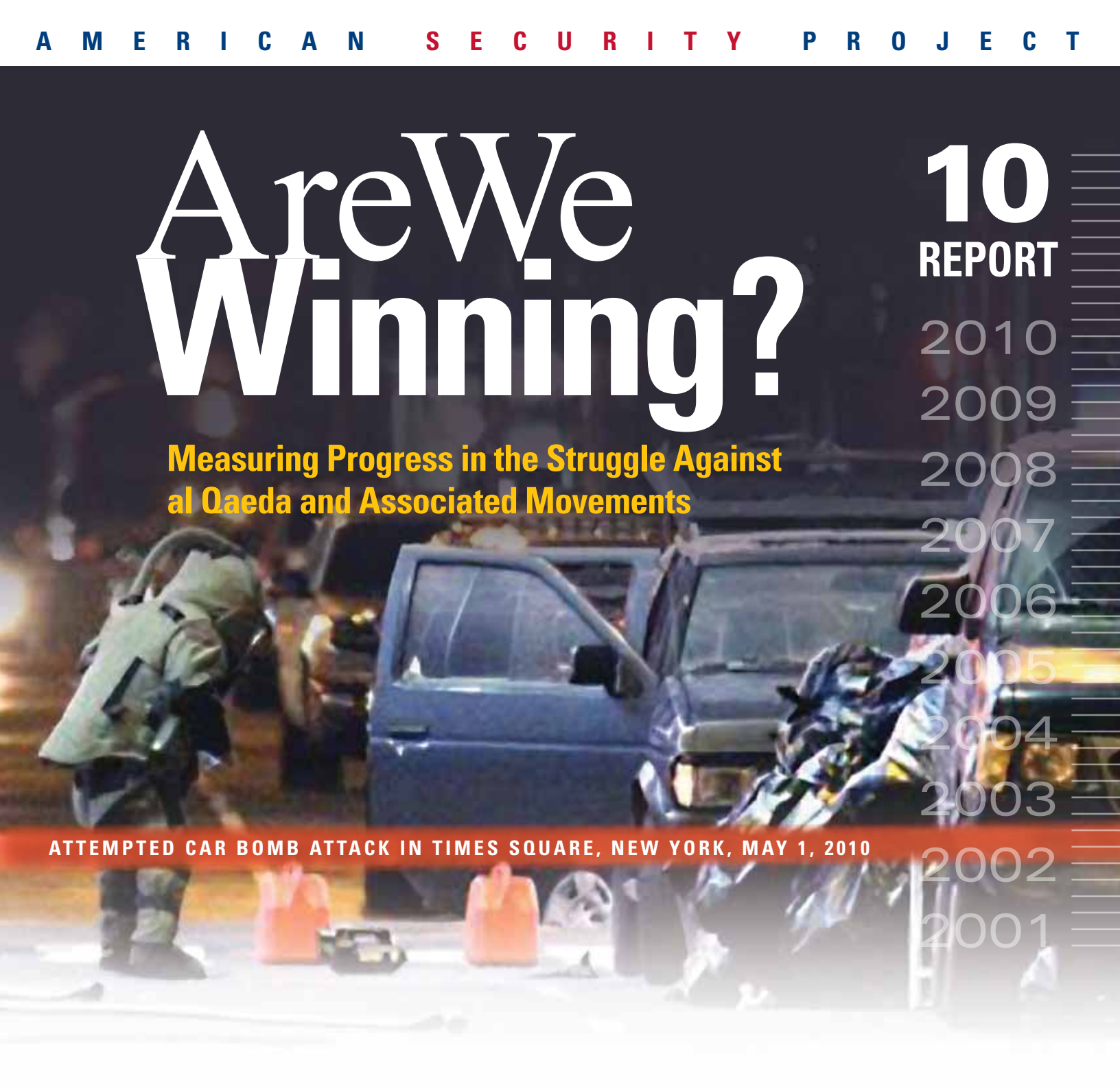


Are We Winning?

10
REPORT

Measuring Progress in the Struggle Against al Qaeda and Associated Movements

- 2010
- 2009
- 2008
- 2007
- 2006
- 2005
- 2004
- 2003
- 2002
- 2001



ATTEMPTED CAR BOMB ATTACK IN TIMES SQUARE, NEW YORK, MAY 1, 2010



America needs a new national security vision for this new era and a dialogue at home that is as robust as it is realistic.

Mission

The American Security Project is organized around the belief that honest public discussion of national security requires a better-informed citizenry—one that understands the dangers and opportunities of the twenty-first century and the spectrum of available policy responses.

Security is a fundamental responsibility of government. In the new millennium, however, U.S. national security policy has not kept pace with rapidly changing threats to American interests. Globalization has quickened, but the United States has not built alliances or institutions to protect and advance American security. Terrorists have expanded their reach and lethality, but the moral authority of the United States is at an all-time low. Changes in the Earth's climate are more evident every day, but the United States has failed to act, alone or with allies, to avoid disaster.

America needs a new national security vision for this new era and a dialogue at home that is as robust as it is realistic. Yet the quality of our discussion on national security has been diminished. Fear has trumped conversation. Artificial differences have been created and real differences have been left unexamined. The character of our national dialogue has grown increasingly shrill while the need for honest discussion has grown more urgent.

Only by developing real analysis and thoughtful answers can a genuine foreign policy consensus be rebuilt for a dangerous and decisive age. Only then will America again marshal all her resources—military, diplomatic, economic, and moral—to meet the challenges of a complex world.

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10
REPORT

2010

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Mission

Introduction

Going into the tenth year of the “war on terror,” any assessment of the struggle against violent Islamist extremists faces a fundamental analytical challenge. Every day in the news, we see tremendous developments. The “Arab Spring,” which seems to be fundamentally challenging the political order in the Arab world, is sweeping away much of the political authoritarianism that was a major root cause of radicalism in the region. On May 1, 2011 came more stunning news: a successful U.S. military operation that killed al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden. At this point, neither of these sets of developments points to any clear conclusion. Will the collapse of authoritarian regimes in the Arab world lead to stable, moderate democracies, or will radical, Iranian-style theocracies emerge instead? Similarly, will bin Laden’s death cause al Qaeda to shatter and fade away into complete irrelevance, or will it lead to a renewed and invigorated radical Islamist movement as various groups compete for leadership and followers through an ever-escalating cycle of violence?

Simply put, we are witnessing momentous changes, but those changes have uncertain consequences. Any judgments about them remain pure speculation.

However, the more prosaic level of analysis provided in this report is grounded in objective data. Regardless of the news headlines, the reality is that there is only one word to describe the “war on terror” based on the empirical data: stalemate.

The United States has built a strong international coalition to combat the threat of Islamist terrorism. It has modernized its own laws and governmental institutions while promoting effective international cooperation on tracking and limiting terrorist financing and information sharing. These positive developments are visible on a regular basis in the form of disrupted plots both at home and abroad.

At this point, the main challenge for the United States is not in the development of effective counterterrorism instruments, but in sustaining a strategy for their wise use politically. This will be difficult to accomplish, as demonstrated by the backlash against efforts to use civilian courts to hold terrorists criminally accountable for their actions, and in the failure of the Obama administration to secure support to close the prison at Guantanamo Bay.

But despite successes on the ways and means side of the equation, the latter part of 2009 and much of 2010 were undoubtedly a time of setbacks. Al Qaeda continues to absorb casualties and replace losses, even in the midst of ever-escalating kinetic operations against it and its affiliates. Though the organization remains under pressure, there is no reason to believe the United States is close to eradicating the threat.

Worse, for the first time in several years, al Qaeda seems to be developing effective transnational affiliates. Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), based in Yemen, has been extremely active in attempting attacks on the United States, and al Shabaab in Somalia branched out for the first time to strike in Uganda. Osama bin Laden's death may be occurring just as al Qaeda is beginning to really walk without his leadership.

