases have been filed. The list does not include suspects held at Guantanamo Bay or secret facilities, three suspects held in a military prison in South Carolina, or “many of the approximately 50 people the Justice Department has acknowledged detaining as ‘material witnesses’”.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

This follows a report by New York University's Center on Law and Security, completed in February 2005, which found that of the one hundred and nineteen criminal cases that it examined, "the courts have indicted relatively few individuals on the charge of direct acts of terrorism and convicted only one (Richard Reid). Of all charges related to terrorism brought before the courts, only 5% have been for direct acts of terrorism".<sup>20</sup> Since the release of the report, Zacarias Moussaoui pled guilty to being part of al Qaeda and a plan to attack the White House.

The American sleeper cell phenomenon has been much exaggerated by both U.S. officials and hyperventilating stories in the media, which is not to say that sleepers have not existed in the past. Ali Mohamed, al Qaeda's chief military trainer, for instance, was a U.S. Army sergeant in the late 1980s, who married a Mexican-American woman and who was working as a computer network specialist in California when he was arrested in 1998, fourteen years after first arriving in the States. Ali Mohamed was the aide that bin Laden dispatched to case the U.S. embassy in Kenya in 1993, five years before it was destroyed by al Qaeda's local cell. In his plea agreement, Iyman Faris admitted to traveling to Afghanistan to an al Qaeda training camp and meeting bin Laden, and to casing the Brooklyn Bridge in late 2002 and early 2003 after his return from Pakistan.<sup>21</sup> His intention was to cut the bridge cables with gas cutters but determined this to be highly unlikely. Faris first came to the United States in 1994 and became a U.S. citizen in December 1999.

After 9/11, there has been scant evidence of other individual sleepers like Ali Mohamed or Iyman Faris operating in the U.S. The 9/11 Commission concluded, building on the work of the largest criminal investigation in history, that the hijackers did not have a support network in this country. In March 2005, the FBI, in a leaked report, concluded that "U.S. Government efforts to date also have not revealed evidence of concealed cells or networks acting in the homeland as sleepers."<sup>22</sup> But the June 2005 arrest of Hamid Hayat, charged with lying to federal investigators about attending a terrorist training camp for six months between 2003 and 2004 in Pakistan, suggests that this may be changing.<sup>23</sup> Hayat's arrest is the first time that a second generation Muslim American has been accused of receiving terrorist training after 9/11.

Nevertheless, the gravest threat from Islamist terrorists has historically come from visitors to this country not from sleeper cells. That was the case in the 1993 attack on the World Trade Center, the mastermind of which, Ramzi Yousef, arrived from Pakistan intent on attacking American targets, and that was also the case in the 9/11 attacks. It was true of Ahmed Ressaam, who was stopped at a Canadian border crossing in December 1999 on a mission to bomb Los Angeles airport, and the shoe bomber, Richard Reid.

---

<sup>20</sup> "Terrorist Trials: A Report Card," New York, NY: The Center on Law and Security, New York University School of Law, February 2005. The Center "focused on the 119 cases reported on Findlaw, as many, including leading figures in the Counterterrorism Division at the DOJ, advised us that these cases constituted the important and representative cases".

<sup>21</sup> Statement of Facts, *United States v. Iyman Faris*, May 1, 2003. Iyman Faris is currently seeking to withdraw his plea agreement.

<sup>22</sup> "No 'true' al Qaeda sleeper agents have been found in U.S.," *ABC News*, March 9, 2005.

<sup>23</sup> Shaun Waterman, "California terror case raises fears of sleeper cells," *UPI*, June 8, 2005.

## Future Trends

### 1. Al Qaeda and Europe

In fact, the Islamist terrorist threat to the United States today largely emanates from Europe, not from domestic sleeper cells or, as is popularly imagined, the graduates of Middle Eastern madrassas who are functional idiots who can do little more than read the Koran. Omar Sheik, for instance, the kidnapper of Wall Street Journal reporter, Danny Pearl, is a British citizen of Pakistani descent who graduated not from a madrassa, but from the academically rigorous London School of Economics. The “shoe bomber” Richard Reid is British, and the 9/11 pilots became militant in Hamburg. Indeed, in March 2005, at a conference marking the first anniversary of the Madrid bombing, Robert Leiken of the Nixon Center presented his study of 373 radical Muslim terrorists arrested or killed in Europe and the United States from 1993 through 2004 of which an astonishing 41 percent were Western nationals, who were either naturalized or second generation Europeans or converts to Islam.<sup>24</sup> Leiken found more terrorists who were French than the combined totals of Pakistani and Yemeni terrorists!<sup>25</sup>

The attacks in Madrid last year that killed 191 people and the assassination of Dutch filmmaker, Theo van Gogh, demonstrate that men animated by al Qaeda’s worldview have recently conducted significant acts of terrorism in Europe, a trend that is likely to accelerate as continued heavy Muslim immigration into Europe collides with widespread racism to create an alienated Muslim population, which often feels that no matter how much money is made or how long their families have been in the country as a Pakistani they are never quite British, or as an Algerian in France they are not quite French, or as a Moroccan in Spain they can never be really Spanish.

How al Qaeda succeeds or fails in Europe is critical to its future in the West. First, there is the matter of numbers. France alone is host to some five million Muslims, about as many Muslims as live in the United States. And while few American Muslims have proven susceptible to al Qaeda’s ideology, this is not the case with Europe’s twenty million Muslims, a substantial minority of which are relatively recent arrivals. In 1945, less than one million Muslims lived in Europe. Second, part of this is a matter of alienation. By and large, Muslims in Europe are more discriminated against than their American counterparts. Algerians in France and Pakistanis in Britain, for instance, are too often treated as second-class citizens and are less integrated into their host countries than their American counterparts. Third, as citizens of the European Union, those who adopt al Qaeda’s ideology have considerable latitude to move around Europe and visit other countries in the West.

Future terrorist attacks that will be damaging to American national security are therefore likely to have a European connection. Citizens of the European Union, who

---

<sup>24</sup> Robert S. Leiken, “Europe’s Mujahideen: Where Mass Immigration Meets Global Terrorism,” Washington, DC: Center for Immigration Studies, April 2005.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. p.5.

adopt al Qaeda's ideology, can both move around Europe easily and also have easy entry into the United States because of the Visa Waiver Program that exists with European countries. European members of al Qaeda, for instance, could either come to the U.S. to launch a significant attack on the scale of what took place in Madrid last March, or they could launch a major terrorist strike in Europe – such as a radiological ‘dirty’ bomb attack in the City of London, a key financial center – that would have a devastating effect on the global economy, and by extension the American economy.

As the French scholar, Gilles Kepel, has pointed out, “the war for Muslim minds around the world may turn on the outcome” of how European Muslims deal with Islamist militancy in their midst and the extent to which European Muslims can be truly integrated into their host societies.<sup>26</sup> This will not be something that can be achieved quickly and may become more difficult.

Europe’s Muslim population will increase dramatically over the coming decades because the native populations of most European countries are going into a steep demographic decline and will need greater immigration from North Africa and the Middle East to meet the costs associated with supporting their own rapidly aging populations. How European governments address how to integrate their growing Muslim populations will do much to determine how safe Americans will be from attacks by al Qaeda and its affiliated groups.

Britain illustrates many of the features of the wider European problem – it is where the threat from Islamist extremists is especially high. In 2004, Sir John Stevens, London's former Metropolitan Police Commissioner, warned that an Islamist extremist attack in London was “inevitable,” while a government report estimated that between ten and fifteen thousand British Muslims are supporters of al Qaeda or related groups.<sup>27</sup> The estimate was based on “intelligence, opinion polls, and a report that ten thousand Muslims last year attended a conference held by Hizb-ut-Tahir, described by the Home Office as a ‘structured extremist organization’.”<sup>28</sup> British authorities believe that between three and six hundred British citizens were trained in al Qaeda and Taliban camps in Afghanistan.<sup>29</sup> And several hundred men are believed to have fought in Kashmir and returned to Britain in the 1990s. In March, Sir Ian Blair, the present Metropolitan Police Commissioner, told a radio interviewer, “I agree with the Prime Minister's assessment . . . that there are hundreds of people who came back from the [Afghan training] camps and are now in the United Kingdom, and that is a very dangerous issue.”<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> Gilles Kepel, *The War for Muslim Minds: Islam and the West*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2004), p.\_\_\_\_.

<sup>27</sup> On Stevens, see “London terror attack ‘inevitable’,” *BBC*, March 16, 2004. On the government report, which was written by the Home and Foreign Offices, see “Leaked papers warn of Al Qaeda support,” *Financial Times*, May 31, 2004.

<sup>28</sup> “Leaked papers warn of Al Qaeda support,” *Financial Times*, May 31, 2004.

<sup>29</sup> “Terror in the UK,” *Independent on Sunday*, March 6, 2005.

<sup>30</sup> John Steele, “Terror threat from ‘very many’ Muslim men, says Met chief,” *Daily Telegraph*, April 3, 2005.

Most British Muslims are young and many are poorly integrated into society and therefore vulnerable to extremism. Seventy percent of them are under thirty years old, compared to forty-five percent for the UK as a whole.<sup>31</sup> The unemployment rate among the British Muslim community runs ten percentage points above the national average of 5 percent.<sup>32</sup> In the case of 16-24 year old Muslim men, the unemployment rate is 28 percent. And, unsurprisingly, a sense of anger shows up in polling data among British Muslims. Eight out of ten believe that the war on terrorism is a war on Islam, while a poll conducted last year, under the auspices of The Guardian newspaper, found a surprising 13 percent who said that further attacks by al Qaeda or a similar organization on the United States would be justified.<sup>33</sup> This sort of sentiment can be found in a rap video that surfaced last year called "Dirty Kuffar," the lyrics of which included the following verse: "OBL [bin Laden] pulled me like a shining star! Like the way we destroyed them two towers, ha-ha!"<sup>34</sup>

One well known London-based Islamist militant is Sheik Omar Bakri Muhammad, a Syrian who styles himself the judge of his own sharia court. In 1997, Bakri founded Al-Muhajiroun, an organization that attracted much media attention before its official disbanding in October 2004. Bakri seems to have been a spiritual mentor for two second generation, college-educated, middle-class men of Pakistani heritage who, on April 30, 2003, walked into Mike's Place, a busy jazz club near the U.S. embassy in Israel, on a suicide mission. Once inside the club, the younger of the two men succeeded in detonating a bomb, killing himself and three bystanders, while the other man fled the scene. Bakri told The Daily Telegraph that he knew one of the Mike's Place attackers, Omar Sharif, "very well and [that] he used to attend regularly at my sessions. He was my brother and I am very proud of him and any Muslim who will do the same as him."<sup>35</sup>

The Mike's Place bombing was highly unusual; it was the first time that a UK citizen had committed an act of suicide terrorism in Israel. If such an attack can happen in Israel, it can also happen in the United States. The Mike's Place attack demonstrates that the U.S. might be vulnerable to suicide attackers who are British or are nationals of other European countries.

Omar Bakri has also been connected to a significant terrorist plot – the alleged plan in 2004 by a group of young Islamic men to use half a ton of ammonium nitrate stored near Heathrow to blow up targets in the UK. Ammonium nitrate was the material used in the Oklahoma City bombing that killed 168 people and also in the attack on the disco in Bali that killed 200 tourists. Also in 2004, police arrested twelve other terrorist suspects, aged nineteen to thirty-two, including senior al Qaeda operative, Issa al-Britani. Many of the suspects were British citizens of Pakistani descent, and some had fought in Kashmir in the 1990s. The U.S. accuses al-Britani of casing financial targets in New

---

<sup>31</sup> 2001 Census, Office of National Statistics, April 2001.

<sup>32</sup> Source: Labor Force Survey. Unemployment figures measured from June 2003 to May 2004.

<sup>33</sup> "Muslims Poll," ICM, March and November 2004.

<sup>34</sup> Antony Barnett, "Islamic rappers' message of terror," *The Observer*, February 8, 2004.

<sup>35</sup> Ohad Gozani, Sue Clough and Sean O'Neill, "British bomber's body identified," *The Daily Telegraph*, May 20, 2003.

York and Washington between August of 2000 and April of 2001. Those targets included the IMF, the World Bank, the Prudential building in Newark and the New York Stock Exchange. Al-Britani's arrest resulted in the Department of Homeland Security elevating the threat level to orange this past summer.

Since 9/11, British citizens have planned the kidnapping-murder of American journalist Danny Pearl, attempted to bring down U.S. airliners with shoe bombs, contemplated additional attacks on financial landmarks in New York and Washington, and carried out suicide operations in Israel. The British are fortunate to have disrupted several terrorist plots and to have avoided a domestic attack. But good fortune is not likely to last long. The record demonstrates that Islamist militant groups in the United Kingdom, as is the case in several other major European countries, represent a threat not only to their own homelands but also to the United States – a threat that will continue for many years to come.

To address this threat, since 9/11, the U.S. and the European Union have reached agreements on information sharing between law enforcement agencies, signed treaties to streamline extradition and enhance cooperation between prosecutors, and advanced initiatives on container security and biometric screening for countries participating in the Visa Waiver Program.<sup>36</sup> Europol has stationed two liaison officers at the FBI in Washington, and an agent will be assigned to Europol.<sup>37</sup> After the Madrid attacks, EU leaders agreed to various measures to combat terrorism, including the creation of a counterterrorism coordinator, increased support for Europol, and commitments to better share intelligence and law enforcement information. But greater cooperation and further progress is required.

## **2. Attacking western economic targets and particularly the oil industry**

Since the 9/11 attacks, al Qaeda and its affiliated groups have increasingly attacked economic and business targets, a trend that has accelerated in the past two years. The shift in tactics is in part a response to the fact that the traditional pre-9/11 targets, such as American embassies, war ships, and military bases, are now better defended, while so-called 'soft' economic targets are both ubiquitous and easier to hit. The suicide attacks in Istanbul in November 2003, directed at a British consulate and the local headquarters of the HSBC bank, that killed sixty, are indicative of this trend. The plotters initially planned to attack Incirlik Air Base, a facility in western Turkey used by American troops, but concluded that the tight security at the base made the assault too difficult and so transferred their efforts to the bank and consulate because they were relatively undefended targets in central Istanbul.