After the election of Barack Obama in 2008, there was some hope that the United States might be able to leverage excitement about his election to transform America's role in the world and potentially refocus the fight against Islamist terrorism. But Obama's policies have closely mirrored those of President George W. Bush, demonstrating either the durability of the governmental consensus on the overall strategy or the power of inertia. We have to acknowledge that regardless of revolutionary developments on the horizon—there is no silver bullet in the “war on terror.” Indeed, more than ever it is becoming clear that the best the United States can achieve is to reduce the threat of terrorism to a persistent nuisance that we accept as a fact of life.¹

Further, trends in the domestic sphere have turned sharply negative, marking the most significant change between this report and last year's. Metric Five, which looks at the U.S. “home front,” saw two very negative developments. The first is the rise of a vocal anti-Islam movement demonstrated by anti-mosque and anti-Sharia initiatives. The second is the increasing number of domestic radicalization cases in the United States. Taken together, these developments have the potential to transform the “war on terror” dramatically for the worse. We will need to see whether these were simply election-year and recession-driven dynamics, but for now, these are very troubling developments.

There will be good years and bad years in the future. The reversal of 2009–2010 will surely prove temporary, but so likely will future positive trends as was the case with the various improvements in America's position in 2008 and early 2009. As the “war on terror” approaches its second decade the prospect for “victory” remains elusive.

The research for this report was completed prior to the recent transformative events in Egypt, Libya, and elsewhere in the Arab world. While it is easy to speculate on the possible consequences of these developments, we do not yet have solid data to examine. These developments will be treated in-depth in the next edition of “Are We Winning?”

A Note about Terminology

There has been a great deal of debate over the appropriate use of various terms associated with the “war on terror” among government officials and policy experts alike. The American Security Project has chosen to adjust its use of terminology. While in the past we framed the issue as examining the level of “violent jihadism,” we are now focusing our assessment on al Qaeda and Associated Movements (AQAM).

Unfortunately, our ability to disaggregate data is imperfect. As a consequence, in several sections we continue to cite trends in the number of “Islamist” attacks as coded by the U.S. National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC). ■

Introduction

The metrics in this report are color coded according to our findings based on the question:

Do trends in this indicator demonstrate progress in the struggle against al Qaeda and associated movements?

NO

UNCERTAIN

YES

Summary of Findings

I. Islamist Violence

The number of terrorist attacks by radical Islamist groups remains at an all-time high, and the level of violence outside of Iraq and Afghanistan continues to surge.

II. State of al Qaeda Leadership

U.S. drone attacks killed two successive AQ operations chiefs for Pakistan and Afghanistan. In May 2011, Osama bin Laden was killed in an American raid on his safe house in Pakistan. Nevertheless, the al Qaeda media apparatus remains resilient and effective. The ability of the organization to replace losses demonstrates its durability, although it has never before faced a challenge like it faces today.

III. Al Qaeda Affiliated Movements

After years of concern about the potential rise of effective al Qaeda affiliates, in 2010 those fears came to fruition with the increased capacity of al Qaeda affiliated groups in Somalia and Yemen.

IV. Muslim Public Attitudes

The "Obama Effect" has now fully dissipated, and opinion of the United States in the Muslim world is as bad as it was in 2008. Al Qaeda remains unpopular as well.

V. The Home Front

Trends within the United States took a dramatic turn for the worse with the rise of highly visible anti-Muslim sentiments as well as an increase in domestic radicalization cases.

VI. Terrorist Financing

Although reliable information remains sporadic, there is increasing evidence to suggest that while radical Islamist groups continue to have access to significant funds, al Qaeda in particular may be undergoing a profound funding crisis.

VII. Ungoverned Spaces

Ungoverned spaces continue to provide safe havens for terrorist groups, and weak governance remains a major factor in spawning and sustaining radical insurgent movements.

VIII. International Cooperation against Terrorism

While many countries still need to fully implement United Nations counterterrorism measures, regional initiatives continue to build state capacity and data sharing.

IX. State Sponsorship of Terrorism

Active state sponsorship remains at historically low levels; however, the large number of states that tolerate some level of presence by known terrorist groups complicate counterterrorism efforts.

X. Economic Prosperity and Political Freedom

Although poverty and political oppression persist at high levels throughout the Muslim world, trends in both sets of indicators continue to improve. The Muslim world also weathered the international financial crisis noticeably better than many.

The number of terrorist attacks by radical Islamist groups remains at an all-time high, and the level of violence outside of Iraq and Afghanistan continues to surge.

I. Islamist Violence

In past editions of this report we have used total incidents of Islamist terror as a surrogate for an assessment of the threat posed by al Qaeda. This year, we have decided to disaggregate the data in order to provide a more detailed assessment. There are at least six distinct numerical measures one could use to assess the level of violence. These are:

Islamist Violence: This measure examines the total level of violence perpetrated by Islamist groups, including both terrorism and insurgent activity. The logic of using this measure is that the lines between terrorist groups and insurgencies, and between the memberships of various groups, is murky and shifting. Groups with purely local grievances still sometimes utilize foreign fighters. Individuals joining the Islamist movement as insurgent fighters are sometimes recruited to join transnational terror organizations. While this metric does not measure the threat posed to the United States by al Qaeda, it does essentially define the “pool” of potential recruits for organizations like al Qaeda.

Islamist Terrorism: This measure assesses the level of activity of groups that are actively targeting civilians, irrespective of nationality. Groups that use terrorism have historically demonstrated significant strategic malleability in terms of whom their violence targets. Having breached the hurdle of legitimizing attacks on civilians, their strategic orientation is often flexible. Islamist groups that focus on local grievances sometimes refocus on transnational terrorism, while transnational groups sometimes return to their local roots. The significant development is the establishment of organizations committed to the use of political violence, often against civilians, rather than the specific nature of the target set at any given time.

Islamist Suicide Terrorism: The next level of threat is defined by the level of suicide terrorism by Islamist groups. Suicide attacks are more deadly, on average, than other attacks. In addition, they demonstrate a level of commitment and organization that indicate a higher level of threat that is both virtually impossible to deter and tremendously difficult to prevent.

Mass Casualty Terrorism: Another potential metric is the number of mass casualty attacks. Mass casualty attacks demonstrate both strategic intent and operational capacity. But it is easy to overstate this point. Mass casualty attacks often differ from other attacks solely in terms of consequences rather than apparent intent. Chance, in short, seems to play a large role in the incidence of such attacks.

Islamist Terrorism against Americans: The majority of the victims of Islamist terror have been, paradoxically, other Muslims. This violence represents a threat to international stability, but only an indirect threat to the United States. Violence against Americans, by contrast, represents a direct national security threat to the United States. Such violence is the hallmark of groups with a transnational orientation and institutional capacity to operate in well-defended environments.

Spectacular Islamist Terrorism against Americans:

Ultimately, the “war on terror” was a direct consequence of three al Qaeda attacks in the space of a little over three years—the East Africa embassy bombings in 1998, the attack on the *USS Cole* in 2000, and most importantly, the attacks of September 11, 2001. Because these sorts of attacks are rare, it is difficult to rely on them as a trend line for assessing success or failure in counterterrorism efforts. And yet, this metric is what many Americans would consider the only important one. Violence in Pakistan or Somalia may be troubling, but the absence of successful mass casualty attacks on the United States is arguably more significant.

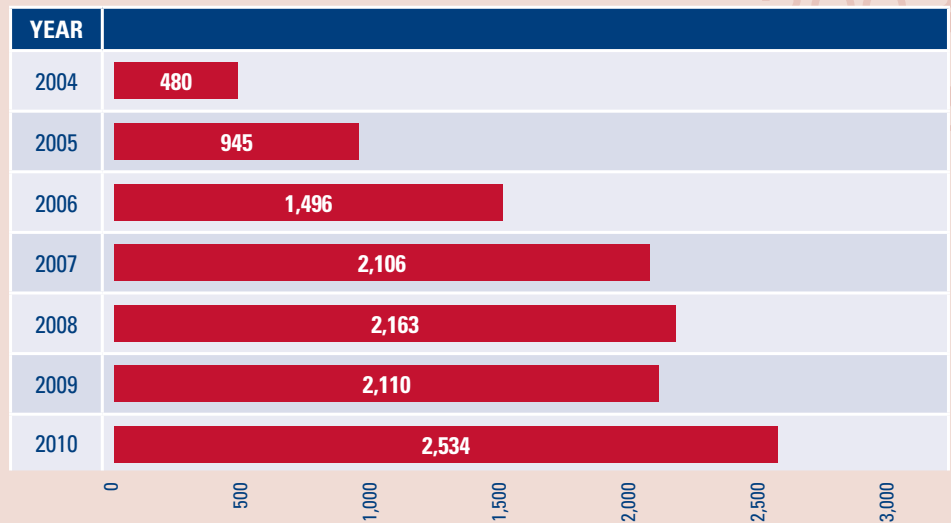
These six sets of measures have not been well correlated. Over the past decade we have seen a dramatic worsening of the statistics on measuring the first three metrics, while we have seen reasonably positive trends for the latter two. It is plausible that this inverse correlation is significant. But even if we are “fighting them there so we don’t have to fight them here,” it is not clear that this is a smart long-term solution. Worse, this inverse correlation may be an illusion that gives us a false sense of confidence in our current strategy and a false sense of security in the face of what may be a growing threat. Unfortunately, the data by itself is insufficient to resolve this issue.