Al Qaeda also learned an important lesson from 9/11: that disrupting Western economies and, by extension the global economy, is useful for their wider jihad. In a

---

<sup>36</sup> Kristin Archik, "U.S.-EU Cooperation Against Terrorism," (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, updated April 13, 2005). The treaties require Senate ratification and the codification in the national laws of EU members.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

videotape released in October 2004, bin Laden pointed out that for al Qaeda's \$500,000 investment in the 9/11 attacks the United States economy sustained a \$500 billion loss, a leveraged investment, "meaning that every dollar al Qaeda invested defeated a million dollars." Ramzi Binalshibh, one of the key planners of 9/11, wrote that following the attacks "the dollar lost a lot of its value. Airline companies have been affected; they have had to fire 68,000 employees."<sup>38</sup> Around the first anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, bin Laden and Ayman al Zawahiri released audiotapes announcing a new policy aimed at disrupting the global economy, a policy that will likely intensify in coming years.

Al Qaeda and like-minded terrorist groups are increasingly targeting companies that have distinctive Western brand names. In 2003, suicide attackers bombed the Marriott hotel in Jakarta, producing a substantial death count. The same year in Karachi a string of small explosions at eighteen Shell stations wounded four, while in 2002 a group of a dozen French defense contractors were killed as they left a Sheraton hotel, which was heavily damaged. McDonald's restaurants have long been the target of leftist terrorists, but during 2004 they were also bombed by Islamist militants in Turkey, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia. In October 2004 in Taba, Egyptian jihadists inspired by al Qaeda attacked a Hilton Hotel.

Al Qaeda attacks on oil facilities accelerated sharply in 2004. Suicide bombers struck Iraq's principal oil terminal in Basra on April 27. In Yanbu, Saudi Arabia, al Qaeda attacked the offices of ABB Lummus Global, a contractor for Exxon/Mobil, killing six Westerners, on May 1. Four weeks later, in Al Khobar, Saudi Arabia, al Qaeda attacked the office building of Western oil firms before seizing and executing hostages at the residential compound housing executives and employees. Twenty-two were killed.

Following these attacks, a statement, attributed to Abdul Aziz al-Muqrin, al Qaeda's commander in Saudi Arabia, said that "the rise in oil prices is in the interests of the Muslim people . . . (Higher prices) worry the wicked government (in Riyadh) because it is committed to America's welfare and a steady supply of oil (to the United States) at the cheapest of prices".<sup>39</sup> Al Qaeda's decision to target oil complexes in Saudi Arabia and Iraq is a strategic success – consumers are now paying a so-called "fear premium" for oil. And these attacks are likely to continue. On December 16, 2004, bin Laden drew unusually specific focus to al Qaeda's operations in Saudi Arabia and the need to target oil interests, stating in an audio recording:

"We ask God Almighty to have mercy on the mujahedeen who stormed the consulate of the Americans in Jeddah . . . One of the most important reasons that led our enemies to control our land is the theft of our oil . . . Be active and prevent them from reaching the oil, and mount your operations accordingly."<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> \_\_\_\_\_.

<sup>39</sup> "Purported Al-Qaeda statement says high oil prices in Muslims' interest," *Agence France Presse*, June 4, 2004.

<sup>40</sup> "Excerpts of Bin Laden message," *BBC News*, December 12, 2004.

Attacks on oil installations, pipelines, and oil workers will continue for the foreseeable future in both Saudi Arabia and Iraq, the two countries which happen to sit on the largest oil reserves in the world.

### **3. Attacking Israeli/Jewish targets**

The virulent strain of anti-Semitism that animates al Qaeda and its affiliates is an important aspect of al Qaeda's philosophy that has hitherto received insufficient attention. The multiple bomb attacks in October 2004 at resorts on Egypt's Red Sea coast, which killed dozens and wounded more than one hundred and fifty, the majority of whom were Israelis on vacation during the Jewish holidays, bear the hallmarks of an operation directed or inspired by al Qaeda. While Palestinian terrorist groups, such as Hezbollah and Hamas have historically not operated in Egypt, the Egyptian Jihad group, which merged its operations with al Qaeda in the late 1990s, has carried out numerous terrorist operations in Egypt over the past two decades. And so, Egyptian associates of al Qaeda must be considered the leading suspects in the attacks.

Attacking Jewish targets is an al Qaeda strategy that has only emerged strongly in the past couple of years. Despite bin Laden's declaration in February 1998 that he was creating the "World Islamic Front against the Crusaders and the Jews," al Qaeda only started attacking Israeli or Jewish targets in early 2002.<sup>41</sup> Since then al Qaeda and its affiliated groups have directed an intense campaign against Israeli and Jewish targets, killing journalist Daniel Pearl in Karachi; bombing a Tunisian synagogue, killing a group of German tourists; launching attacks against two synagogues in Istanbul that killed twenty-three; bombing a Jewish center and cemetery in Casablanca, Morocco, and attacking an Israeli-owned hotel in Mombassa, Kenya, killing thirteen. At the same time as the attack on the Kenyan hotel, al Qaeda also tried to bring down an Israeli passenger jet with rocket propelled grenades, an attempt that was unsuccessful.

In the future, al Qaeda will likely intensify its campaign of attacking Jewish and Israeli targets. For that reason, bin Laden's statement in October 2004 that Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982 inspired his desire to attack the United States is worrisome, as bin Laden has now moved the Israeli-American alliance to the center of his justification for al Qaeda's attacks against the West.

### **4. Jihadist terrorists and weapons of mass destruction**

Nation states have used weapons of mass destruction (WMD) only infrequently. Multilateral treaties and established norms of behavior suggest that their use by states will remain a relatively low possibility in the near future. No such constraints impede the actions of al Qaeda and its affiliated groups, which have conducted a program of WMD acquisition and research going back more than a decade and have already attempted to launch WMD attacks on Western targets. In a 1999 interview, bin Laden stated that

---

<sup>41</sup>"Jihad against Jews and Crusaders," World Islamic Front Statement, February 23, 1998.

acquiring nuclear and chemical weapons is a “religious duty”.<sup>42</sup> Al Qaeda’s intent is clear, but we know very little about its current capabilities. As the Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States concluded, “there are critical intelligence gaps with regard to each al-Qa’ida unconventional weapons capability--chemical, biological, and nuclear.”<sup>43</sup>

## 1. Al Qaeda’s efforts to acquire WMD

- Al Qaeda first sought to acquire WMD when bin Laden was based in Sudan in the early 1990s. The group experimented with chemical weapons and attempted to purchase large quantities of highly enriched uranium.<sup>44</sup>
- Mamdouh Mahmud Salim, a top bin Laden deputy, sought nuclear weapons components for the group and is believed to have approved efforts to procure enriched uranium in the late 1990s.<sup>45</sup>
- In 2000, bin Laden met several times with recently retired senior Pakistani nuclear scientists to discuss WMD issues.<sup>46</sup> Those scientists aimed to establish uranium mining facilities in Afghanistan as part of a larger plan to establish some type of nuclear program in the country.
- After the 9/11 attacks, bin Laden told an interviewer, “I wish to declare that if America used chemical or nuclear weapons against us, then we may retort with chemical and nuclear weapons. We have the weapons as deterrent.”<sup>47</sup> Bin Laden's deputy, Ayman al Zawahiri, told the same interviewer that al Qaeda had acquired nuclear materials on the black market from the countries of the former Soviet Union.<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup> Time Magazine interview, “Osama bin Laden lashes out against the West,” January 11, 1999 (conducted in Afghanistan's Helmand province by Rahimullah Yusufzai).

<sup>43</sup> Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction, *Report to the President of the United States* (2005), p. 276.

<sup>44</sup> On uranium, see National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report* (2004), p. 60. See also trial testimony of Jamal Ahmed Mohamed al Fadhli, *United States v. bin Laden*, February 7, 2001, February 13, 2001, and February 20, 2001. On chemical weapons, see trial testimony of al Fadhli, *United States v. bin Laden*, February 13, 2001.

<sup>45</sup> Matthew Bunn, “The Threat: The Demand for Black Market Fissile Material,” Washington, DC: The Nuclear Threat Initiative, February 11, 2003 (last updated). See also Benjamin Weiser, “U.S. says bin Laden aide tried to get nuclear weapons,” *New York Times*, September 26, 1998.

<sup>46</sup> David Albright and Holly Higgins, “Pakistani Nuclear Scientists: How Much Nuclear Assistance to Al Qaeda?,” Washington, DC: Institute for Science and International Security, August 30, 2002. On al Qaeda meetings with Pakistani scientists, see Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction, *Report to the President of the United States* (2005), p. 272.

<sup>47</sup> Ausaf and Dawn interview, “Usama bin Laden,” November 9, 2001 (conducted near Kabul, Afghanistan by Ausaf editor, Hamid Mir).

<sup>48</sup> “Al Qaeda may have nuclear weapons,” *Associated Press*, March 23, 2004.

- Until it lost its Afghanistan base in December 2001, al Qaeda conducted experiments on dogs that were injected or gassed with cyanide as a prelude to a possible use of the deadly agent against American targets.<sup>49</sup>
- The group also experimented in Afghanistan with other toxins, such as ricin and botulinum, and tried to develop anthrax weapons.<sup>50</sup> In its final report, the Commission on U.S. Intelligence Capabilities concluded that al Qaeda's biological weapons program in Afghanistan was "extensive, well-organized, and operated for two-years before September 11".<sup>51</sup> In May 2005, the U.S. Defense Department released two letters from an al Qaeda operative that describe unsuccessful efforts to acquire a lethal strain of anthrax and list equipment required to establish a "rudimentary biological weapons laboratory".<sup>52</sup> Abu Rauf, a Pakistani microbiologist, is believed to have written the letters. Al Qaeda recruits have included several biochemists and microbiologists.

## **2. Al Qaeda's plan to spread its knowledge of WMD development**

- Al Qaeda's seven thousand-page *Encyclopedia of the Afghan Jihad*, first published in Pakistan in 1996 and made available on CD in 1999, devoted an entire chapter on how to develop chemical and biological weapons. This work has had wide distribution in jihadist circles.
- Al Qaeda maintains Web sites today that contain information about the development of WMD.

## **3. Al Qaeda's efforts to use WMD**

- The most reliable guide to al Qaeda's future actions has always been bin Laden's statements. When he says that his group is prepared to use weapons of mass destruction, one can only conclude that it is only a matter of time before al Qaeda or its affiliates does so.
- In January 2004, a seven-pound block of cyanide salt was discovered in Iraq at the safe house of a terrorist organization with links to al Qaeda.<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>49</sup> Nic Roberston, "Tapes shed new light on bin Laden's network," *CNN*, August 19, 2002.

<sup>50</sup> On botulinum toxin, see Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction, *Report to the President of the United States* (2005), p. 269. On anthrax, see National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report* (2004), p. 151.

<sup>51</sup> Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction, *Report to the President of the United States* (2005), p. 269.

<sup>52</sup> Eric Lipton, "Qaeda Letters Are Said to Show Pre-9/11 Anthrax Plans," *The New York Times*, May 21, 2005.

<sup>53</sup> Douglas Jehl, "The struggle for Iraq: U.S. aides report evidence tying al Qaeda to attacks," *The New York Times*, February 10, 2004.

- In December 2002, U.S. officials were deeply concerned about the possibility that al Qaeda-affiliated groups were planning multiple chemical attacks across Europe. Arrests in Italy, France, and Spain averted those attacks. Those arrested were planning attacks using ricin and cyanide.
- In 2002, Hispanic-American Jose Padilla, a small time criminal affiliated with al Qaeda, was arrested in Chicago, allegedly planning an attack in the U.S. involving radioactive materials.
- ‘America Taliban’ John Walker Lindh told his American interrogators that the second and third wave of al Qaeda attacks after 9/11 would involve WMD.<sup>54</sup>
- The mastermind of 9/11, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, told al Jazeera in the spring of 2002 that al Qaeda had considered attacking American nuclear facilities.<sup>55</sup>
- The 9/11 hijackers looked into purchasing crop dusting planes suitable to disperse chemical and biological agents before the attacks on Washington and New York.

#### **4. Assessment of al Qaeda’s WMD capabilities today**

It appears highly unlikely that al Qaeda has acquired nuclear weapons.<sup>56</sup> However, based on information derived from detainee interrogations and documents and evidence recovered in Afghanistan, it is clear that al Qaeda has the intent to manufacture crude radiological, chemical, and biological weapons. It is only a matter of time before such an attack is mounted.

A U.S. intelligence official told me that since 9/11 al Qaeda’s ‘special weapons program’ has been working to ‘weaponize’ anthrax. The terrorist leadership has long expressed a strong interest in carrying out some kind of weapons of mass destruction attack. In countries, such as Italy and Spain, there have been a number of arrests over the past two years of Islamist militants who were planning to carry out some kind of small-bore chemical weapons attack. The most recent such arrest came in June 2004 when an Egyptian, believed to have been behind the train bombings in Madrid, was arrested in Milan. Intercepts of his phone calls referred to a woman that he knew who was ready to carry out a chemical attack in the United States.<sup>57</sup>

In June 2004, a report in the *New Scientist* magazine, based on records from the U.N.’s International Atomic Energy Agency, indicated that the risk of a radiological “dirty bomb” attack is growing.<sup>58</sup> In 1996, there were eight incidents of smuggling of radioactive materials suitable for such a device. In 2003, there were fifty-one such

---

<sup>54</sup> Larry Margasak and John Solomon, “More severe attacks were to follow 9/11,” *Associated Press*, October 4, 2002.

<sup>55</sup> Yosri Fouda, “The Terror Plot,” *The Sunday Times (London)*, September 8, 2002.

<sup>56</sup> See Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction, *Report to the President of the United States* (2005).

<sup>57</sup> Elaine Sciolino, “Terror Suspect in Italy Linked to More Plots,” *The New York Times*, June 11, 2004.

<sup>58</sup> Rob Edwards, “Only a Matter of Time,” *New Scientist* (2004), Issue 2450.

cases.<sup>59</sup> The dramatic rise in smuggling has coincided with efforts by al Qaeda to acquire radioactive materials and to blow up a “dirty” radiological bomb in the U.S. Such an attack would kill relatively few people, but would cause enormous panic and likely severely damage the U.S. economy.

## **A discussion of some of the underlying causes of Islamist terrorism**

### **1. The poverty myth**

It is common currency among politicians that poverty incubates future terrorists. George W. Bush told an audience in Mexico in March 2002, for instance, that “we fight against poverty because hope is an answer to terror.”<sup>60</sup> A corollary to that view is that a Marshall Plan to the Middle East might alleviate the problem of terrorism, an essentially optimistic view that the human race operates in a manner consistent with optimizing its economic well-being. History does not suggest that this is the case.