The trend lines for Islamist violence are poor. In two successive reports, we have identified what we thought was a leveling off of violence, only to see a new spike as more recent data became available. The amount of Islamist violence worldwide has increased virtually every year since 2001 and continues to worsen. More and more young Muslims are being recruited into terrorist or insurgent movements, building a growing pool of self-described jihadists. There is no single database that counts all incidents of Islamist violence. The terrorism data is unambiguous, however, and while there has been a decline in Islamist violence in Iraq, increases in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Somalia have more than offset those improvements. Indeed, even progress in Iraq is often overstated, as Iraq

remains a tremendously violent country with levels of violence there at roughly the same level as in 2005. While it may seem peaceful compared to the depths of the civil war in 2006–2007, the reality is that Iraq remains beset by extraordinarily high levels of Islamist violence. On a per capita basis, only Afghanistan is worse.

Islamist terrorism has also increased worldwide. Improvements in Iraq mask the global trend. According to the NCTC, worldwide there were 2,110 incidents of Islamist terrorism in 2009, down slightly from the 2,163 in 2008 and 2,106 in 2007. Considering that incidents in Iraq have declined from 606 to 223 in that period, it is clear that violence elsewhere is increasing.

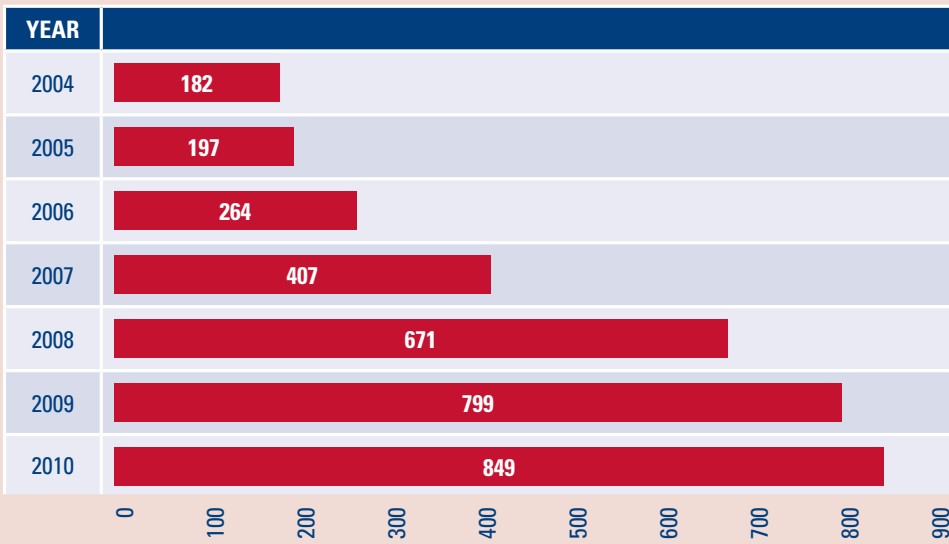
ISLAMIST TERRORISM WORLDWIDE



Source: WITS. <http://www.nctc.gov/wits/witsnextgen.html>

Islamist Violence

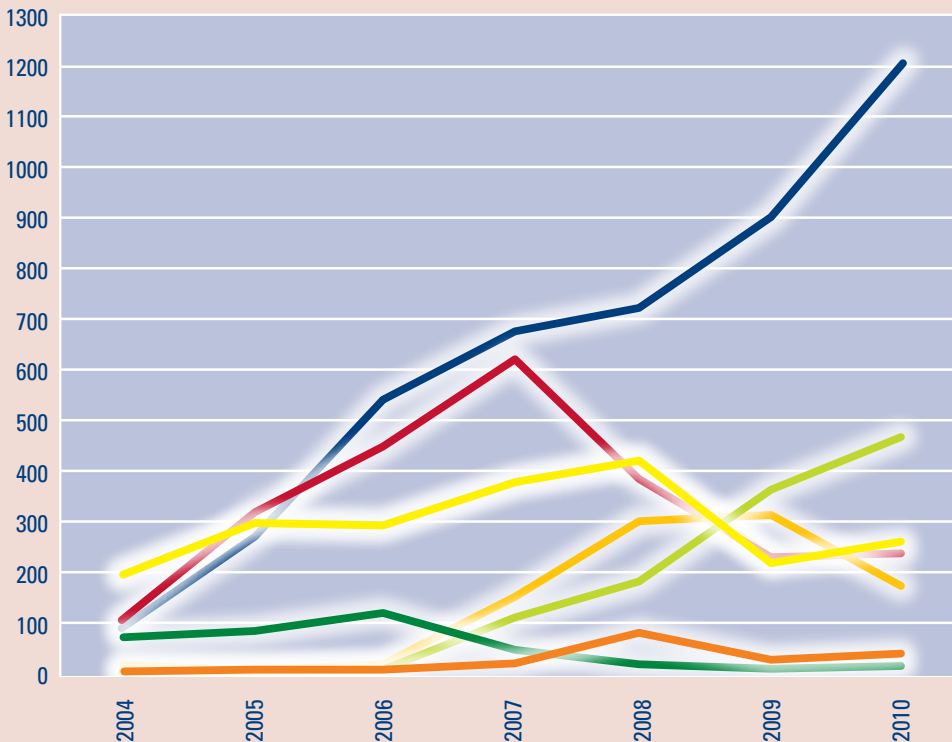
ISLAMIST TERRORISM WORLDWIDE EXCLUDING IRAQ, AFGHANISTAN, AND ISRAEL AND PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES



Source: WITS. <http://www.nctc.gov/wits/witsnextgen.html>

INCIDENTS OF ISLAMIST TERRORISM IN SELECTED COUNTRIES

- IRAQ ■ AFGHANISTAN ■ PAKISTAN ■ SOMALIA
- RUSSIA ■ INDIA ■ ISRAEL AND PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES



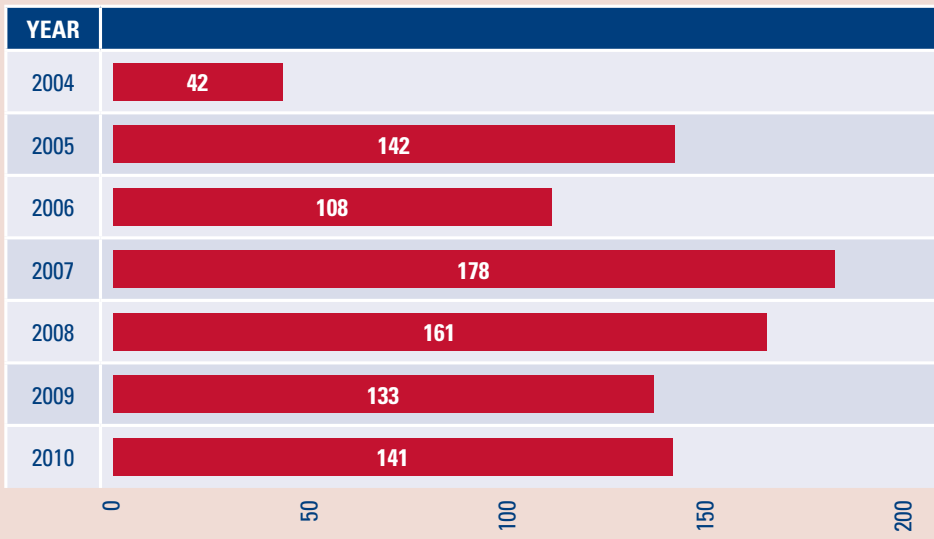
Source: WITS. <http://www.nctc.gov/wits/witsnextgen.html>

In this series of reports, we have traditionally relied heavily on the measure of terrorism outside of Iraq, Afghanistan, Israel, and the Palestinian territories in order to get a sense of the baseline level of violence outside those war zones. In this metric, Islamist terrorist attacks have increased from 407 in 2007 to 671 in 2008 and 799 in 2009.

The data for 2010 shows a troubling growth in Islamist terrorist incidents worldwide. After three years of about 2,100 attacks per year, attacks surged in 2010 to 2,534. Of these attacks, 849 occurred outside of Iraq, Afghanistan, Israel, and the Palestinian Territories. In short, 2010 saw a continuation of the trend towards increasing violence that this report has documented since its inception.

These increases are largely due to dramatic spikes in violence in Pakistan and Somalia. There has been at least some speculation that improvements in Iraq are connected to increases in violence elsewhere, that as al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) fighters relocated to Afghanistan, they brought increased technological sophistication with them.² But while this remains an important issue for examination, there is little compelling evidence to support this “balloon effect” hypothesis. Indeed, any emulation that is occurring is likely due to the sharing of technical details online.³ There is, however, compelling evidence that as in Iraq, foreign fighters continue to promote violence elsewhere.⁴

SUICIDE ATTACKS BY ISLAMIST GROUPS



Source: WITS. <http://www.nctc.gov/wits/witsnextgen.html>

Islamist suicide terrorism has also increased dramatically since 9/11, largely driven by significant increases in the use of this tactic—first in Iraq and now in Afghanistan.⁵ According to the NCTC, suicide terrorism by Islamist groups spiked in 2005 and has remained high ever since.⁶ These attacks are particularly problematic because they are harder to defend against and they cause greater loss of life on average.⁷

There are no identifiable trends regarding mass casualty attacks. Because the numbers of such attacks are smaller—fewer than 100 attacks attributed to Islamist groups have killed more than 50 people since 2004—it is difficult to chart developments over time. If anything, there does seem to have been a small spike in 2007 with such attacks becoming slightly less common since, largely because many

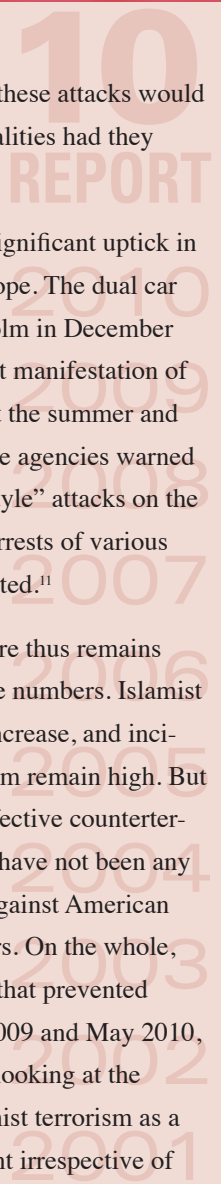
of these attacks occurred in Iraq. Similarly, there is no identifiable clear trend in attacks on Americans, other than the expected reductions in such attacks in Iraq and an increase in Afghanistan. Attacks on American civilians outside of these war zones remain rare. Only nine American civilians were killed by terrorism in 2009⁸—though this figure does not count the 13 killed and 32 wounded at Fort Hood in November 2009 by Nidal Malik Hasan, a U.S. Army major with Islamist leanings.

Significantly, there have been no successful spectacular mass casualty attacks against American civilians since 2001. There has, however, been an apparent recent uptick in attempts. In December 2009, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab tried to detonate a bomb on a flight bound for Detroit with 289 people aboard.⁹ In May 2010, a car bomb was nearly detonated in

Times Square. Both of these attacks would have caused mass casualties had they been successful.

There has also been a significant uptick in Islamist activity in Europe. The dual car bomb attack in Stockholm in December 2010 was only the latest manifestation of this trend.¹⁰ Throughout the summer and fall of 2010, intelligence agencies warned of possible “Mumbai-style” attacks on the continent, and indeed arrests of various plotters were also reported.¹¹

The overall threat picture thus remains ambiguous based on the numbers. Islamist violence continues to increase, and incidents of suicide terrorism remain high. But either due to luck or effective counterterrorism measures, there have not been any mass casualty attacks against American civilians in several years. On the whole, given the lucky breaks that prevented disaster in December 2009 and May 2010, caution would suggest looking at the global increase in Islamist terrorism as a threatening development irrespective of the lack of 9/11-style attacks on American soil since 2001. Based on this assessment, we continue to judge trends in this metric to be negative.



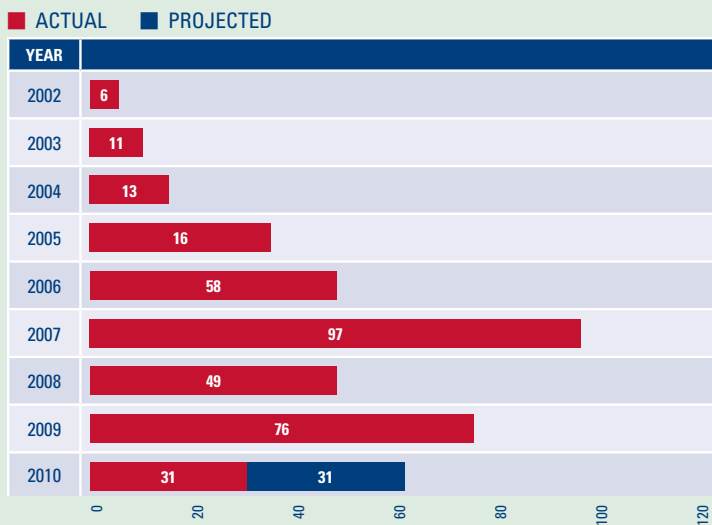
Islamist Violence

U.S. drone attacks killed two successive AQ operations chiefs for Pakistan and Afghanistan. In May 2011, Osama bin Laden was killed in an American raid on his safe house in Pakistan. Nevertheless, the al Qaeda media apparatus remains resilient and effective. The ability of the organization to replace losses demonstrates its durability, although it has never before faced a challenge like it faces today.

II. State of the al Qaeda Leadership

The biggest news regarding al Qaeda leadership occurred after the scope of this report – the death of Osama bin Laden in May 2011. We do not yet know the consequences of this development. There is both reason for optimism, given bin Laden’s unique role as founder and symbol for the organization, and pessimism, given how resilient al Qaeda has been in the past.

AL QAEDA MESSAGING



Source: <http://www.intelcenter.com/gaeda-timeline-v8-0.pdf>

This resilience was demonstrated in 2010 as drone strikes continued to batter suspected radicals in Pakistan, including al Qaeda targets. Under President Obama, the scale of drone strikes has increased dramatically. There were 99 drone strikes in Pakistan through November 2010, compared with 53 in 2009 and 34 in 2008.¹² These strikes are killing militant leaders, but it is unclear whether the long-term benefits of this approach outweigh the costs in public opinion of continuing them.

Indeed, there is some reason to believe that al Qaeda, at least, has begun to adapt to pressure from drones. For instance, media operations, which slowed down in 2008, perhaps due to the persistence of military strikes, seem more effective at present. Not only has the pace of messages increased, but they are now more timely as well.¹³ The chart at left shows messages through the end of June 2010.

During 2010, the senior leadership of al Qaeda remained active. Both Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri released statements over the past year. It is unclear how much, if any, operational control they exert over al Qaeda operations. The death of bin Laden will ultimately reveal a great deal about the strength of the organization.



Do trends in this indicator demonstrate progress in the struggle against al Qaeda and associated movements?