The members of al Qaeda are not the dispossessed, but the empowered, more likely to have studied technical subjects, such as medicine and engineering, or had careers in business than to have studied at some dirt-poor madrassa. Bin Laden’s top aide is a physician from an upper-class Egyptian family; al Qaeda’s chief military adviser graduated from an Egyptian university with a degree in psychology and worked as a computer network specialist in California.<sup>61</sup> Egyptian terrorist Rifia Ahmed Taha, a cosignatory of bin Laden’s 1998 declaration of war against Americans, is an accountant.<sup>62</sup> Another top al Qaeda official, Mamdouh Mahmud Salim, studied electrical engineering in Iraq and set up businesses around the Middle East.<sup>63</sup> Bin Laden himself studied economics in college and worked for his family’s giant construction business in Saudi Arabia when he was a young man.<sup>64</sup> Lead hijacker, Mohammed Atta, the son of an Egyptian lawyer, earned a PhD in urban planning and preservation in Germany before he embarked on his campaign of urban destruction. Indeed the 9/11 hijackers as a group were scions of the Saudi, Lebanese, and Egyptian middle classes.

Dr. Marc Sageman, a former CIA case officer in Pakistan, who is now a forensic psychiatrist, studied the biographies of 172 al Qaeda members and associates for his 2004 book, *Understanding Terror Networks*.<sup>65</sup> What Sageman found demolished much of the conventional wisdom about who joins al Qaeda: two-thirds were upper or middle-class and over sixty percent had gone to college; they were generally professionals, often of a scientific or technical bent, and few had attended madrassas.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, several had

---

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> George W. Bush, “Speech at the United Nations Financing for Development Conference,” Monterrey, Mexico: March 22, 2002.

<sup>61</sup> Peter Bergen, *Holy War, Inc.* (New York, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), p. 31.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*, (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, p. 73-78

doctorates. Also these were not young hotheads: their average age was 26, three-quarters were married, and many had children.<sup>67</sup> Only two appeared to have some form of psychosis.<sup>68</sup>

With their middle-class or upper-class backgrounds, the leaders of al Qaeda are not an exception, but the rule among militants who use terrorist methods in the Middle East. According to Claude Berrebi, an Associate Economist at Rand and Princeton PhD, 57 percent of Palestinian suicide bombers have undergone education beyond high school, compared to only 15 percent of their age cohort.<sup>69</sup> And while one-third of the Palestinian population is poor, only 13 percent of Palestinian suicide bombers come from poor families. Indeed Palestinian polling expert, Kahalil Shikaki, has found that the readiness to conduct suicide operations actually increases the more educated a person is. Princeton's Alan B. Krueger and Jitka Maleckova of Charles University in Prague, in a paper for the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), found little evidence for a link between personal poverty and participation in international terrorist movements.<sup>70</sup> Members of the militant wing of Hezbollah killed in action in the 1980s and 1990s were just as likely to be well-educated and to come from well-off families as they were to be poor and uneducated.<sup>71</sup>

In 1999, the Library of Congress issued a study, based on a wide-ranging survey of the available literature, that asked the question "Who Becomes a Terrorist and Why?" It concluded that there were only a few "major exceptions to the middle- and upper-class origins of terrorist groups" and that "terrorists in general have more than average education".<sup>72</sup> This is the case for Islamist terrorists and also for the secular socialist terrorists that plagued Europe in the 1970s, such as the Baader Meinhof group and the Brigatti Rosse. Terrorism, it turns out, is a bourgeois endeavor, and therefore one could conclude that as the world, on average, becomes more prosperous we will see more terrorism, not less in coming decades.

This recent research which demonstrates that terrorism is a middle-class occupation echoes a pioneering study of Egyptian terrorists undertaken by the French academic Gilles Kepel during the mid-1980s.<sup>73</sup> Kepel examined the backgrounds of three hundred Islamist militants who were tried in the wake of the 1981 assassination of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat. Of those who were of working age, 17 percent were professionals, such as engineers and journalists, 24 percent worked as government employees or teachers, 41 percent were artisans or merchants, 9 percent were in the

---

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, p. 92, 79.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, p. 81.

<sup>69</sup> Claude Berrebi, "Evidence About The Link Between Education, Poverty and Terrorism Among Palestinians" (September 2003). Princeton University Industrial Relations Section Working Paper No. 477.

<sup>70</sup> Alan B. Krueger and Maleckova, Jitka, "Education, Poverty, Political Violence and Terrorism: Is There a Causal Connection?" (July 2002). NBER Working Paper No. W9074.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, p. 29.

<sup>72</sup> Rex Hudson, *The Sociology and Psychology of Terrorism: Who Becomes a Terrorist and Why*, (Washington, DC: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1999), p. 41-42.

<sup>73</sup> Gilles Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt: The Prophet and Pharaoh*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, c1985).

military or police, while only 5 percent were unemployed.<sup>74</sup> Of those who were students, around a one-third were studying in the elite faculties of medicine and engineering.<sup>75</sup>

Moreover, Egypt represents a particularly compelling case of why Marshall Plans to solve terrorism don't make any sense. As a result of the 1979 Camp David Peace Accords, the United States has transferred tens of billions of dollars to Egypt during the past two and half decades. This transfer of aid – which has made Egypt the second largest recipient of American aid after Israel – coincided with the worst period of terrorism in Egypt's history. Not only did Egypt's Islamist terrorists assassinate Sadat, they also killed some 1,200 other people. Egyptian terrorists eventually adopted a ceasefire with the government only because of popular revulsion to their tactics which culminated with the 1997 Luxor massacre in which members of the Islamic Group killed fifty-six tourists.

According to a UN study in 2002, the Arab world has experienced the second-lowest per capita growth of any region in the world, findings that seem to support the thesis that deprivation might be a key cause of terrorism.<sup>76</sup> There's a problem though – sub-Saharan Africa has done even worse in the same period. But while sub-Saharan Africa has been a site of transnational terrorist activities, like al Qaeda's bombing of the U.S. embassy in Kenya, the region, though violent, has not spawned either its own indigenous terrorist movement or any radical transnational ideology. Like impoverished Afghanistan under the Taliban, poor Sudan was a useful base for the predominantly affluent Saudi and Egyptian leadership of al Qaeda, but no more than a base. Well-organized, well-funded, and well-educated terrorists can take advantage of conditions in failed states, but failed states are not the source of terrorism, but rather staging-areas. As historian Walter Laqueur has noted, "in the forty-nine countries currently designated by the United Nations as the least developed hardly any terrorist activity occurs."<sup>77</sup> And so, while ending poverty is a worthy goal in itself, it has little or nothing with to do with reducing terrorism.

## 2. The madrassa myth

Related to the unfounded argument that poverty causes terrorism is the widely-held view that religious schools in the Muslim world, known as madrassas, graduate students who become terrorists. For instance, in 2004 then-U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell denounced madrassas in Pakistan and several other countries as breeding grounds for "fundamentalists and terrorists."<sup>78</sup> While madrassas may breed fundamentalists, who have learned to recite the Koran by rote, such schools do not supply the technical or linguistic skills necessary for effective terrorism.

---

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, p. 221.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, p. 220.

<sup>76</sup> *Arab Human Development Report 2002*, (New York, New York: United Nations Development Programme).

<sup>77</sup> Walter Laqueur, *No End to War: Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century*, (New York, New York: Continuum International Publishing Group), p. 11.

<sup>78</sup> "Madrassas breeding terrorists, Powell says," *Daily Times*, December 3, 2004.