Osama bin Laden: He was the founder and leader of al Qaeda. He was killed in a U.S. military operation in May 2011. Born in Saudi Arabia to an affluent family with more than 50 siblings, he first took an interest in violent Islamism when he became involved in the Muslim Brotherhood. He later fought with the mujahideen in Afghanistan against the Soviets. After using Sudan as a base for training camps in the early 1990s, he fled counter-terrorist efforts there to settle in Afghanistan.¹⁴



Ayman al-Zawahiri: He is al Qaeda's second in command, and has increasingly taken the helm as the face, voice, and inspiration of the organization. In his home country of Egypt, he began organizing violent Islamists at the age of 15. He met Osama bin Laden while working as a surgeon for the Red Crescent Society in 1980.¹⁵

Photo not Available

Sheikh al-Fateh: Al-Fateh was killed in a missile strike in September 2010. An Egyptian national, he was reportedly "al Qaeda's chief of operations for Afghanistan and Pakistan."¹⁶

KILLED

Photo not Available

Hamza al-Jufi: Al-Jufi was killed by a missile strike near Wana in Pakistan in June 2010. He was a leader of the radical group "Jundullah," or Army of God, which Pakistani security officials said was involved in sectarian violence around the port city of Karachi.¹⁷

KILLED



Mustafa Abu al-Yazid: Al-Yazid was killed in a missile strike in Pakistan in May 2010. Al-Yazid was "a top financial chief for al Qaeda as well as one of the group's founders, and was considered by American intelligence officials to be the organization's No. 3 leader."¹⁸ He was also frequently featured in videos released by al Qaeda's media arm.



Sheikh Mansoor: "Sheikh Mansoor was a commander in al Qaeda's Lashkar al Zil, or the Shadow Army, U.S. officials said."¹⁹ He was killed in a missile strike in North Waziristan in February 2010.



Several other significant al Qaeda affiliated figures were also killed in 2010.²⁰ One of the most significant developments in this area was the capture, rather than killing, of the Taliban's military chief, **Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar** in February 2010.²¹ The consequences of this development remain unclear—it has been argued that his capture harmed the prospects for a negotiated settlement in Afghanistan—demonstrating the complex web of interests and personalities in South Asia.²²

al Qaeda Leadership

After years of concern about the potential rise of effective al Qaeda affiliates, in 2010 those fears came to fruition with the increased capacity of al Qaeda affiliated groups in Somalia and Yemen.

III. Al Qaeda Affiliated Movements

Previous editions of this report have noted the increasing danger posed by Islamist movements in the Arabian Peninsula and East Africa. This year, those threats came to fruition.

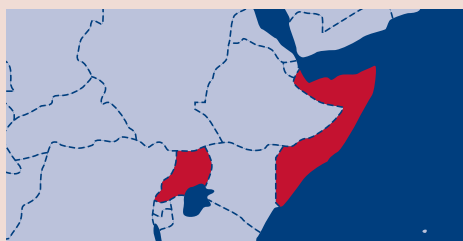


AQAP **A**

The growth of al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) has received the most attention from American counterterrorism authorities. The attempted bombing of Northwest Flight 253 over Detroit has been convincingly tied to AQAP, based in Yemen. AQAP clearly has increased its operational capacity over the past year.²³

AQAP is particularly dangerous in terms of domestic radicalization. American citizen Anwar al-Awlaki is based in Yemen and is reportedly a “regional commander” for al Qaeda in the region.²⁴ His sermons and online activities have been linked to the accused Fort Hood shooter Nidal Malik Hasan, “underwear bomber” Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, and Times Square bomber Faisal Shahzad.

In October 2010, authorities in Europe and the Middle East foiled a plot to send bombs by mail. This plot also originated in Yemen.²⁵ Whether as a matter of chance or design, the locus of mail threats from al Qaeda now seems to be in Yemen rather than in Pakistan or Afghanistan.



East Africa **B**

Al Shabaab in Somalia has become increasingly focused on transnational terrorism in recent years, executing two bombings in Kampala, Uganda, in July 2009, killing at least 74 people.²⁶ Al Shabaab has increased its control over Somalia and become increasingly vocal in its threats against outside involvement in Somalia.

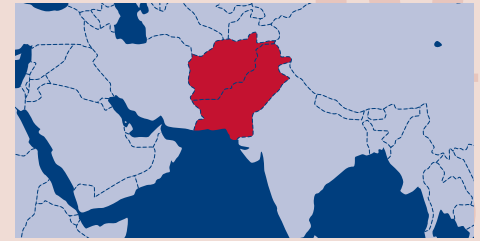
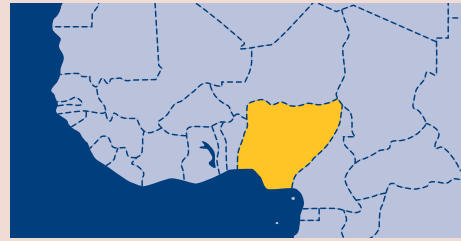
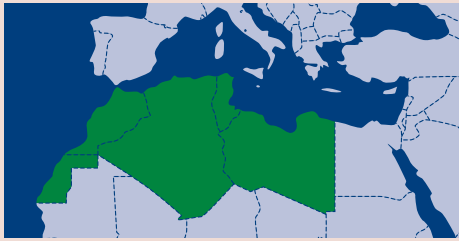
Al Shabaab has had success in recruiting Somali-Americans to fight in Somalia. Along with AQAP and the activities of al Qaeda Central in Pakistan, al Shabaab has to be seen as one of the most serious threat vectors for the United States.



Southeast Asia **C**

Southeast Asia is generally a success story. The twin bombings in Jakarta, Indonesia by a splinter group of Jemaah Islamiyah in July 2009 were the first significant instances of violence in that country in four years.²⁷ Those attacks led to a vigorous government response that resulted in the death or capture of over 100 terrorist suspects. The discovery on the eve of President Obama’s November 2010 visit to Indonesia of militant training camps in Aceh Province, however, highlights the resilience of the small and fragmented radical movement in the world’s most populous Muslim nation as well as the continued effectiveness of the government’s response.²⁸

Islamist violence remains sporadic and locally focused in much of the rest of the region. A spate of violence by the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in the Philippines seems to have been a temporary response to a Philippine court decision voiding a peace agreement with the group. In September 2009, the group announced its willingness to accept a more limited form of local autonomy, thus likely clearing the way for a new agreement, which is still being negotiated.²⁹ An insurgency among Muslims in Thailand continues to simmer, particularly with the Thai government suffering through an extended political crisis.³⁰



North Africa **D**

Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) remains a low-level threat. Despite the grandiose proclamations issued by the group in the 2006–07 timeframe, its reach has been limited. Effective government action and the unpopularity of al Qaeda in North Africa seem to have marginalized the group, and its recent actions largely revolve around low-level criminality to maintain some funding, punctuated with occasional attacks on security services and development projects. Terrorist organizations do sometimes fade under financial pressures, and recourse to criminality can undermine the revolutionary fervor of the organization. This may be the case of AQIM.³¹

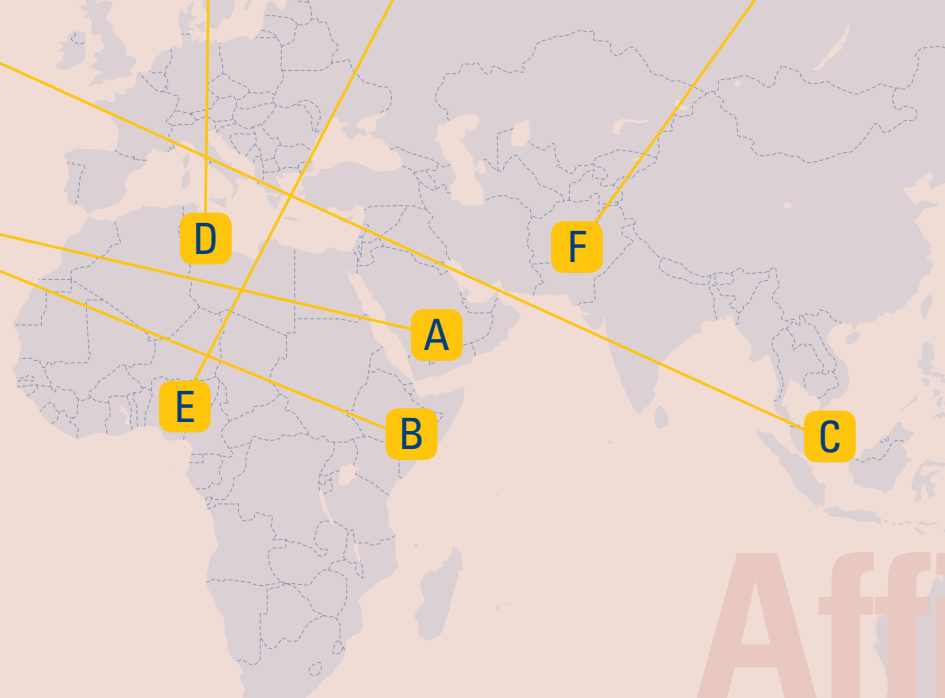
West Africa **E**

There is little evidence of effective al Qaeda penetration into West Africa, but there is also some reason for concern. Various Islamist groups continue to operate in the region, particularly in Nigeria. For instance, the Islamist sect Boko Haram was responsible for violence that claimed over 150 lives in July 2009.³² The group is several years old, has a largely incoherent anti-scientific ideology, but nevertheless seems to reflect a potential vector of radicalization. The fact that “underwear bomber” Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab is also from Nigeria creates another worrisome data point.

South Asia **F**

Despite a massive increase in the American military commitment to Afghanistan, the conflict seems no closer to a decisive outcome than last year. Though there is significant debate about the likely consequences of different outcomes in Afghanistan, the continued institutionalization of Islamist groups there is not a positive development.

It is also unclear whether the tactical and operational successes of the Pakistani army against the Pakistani Taliban will have long-term positive consequences. We are still seeing the fallout of the massive floods that devastated the country in the summer of 2010, including an apparent weakening of civilian government and a diversion of attention by the military from counterinsurgency operations to flood relief. Given the death of Osama bin Laden, the future of American military operations and drone strikes in South Asia remains uncertain.



Affiliated Movements

The “Obama Effect” has now fully dissipated, and opinion of the United States in the Muslim world is as bad as it was in 2008. Al Qaeda remains unpopular as well.

IV. Muslim Public Attitudes

The election of Barack Obama created a temporary wave of hopefulness in the Muslim world. Now, two years later, the wave has almost completely dissipated. Views of the United States are now, in the aggregate, as negative as they were during the Bush administration, though the number of respondents with “very” negative views of the United States remains slightly lower.

This is not particularly surprising. Muslim anger at the United States is a function of its strategic choices. Clearly, given President Obama’s rhetorical outreach, this is not an issue of style. American policy is deeply unpopular, and this unpopularity provides a fertile recruiting ground for anti-American radicals.

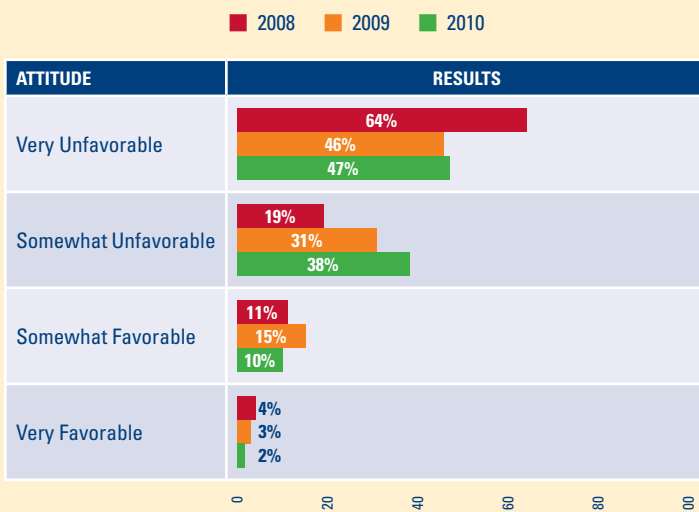
Explicit support for terrorism, however, remains low in the Muslim world. Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda remain unpopular. Thus far, the United States has been unable to convert this anger at groups like al Qaeda into public support for engagement with the United States.

The numbers tell the story. In a 2010 poll of six Arab countries, Middle East scholar Shibley Telhami found that only 12% of Arabs held “favorable” or “somewhat favorable” views of the United States.³³ This is down from 18% in 2009 and 15% in 2008.

The results are similar elsewhere in the Muslim world. In Turkey—an American ally and member of NATO—only 13% of the population had a “mainly positive” view of the United States’ influence in the world, while 70% viewed U.S. influence as “mainly negative.”³⁴ In Pakistan, the numbers were 9% positive, 52% negative. As in past years, West Africa and Indonesia, with large Muslim populations, nonetheless saw the United States more favorably, though Indonesia’s 36% positive, 39% negative finding is less than encouraging. The situation in Nigeria is peculiar. In another recent survey, 81% of Nigerians held favorable views of the United States, but oddly 49% of Nigerians also had positive views of al Qaeda.³⁵

Developments in Pakistan are particularly distressing. According to a Pew Research poll, favorable views of al Qaeda doubled in the past year from 9% to 18%, and support for cooperation with the United States on fighting radical groups has declined. “Roughly six-in-ten (59%) Pakistanis describe

ARAB ATTITUDES OF THE U.S.



Source: http://www.brookings.edu/reports/2010/0805_arab_opinion_poll_telhami.aspx

the U.S. as an enemy, while just 11% say it is a partner...The U.S.-led war in neighboring Afghanistan is widely opposed by Pakistanis. Nearly two-thirds (65%) want U.S. and NATO troops removed as soon as possible.”³⁶

Polling in Pakistan’s Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) provides particularly stark evidence of the challenge. The vast majority of FATA residents oppose American action against al Qaeda on their territory while the vast majority support Pakistani government action. Having a common enemy is not translating into a desire for coordinated action. This is a fundamentally different dynamic from the attitudes of, for instance, German citizens during the Cold War, where anti-Soviet attitudes translated into pro-American positions. Today, a shared antipathy to al Qaeda is doing little to improve American relations with the Muslim world.

A joint poll by the New America Foundation and Terror Free Tomorrow conducted in Pakistan’s FATA found that,

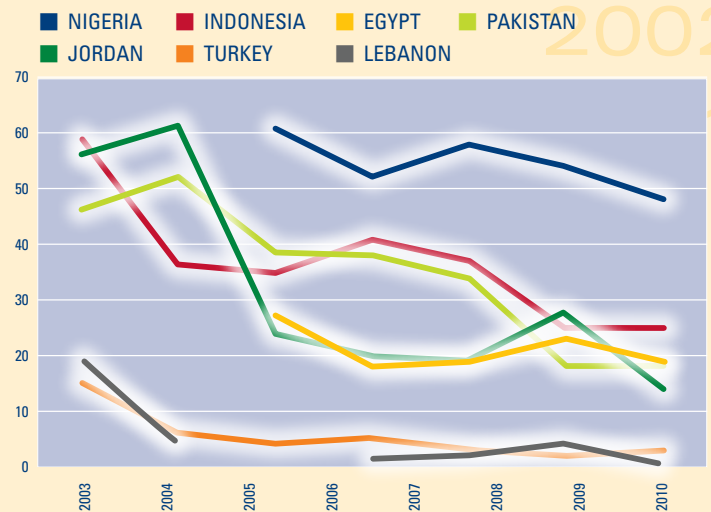
Nearly nine out every ten people in FATA oppose the U.S. military pursuing al-Qaeda and the Taliban in their region. Nearly 70% of FATA residents instead want the Pakistani military alone to fight Taliban and al-Qaeda militants in the tribal areas.

The intensity of opposition to the American military is high. While only one in ten FATA residents think suicide attacks are often or sometimes justified against the Pakistani military and police, almost six in ten believe these attacks are justified against the U.S. military.³⁷

Al Qaeda remains unpopular in the Muslim world. Polls frequently ask respondents about their “confidence in Osama bin Laden” to do the right thing, and this is a useful surrogate for attitudes towards al Qaeda generally. Pew’s Global Attitude Project has tracked attitudes toward bin Laden since 2003, and his standing among Muslim publics remains low.³⁸ It will be interesting to see whether this trend will continue with his death, or whether a “martyr” narrative will take hold.