Indeed, there is little or no evidence that madrassas breed terrorists capable of attacking the West. This is not to say that Wahhabism is not important to the growth and support of al Qaeda, the movement. To be sure, its fundamentalist teachings lay the groundwork for establishing a popular base of support for radicalism. But it bears reminding that millions of Wahhabi Muslims do not want to attack the West and that al Qaeda will continue to find, attract, indoctrinate and train terrorists even if the Saudis redefine their permissive relationship with their more radical clerics.

An examination that I have undertaken of large-scale international terrorist attacks since 1993 shows that, in almost every case, a majority of the terrorists are college-educated, often in technical subjects such as engineering. In the four attacks for which the most complete information is available on educational levels – the World Trade Center in 1993, the U.S. Embassies in Africa in 1998, the 9/11 attacks, and the Bali attacks of 2002 – 53 percent of the terrorists had either a college degree or some tertiary education. This is roughly comparable to the general adult population in the U.S 52% of which has attended college. The first World Trade Center attack was committed entirely by college-educated men, while the 9/11 attack pilots, as well as the secondary planners identified by the 9/11 Commission, all attended western universities, a highly prestigious and elite endeavor for anyone from the Middle East. Indeed, the lead pilot Mohammad Atta had a doctorate in, of all things, urban preservation. Even in the Bali attacks, the only incident in which the terrorists were known to rely largely on madrassa recruits, five college-educated “masterminds” – including two university lecturers – helped shape the plot.

Looking forward, we will have to continue monitoring this trend and determine whether madrassa students are serving as foreign fighters in Iraq.

### **3. Sense of humiliation**

The U.S. national security problem is not fundamentalism per se, but the vexing question about why some individuals turn to violence in God’s name. Bin Laden has harnessed the sense of historical injustice – the “humiliation” felt by the Muslim world since the carve-up of the Ottoman Empire by the British and the French. For bin Laden, the Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916 plays the same role that the “stab in the back” Versailles Treaty played for Hitler. On October 7, 2001, on the videotape that flickered across our screens as the war on the Taliban began, bin Laden talked about the humiliation of the Muslim world as the motivation for the war against the U.S.

### **4. Political stagnation in the Arab world**

All around the Middle East a host of authoritarian kleptocracies have held on to power for decades. That has turned many towards Islamism, the beguiling idea that Islam offers a holistic solution to all of society’s ills. Meanwhile bin Laden has acquired a mantle of respectability among certain sections of the Muslim world because other Middle Eastern leaders are seen as corrupt and illegitimate. Bin Laden, by contrast, is

seen as courageous and incorruptible by a sizable fan base that looks to him to reverse decades of Western domination in the Middle East and other parts of the Muslim world.

Al Qaeda draws many of its recruits from closed societies that are intolerant of dissent. For this reason, it is no coincidence that Saudis and Egyptians play such a key role in the group. If there were more open societies in the Muslim world, which would allow for more political space for the Islamists, al Qaeda's appeal would be reduced.

Charles Hill, a former U.S. diplomat, observes in the 2001 book, *The Age of Terror: America and the World after September 11*, that it is the political failures of Arab governments which have incubated the religious terrorists. He writes:

“(There are) variations of a single approach to the political ordering of society . . . . Power is held by a strongman, surrounded by a praetorian guard . . . . Those close to political power gain; the weak are disregarded . . . . Every regime of the Arab-Islamic world has proved a failure. Not one has proved able to provide its people with realistic hope for a free and prosperous future. The regimes have found no way to respond to their people's frustration other than a combination of internal oppression and propaganda to generate rage against external enemies. Religiously inflamed terrorists take root in such soil. Their threats to the regimes extort facilities and subsidies that increase their strength and influence. The result is a downward spiral of failure, fear and hatred.”<sup>79</sup>

Any observer of the Middle East would have to agree that the region has dire problems. Over the past two decades, in certain quarters it was held as a tenet of quasi-theological faith that Western discussions of Middle Eastern problems were inherently biased, flawed, imperialist or even racist. 9/11 destroyed whatever currency that notion once had. Moreover, in some quarters of the Arab world today, there is refreshing evidence of self-examination about “what went wrong,” best demonstrated by the release of the unglamorously named “Arab Human Development Report 2002.”<sup>80</sup> Written by Arab intellectuals, the report highlights the dearth of freedom, the lack of civil society, the widespread illiteracy and the dismal status of women in the Arab world, all of which have some bearing on why al Qaeda was incubated in the Middle East.

## **5. We are caught up in a clash within Islam**

The most useful way of looking at the underlying causes of the 9/11 attacks was first articulated in November 2001 in an essay entitled, *Somebody Else's Civil War*, by Michael Scott Doran.<sup>81</sup> Doran explained that bin Laden's followers “consider themselves an island of true believers surrounded by a sea of iniquity and think that the

---

<sup>79</sup> Charles Hill, “A Herculean Task: The Myth and Reality of Arab Terrorism,” in Strobe Talbott and Nayan Chanda (ed.), *The Age of Terror: America and the World after September 11*, (New York, New York: Basic Books, 2001), p. 100-101, 103.

<sup>80</sup> *Arab Human Development Report 2002*, (New York, New York: United Nations Development Programme).

<sup>81</sup> Michael Scott Doran, “Somebody Else's Civil War: Ideology, Rage, and the Assault on America,” in James F. Hoge and Gideon Rose (ed.), *How Did this Happen?: Terrorism and the New War*, (New York, New York: Public Affairs, c2001).

future of religion itself, and therefore the world depends on them and their battle.”<sup>82</sup> Bin Laden’s followers have adopted the ideas of the Egyptian writer Sayyid Qutb, who advocated the necessity of an offensive jihad against the enemies of Islam, including the “apostate” rulers of the Middle East. (Many commentators have pointed out that Qutb is the ideological godfather of the jihadists).

Bin Laden and al Zawahiri took Qutb’s ideas a step further by saying it was necessary to direct the jihad against the United States, the patron of regimes such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt. By attacking the “far enemy”, the United States, al Qaeda seeks to destabilize its premiere targets in the Middle East. In a sense then the destruction of the World Trade Center was collateral damage in the ongoing civil war for the hearts and minds of the Muslim world. Doran rightly observes: “[Bin Laden] has no intention of defeating America. War with the United States is not a goal in and of itself, but rather an instrument designed to help his brand of extremist Islam survive and flourish among the believers.”<sup>83</sup>

This clash within the Muslim world remains unresolved between those like bin Laden who seek to install Taliban-style theocracies and those who reject this vision of Islam and who understand that the killing of civilians is not countenanced by the Koran. How this clash is resolved over the coming decades is the key to ending the threat from al Qaeda and its affiliated groups around the globe.

### **Implications for U.S. National Security Policies**

Our national security strategy must be designed to hit bin Laden where he is weakest – his failure to put forth a positive political vision. In Saudi Arabia, a 2003 poll revealed that only 4.7 percent of Saudis would support bin Laden ruling over Saudi Arabia.<sup>84</sup> 48.7 percent supported his rhetoric.<sup>85</sup> This is our opening. Bin Laden’s proposition to restore the Caliphate must be plainly revealed as nothing more than a coarse move for power and a forced return to the Middle Ages.

U.S. policies need to isolate and discredit him, leave him estranged from moderate Muslims, and show his program to be as much a dead-end as the regimes of Iran and the Taliban. Military force and homeland defense are tactics needed to hold and gain ground while a lasting defeat can be forced upon bin Laden and his politics. Many of the following are self-evident and argued elsewhere, including in the 9/11 Commission report. The key lies in implementation.

### **Foreign Policies**

---

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, p. 35

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, p. 32.

<sup>84</sup> Obaid, Nawaf, “Yes to bin Laden rhetoric; no to Al Qaeda violence,” June 28, 2004. The poll was conducted between July and November 2003. The figures are based on 15,452 responses (62 male and 38 percent female). The margin of error was three percentage points. Obaid was supported by seventy-five researchers.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

- *Re-establish U.S. legitimacy:* In his second Inaugural Address, President Bush made clear his determination that “one day this untamed fire of freedom will reach the darkest corners of our world.”<sup>86</sup> His is a fine vision indeed, but one undermined not only by our limited legitimacy abroad, but by the President’s language – often militant and religious in tone – and decisions. Talk of supporting freedom should not engender such hostility. About the President’s first term, John Lewis Gaddis wrote in *Foreign Affairs* that “another lesson relates to language. The president and his advisers preferred flaunting U.S. power to explaining its purpose.”<sup>87</sup> A lesson which appears not to be fully learned. Then there is the matter of consistency.

The mistreatment of Muslim detainees in Afghanistan and Iraq and the prison facilities at Guantanamo Bay and other secret locations leave us vulnerable where we should be strongest – our principles – and arm those who believe this to be a war against Islam. With the war in Iraq ongoing, we can ill afford this drag on our credibility and standing. Choosing not to hold civilian leaders or military commanders to account suggests that we keep two sets of rule books. And the detention facilities are but a short-term scheme, not a durable political solution to a long-term problem. They are now powerful symbols. We need these prisoners off the military’s books – by bringing them into the U.S. judicial system, returning them for prosecution in their home countries, or building legitimacy by developing internationally recognized legal procedures for dealing with them.

- *Address core grievances:* U.S. policies are perceived as unjust and biased by many Muslims, particularly regarding the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. It is plainly evident that this perception works against long-term U.S. security interests. A re-balancing in action and rhetoric is needed and is possible with the strengthening of Mahmoud Abbas. Similarly, the U.S. must work to solve the Kashmir issue between Pakistan and India. Kashmir is both a core grievance of many Islamists and a training ground for militants. Ameliorating the dispute would not only reduce the chance of war between two nuclear powers, but would also take away a key training area for groups that have long had connections with al Qaeda.
- *Consistent support for reforms in Saudi Arabia and Egypt:* The U.S. government must be firm and consistent in pushing for steady progress, and must be seen to side with the reformers. Saad Eddin Ibrahim, the Egyptian dissident, said recently that “there is growing concern among advocates of democracy in the region that the United States may not be serious” about its reform efforts, and the U.S. initiative to encourage democratic reform in the Middle East is showing signs of slackening.<sup>88</sup> In June, the *Washington Post* reported that funding for the Middle East Partnership Initiative has decreased since 2003, falling from \$100 million to \$74 million for the current year.<sup>89</sup>

---

<sup>86</sup> George W. Bush, “Second Inaugural Address,” Washington, DC: January 20, 2005.

<sup>87</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, “Grand Strategy in the Second Term,” *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2005.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> Robin Wright, “Campaign to change Mideast under fire,” *The Washington Post*, June 9, 2005.

Al Qaeda is losing its military campaign in Saudi Arabia. With its strategic miscalculations, including the attack on Arabs during Ramadan in November 2003, al Qaeda discredited itself and allowed the government to seize public support and drive information from informants. But these gains could prove illusory without accelerated political reform. The municipal elections held in February 2005 are but a start, evidenced by the recent harsh sentencing of three dissidents that proceeded without strong U.S. opposition. Reform of oneself is often the most difficult and that is why the U.S. must press the Saudi princes at every turn.

Egypt is the cultural center of the Arab world and, from the Muslim Brotherhood to Qutb to Zawahiri, Egyptians have led the jihadist movement. Seeing political reform in Egypt must be a top U.S. priority, no less than in Saudi Arabia. But with massive arrests and long detention of prisoners, the fixing of the presidential election process that limits independent party participation, and the brutal treatment of women at protests in May 2005, President Mubarak is falling on the wrong side of this argument, and the U.S. government has been largely quiet.

- *Do not leave Afghanistan behind (as the fight toughens in Iraq):* The strategic direction of U.S. policies is set. President Karzai has our firm backing. His business-minded approach to expanding trade and investment and generating jobs is the right one. The near-term challenge is to consolidate last October's accomplishment with a free and fair parliamentary vote in September and drain the Taliban of its remaining legitimacy. But this is a generational challenge with a likely recurring need for both U.S. money and manpower.
- *Distance ourselves from despots in the Muslim world:* Our uncritical embrace of Karimov in Uzbekistan, for instance, does nothing to enhance our standing in the Muslim world. We should strongly condemn his attacks on his own population – attacks that strengthen, rather than weaken militant Islamists groups.
- *Engage Islamist parties:* The long-term solution to the problem of Muslim terrorist groups is a more democratic Middle East of their creation, not ours, where there is real political space for Islamist parties. Islamists and Muslim fundamentalists are not our enemies and can even be our friends. A more democratic Middle East will initially see the strong emergence of Islamist parties because they are generally more organized and have more legitimacy than other groups.

The U.S. must learn to live with this and must not make the mistake, long resonant in the Muslim world, of taking no action when democratically elected Islamists were ousted from power by a military coup in Algeria in 1992. Recent elections in Pakistan and Yemen indicate that Islamist parties are responsible political actors when they are allowed to participate in the political process. Such a pattern will likely be seen in other Muslim countries as they move to greater democracy. An Islamist political party, the Justice and Development Party for instance, governs in Turkey and enjoys good relations in the West.

- *Deprive bin Laden of religious backing:* There are scores of millions of Muslims who would describe themselves as fundamentalist, and millions more who subscribe to Wahhabi or Salafi ideas. Fundamentalist movements are common to history and should not be considered somehow inherently bad. But it is the cleric's call to offensive jihad and the fundamentalist's violent intolerance of the West that must be checked. The U.S. must hold key states to account for re-defining the acceptable and for isolating bin Laden on religious grounds. Conducting terrorist attacks does not require al Qaeda to establish a large base of sympathizers. Realizing bin Laden's political vision does.
- *Engage bin Laden on his own terms:* The President and other U.S. officials should not be afraid to condemn certain terrorist acts as against the Koran. One does not need to be an expert in Islam to condemn attacks against civilians on these grounds. The Koran is replete with injunctions about how civilians must be protected in times of war. Bin Laden and his ideological fellow travelers cannot justify their attacks on civilians from a Koranic perspective. This is a weakness that we should exploit. When U.S. civilians are beheaded in Iraq or killed by suicide attacks on our own soil, the first point we should make is that these acts are condemned by the Koran, the Prophet Mohammed, and many centuries of Islamic tradition.
- *Critique al Qaeda's war on Muslims:* We should exploit the fact that al Qaeda and its affiliates have killed thousands of Muslims. We have squandered a number of propaganda advantages in this arena. For example, after the attacks on the U.S. Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, U.S. officials should have pointed out that of the more two hundred killed in the attacks, only twelve were American, and that a substantial number of the victims were Muslims; Kenya and Tanzania having large Muslim populations. Similarly, no effort was made to determine the number of Muslims who died in the 9/11 attacks. New York has a disproportionately large number of Muslim businessmen, immigrants, and visitors who may have perished in the 9/11 attacks. Likewise, the vast majority of Zarqawi's many hundreds, or even thousands, of victims in Iraq are Muslim civilians. We should not be afraid to point this out. Attempting to justify a double crime puts al Qaeda and its affiliates on the defensive: the killing of civilians and the killing of fellow Muslims.
- *Deny bin Laden symbolic victories:* To sustain his movement, bin Laden must demonstrate results with regularity. In this, he is no different than any other leader. U.S. policies must deny him the air that he needs – the strategic victories that he seeks. If he obtains and uses weapons of mass destruction, his stature will be greatly enhanced. That is why firmly securing the radiological materials of the former Soviet Union must be a high priority.
- *Encourage Europe to integrate and support greater counterterrorism cooperation:* Powerful forces are at work in Europe driven by fears of immigration and growing economic insecurity. Muslim communities are often blamed and left alienated. The answer lies in structural economic reform and integrating Muslims more tightly into society. Where and when possible, the U.S. should encourage Europe to bring