There is good news in these public attitude dynamics. For good and ill, attitudes toward the United States and al Qaeda seem largely uncorrelated. This means that anger at the United States is not being translated into increased support for al Qaeda. But by the same token, anger at al Qaeda is not translating into deeper public support for cooperation with the United States. In much of the Muslim world, the message seems to be that the public wants neither al Qaeda nor greater American involvement.

CONFIDENCE IN BIN LADEN



Source: <http://pewglobal.org/2010/06/17/obama-more-popular-abroad-than-at-home/>

Public Attitudes

Trends within the United States took a dramatic turn for the worse with the rise of highly visible anti-Muslim sentiments as well as an increase in domestic radicalization cases.

v. The Home Front

American Public Attitudes

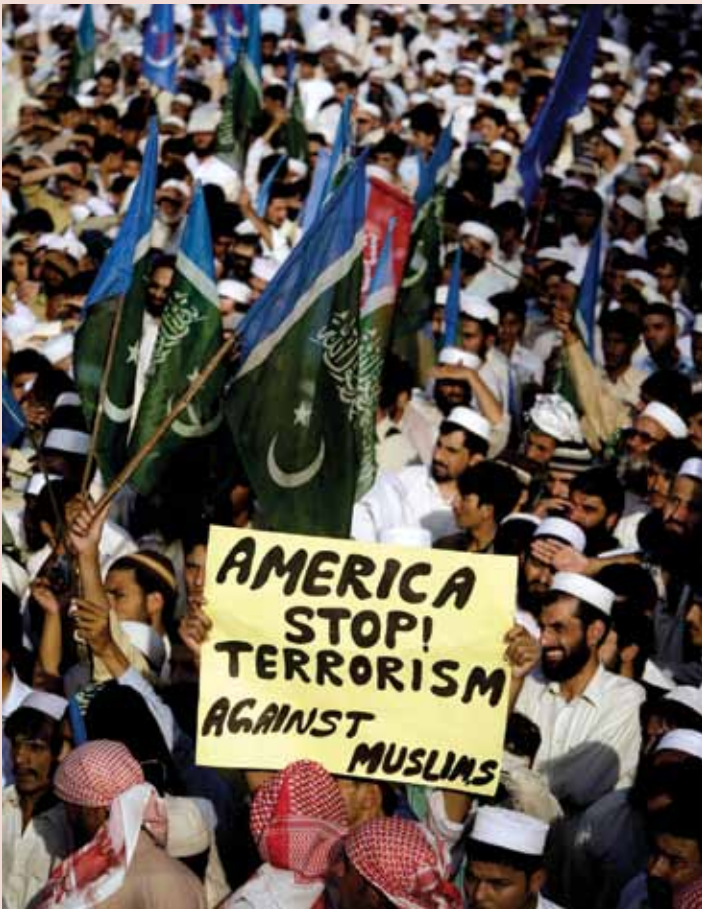
A clear goal of al Qaeda is to provoke a “clash of civilizations” between Islam and the West. Developments in the United States this past year, including the rise of anti-Muslim rhetoric, are thus troubling as they feed into al Qaeda’s strategy. The debate over the “Ground Zero Mosque” was the most visible instance of this trend, but opposition to mosques in a number of localities as well as anti-Sharia rhetoric and laws in some parts of the country also contributed to the visibility of this issue.

Despite the rise of fringe, anti-Muslim activists in the United States, overall public opinion polling shows relatively minor changes in American attitudes toward Muslims. Nonetheless, the trends are troubling. The percentage of Americans who have a favorable opinion of Islam declined from 41% in July 2005 to 30% in August 2010. During that same time frame, unfavorable views of Islam increased slightly from 36% to 38%.³⁹

This polling perhaps minimizes the changes in domestic attitudes. In the wake of the debates over the construction of an Islamic center in lower Manhattan, anti-mosque protests erupted in at least a half-dozen other locations.⁴⁰ Worse, in September 2010, a Florida minister threatened to publicly burn Qurans, prompting several days of anti-American violence in Afghanistan and Pakistan.⁴¹ In November 2010, voters in Oklahoma passed a referendum which “prohibits state courts from considering international law or Islamic Shariah law when deciding cases.”⁴²

Some organizations have noted an increase in anti-Muslim hate crimes,⁴³ but since official government statistics have not been updated since 2008, there is no reliable way to assess whether there has been an upsurge.⁴⁴





The growth and transformation of anti-Muslim sentiment in the United States is an issue that bears further analysis.

The American public has grown slightly more pessimistic about the “war on terror.” From September 2008 to February 2009, between 46% and 62% of the public believed the U.S. was winning the “war on terror.” Since March 2010, this number has not topped 46% and has been as low as 39%.⁴⁵ This change likely reflects increased pessimism over the war in Afghanistan as well as the impact of the close calls of Flight 253 and the Times Square car bomb.

Domestic Radicalization

Another troubling development on the home front has been an apparent surge in domestic radicalization cases. “Between September 11, 2001, and the end of 2009, 46 publicly reported cases of domestic radicalization and recruitment to jihadist terrorism occurred in the United States; 13 of those cases occurred in 2009.”⁴⁶ Several additional cases were reported in 2010.⁴⁷

A previous American Security Project report, “Enemies Among Us,” highlighted the idiosyncrasy of many of these cases. The report notes that “[e]xtremism capitalizes and thrives on perceptions of alienation and exclusion.”⁴⁸ This dynamic highlights the dangers associated with the rise of anti-Muslim sentiment in the United States, and particularly its adoption by mainstream political figures.

In retrospect, President George W. Bush deserves significant credit for condemning anti-Muslim sentiment in the United States. President Obama, for various reasons, may have less credibility with many Americans on this score, despite his equally vigorous condemnation of anti-Muslim rhetoric.

Domestic radicalization is particularly dangerous because of the ability of American citizens and lawful residents to travel to training and radicalization hot spots. Indeed, their use of American travel documents makes them particularly dangerous as transnational terrorists. American citizen David Headley, for instance, made five scouting trips to Mumbai to help Lashkar-e-Taiba plan the deadly 2008 attacks in that city.⁴⁹ Najibullah Zazi used his legal American residency status to travel to Pakistan for training before his planned attack on the New York subway system.⁵⁰ Would-be Times Square bomber Faisal Shahzad is also an American citizen who traveled to Pakistan as part of his radicalization.⁵¹

The interplay of growing anti-Muslim sentiment in the United States and increasing domestic radicalization is a particularly dangerous threat, and one that existing counter-terror initiatives are poorly designed to contain.

Home Front

Although reliable information remains sporadic, there is increasing evidence to suggest that while radical Islamist groups continue to have access to significant funds, al Qaeda in particular may be undergoing a profound funding crisis.

vi. Terrorist Financing

Estimated Cost of Executing Major Terrorist Attacks

ATTACKS ON NEW YORK AND WASHINGTON

DATE: SEPTEMBER 11, 2001
 COST: \$500,000



LONDON TRAIN AND BUS BOMBINGS

DATE: JULY 7, 2005
 COST: \$1,000-\$10,000



MUMBAI ATTACKS

DATE: NOVEMBER 26-29, 2008
 COST: \$730,000

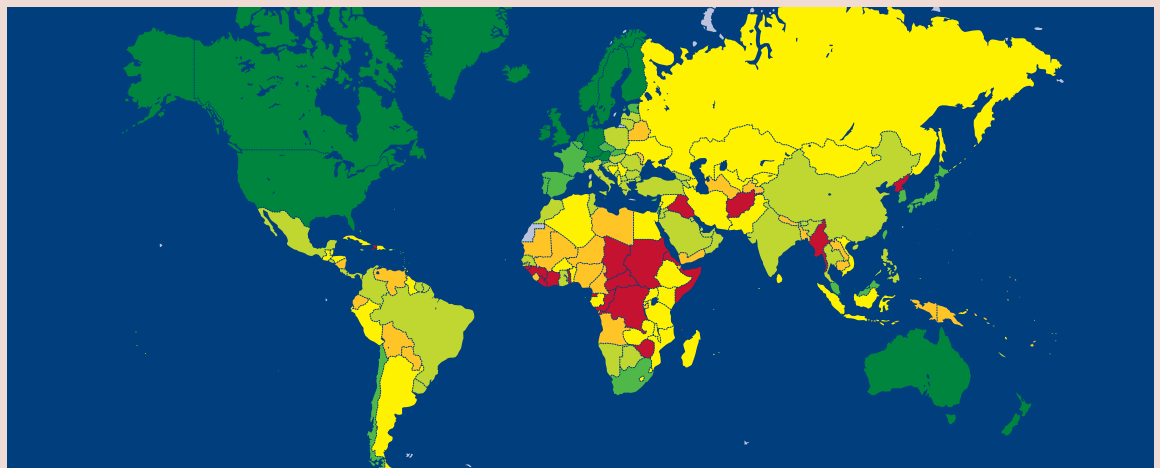


Ungoverned spaces continue to provide safe havens for terrorist groups, and weak governance remains a major factor in spawning and sustaining radical insurgent movements.