Muslim leaders into the political process at all levels, target urban areas of high unemployment, and fund expanded school curriculum on Islam and the Middle East and South Asia. Turkey's membership in the European Union must go forward, and the U.S. should work to see that the recent votes in France and the Netherlands do not disrupt this process or its timing.

Greater cooperation is needed between U.S. and European intelligence services, especially those in France, Germany, Italy, and Spain, building on the 9/11 Commission conclusion that "the U.S. government cannot meet its own obligations to the American people to prevent the entry of terrorists without a major effort to collaborate with other governments".<sup>90</sup> On law enforcement, many, including the U.S. government, have argued for an overall agreement on data protection to ease the burdens of information sharing.<sup>91</sup> This will likely require greater flexibility from EU members. On other points of cooperation, including the FBI's engagement with Europol, with a single liaison post announced but not filled, there is a lack of urgency. Exchanging information through informal government networks, for example of judges as Anne-Marie Slaughter has argued, will be vital and should be encouraged. Other exchanges should follow that of Spanish judge Baltasar Garzon, who is spending nine months this year at New York University.

But perhaps more pressing is the need for stepped-up cooperation between EU member states, which has been limited thus far by a strong resistance to intelligence sharing and the different perceptions of the terrorist threat. Additionally, Europol will require greater funding if it is to perform its duties – with a staff of 350, its current operating budget is only \$96 million.<sup>92</sup> The U.S. should press both counts firmly.

- *Engage South East Asia:* U.S. policies cannot be too tightly trained on the Middle East, leaving vulnerable South East Asia. Al Qaeda's ties with Jemaah Islamiya, for example, ran deep and supported a steady flow of militants to Afghanistan. Our prestige suffered with the Asian financial crisis and the war in Iraq. But this situation is not static. In March 2005, a poll found that sixty-five percent of Indonesians viewed the U.S. more favorably after the U.S. military and humanitarian role in countering the effects of the tsunami and that opposition to U.S. counter-terrorism efforts fell by half.<sup>93</sup>
- *Fix our public diplomacy:* Al Hurra, the 24-hour Arab news channel funded by the U.S. government that is designed to compete with al Jazeera, was funded with only \$62 million dollars. This is a joke. Substantial additional sums should be allocated to al Hurra and our television news efforts to replicate the success that Voice of America

---

<sup>90</sup> National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report* (2004), p. 390.

<sup>91</sup> Kristin Archik, "U.S.-EU Cooperation Against Terrorism," (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, updated April 13, 2005).

<sup>92</sup> Cameron Stewart, "EU split on threat of Islamic terrorism," *The Australian*, May 9, 2005.

<sup>93</sup> "Indonesia Poll Finds Tsunami Aid Boosts Support for U.S.," *Reuters*, March 4, 2005.

and Radio Free Europe had during the Cold War. Al Hurra and other efforts in languages from Farsi to Urdu should attract the most qualified journalists available.

The State Department should also adopt a “war room” approach to what is being broadcast in the Muslim world and create a team of people who can respond quickly in the appropriate languages to any claims that are factually inaccurate. The U.S. government should also understand that Arab media outlets, like other media organizations, value access to administration officials. U.S. administration officials should routinely make themselves available to Arab media.

- *Develop an Internet-based strategy to attack the jihadists:* While fears of cyber terrorism have proven unfounded, the most important base for al Qaeda and its affiliates is now the Internet. It is instrumental for their recruitment, training, strategic planning and propaganda. Zarqawi, for instance, came to international prominence with a calculated campaign of beheadings that were immediately posted to the Web. The Madrid attacks were almost certainly prompted by a discussion on an al Qaeda web site three months before the attacks about which members of the coalition in Iraq were most likely to drop out.

The U.S. government should also adopt a war room approach to surveying what is being said on the jihadist websites, and either find ways to immediately take the sites down or improve the forensics of tracing where the sites are originating so that actionable intelligence can be gathered in a timely manner.

## **Domestic Policies**

- *Fix our intelligence services:* The twin failures of relying too heavily on technical collection methods and abandoning Central Asia after the Afghan-Soviet war carried heavy costs. As Iraq demonstrated, the U.S. intelligence community failed to reveal the absence of what it desperately sought. The greater challenge, of course, lies in regularly uncovering the unknown threats. This requires penetrating al Qaeda and its affiliates, a very tough proposition, especially in the absence of defectors. Jamal Ahmed al-Fadl is the only individual known to have turned on al Qaeda and willingly cooperated with U.S. authorities.

There is no shortage of recommendations.<sup>94</sup> Aggressively building human intelligence capabilities, destroying cultures that limit cooperation and information sharing, and streamlining authorities, reporting, and Congressional oversight are not controversial. They require political will and they require time. The CIA needs to focus on raising individual performance, as the mishandling of the source, “Curveball,” so glaringly indicated is needed.

---

<sup>94</sup> The final report stated that “we find ourselves proposing several sensible changes that former Secretary of Defense and Director of Central Intelligence James Schlesinger endorsed in 1971”. Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction, *Report to the President of the United States* (2005), p. 336.

Lastly, it is vital to remember that our success depends critically on the effectiveness of foreign intelligence services, which are closer to our targets by distance, culture, and language. A key priority is to watch these services, especially in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, to ward against infiltration and to ensure that they do their job and keep us supplied with accurate and actionable intelligence.

- *Educate the public about WMD threats:* A WMD attack of some kind is inevitable in the U.S. in coming decades. We saw with the still unsolved anthrax attacks in the fall of 2001, which killed five people, that widespread panic can be engendered by even small-bore WMD attacks. The public needs to understand that a radiological attack in the U.S. is a high probability in the coming decades. Such an attack will not kill many people. Rather, the greatest threat to public safety would likely be mass panic. The public needs to understand this before the attack happens, not after the damage is done.
- *Encourage inclusiveness at home:* Attacks in the U.S. by Muslim Americans are possible in the future – one only need consider the recent arrest of Hamid Hayat. With their immense economic and political consequences, bin Laden must consider this an attractive strategic move. U.S. domestic programs should be geared to deepening ties and understanding within our communities. Second generation Muslims must not feel alienated.
- *Prepare for the long-haul:* U.S. economic policy should properly reflect the threat from al Qaeda. It is likely to succeed in hitting the U.S. again. The economic impact of 9/11 and the required increases in national security spending make clear the need for balanced books. Persistent large fiscal deficits are unwise.