vii. Ungoverned Spaces

GOVERNMENT EFFECTIVENESS
 (PERCENTILE RANKING)

- 0-10
- >10-25
- >25-50
- >50-75
- >75-90
- >90



While many countries still need to fully implement United Nations counterterrorism measures, regional initiatives continue to build state capacity and data sharing.

VIII. International Cooperation against Terrorism

International Community

The United Nations provided a foundation for an international counterterrorism legal regime in Security Council Resolutions 1390, 1452, 1455, and 1456. Pursuant to these resolutions, nations are urged to freeze the funding and assets of terrorist organizations and individuals who participate in such activities, to prevent the travel of these individuals, and to prevent the supply of arms and related materials to such people and organizations. While all countries were called on to become parties to this and other past terrorist conventions, actual cooperation has varied.

While Resolution 1390 provided the groundwork for international counterterrorism cooperation, additional conventions are needed to resolve issues and holes in the current international framework. Specific issues to address are:

- the legal status of rendition;
- the rights and status of suspected members of terrorist organizations; and
- the obligations of states to prevent attacks emanating from their soil, and on the flip side, the rights of states to act against threats coming from non-state actors emanating from another country.

Active state sponsorship remains at historically low levels; however, the large number of states that tolerate some level of presence by known terrorist groups complicate counterterrorism efforts.

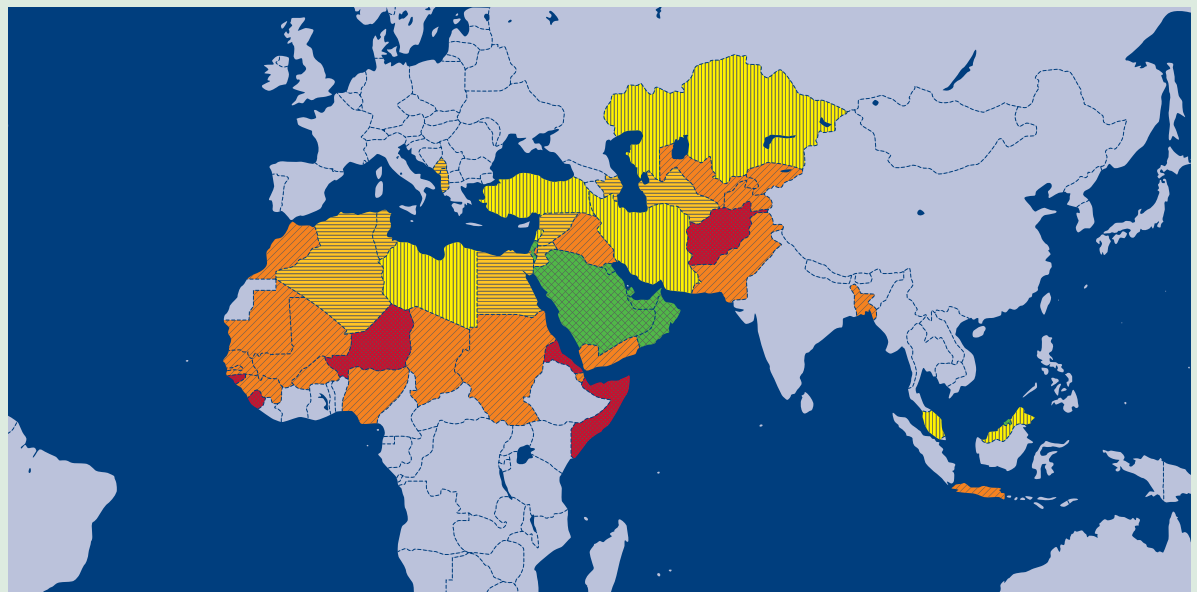
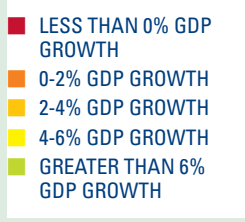
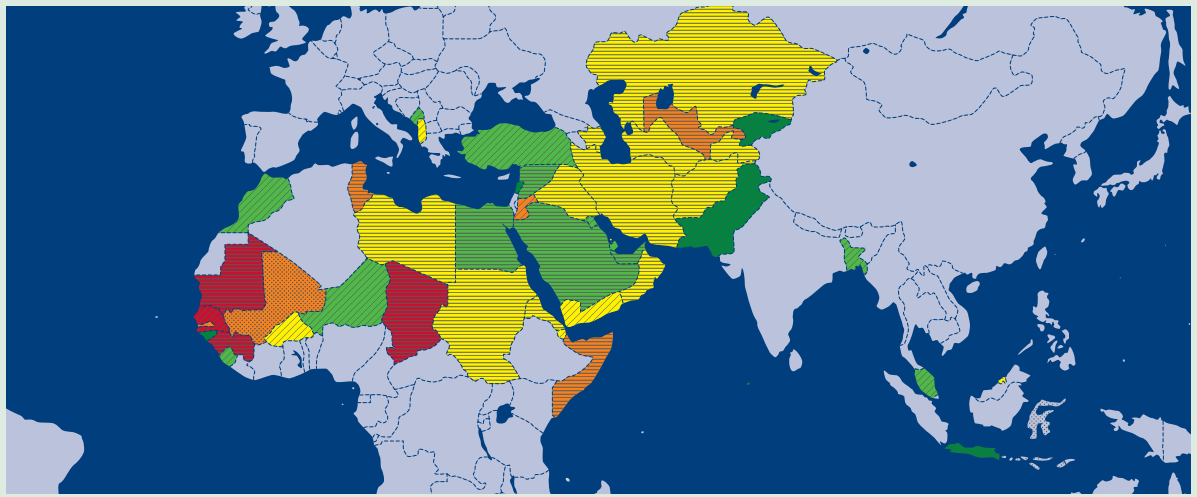
IX. State Sponsorship of Terrorism

Only a small number of countries are failing to cooperate in some manner with the U.S. government's counterterrorism efforts. The State Department specifies four countries as completely uncooperative—Iran, Syria, Cuba, and Sudan—and designates them as state sponsors of terrorism.

It does not differentiate, for example, between those countries who are genuine partners in counterterrorism and those who tolerate terrorist organizations within their borders or turn a blind eye to terrorist fundraising. Other countries have good intentions, but lack the capacity to comply.

Although poverty and political oppression persist at high levels throughout the Muslim world, trends in both sets of indicators continue to improve. The Muslim world also weathered the international financial crisis noticeably better than many.

X. Economic Prosperity & Political Freedom





Conclusions & Recommendations

The transition from the Bush to the Obama administration marked a key potential turning point in American counterterrorism policy. The continuity between the two administrations highlights that we have entered a period of strategic stasis.

American counterterrorism policy will likely continue to be defined by an “all of the above” strategy which includes a very significant and costly role for American ground forces in various existing and emerging hot spots around the world. Whether this is fiscally sustainable in the long-run remains very much an open question.

That said, American counterterrorism strategy remains vulnerable to several potential disruptions. Rising anti-Muslim sentiment in the United States—or at least a rise in the visibility and strength of a radical anti-Islamic fringe—could disrupt relations with the Muslim world sufficiently to make existing policies unsustainable. Budget pressures might also force a reassessment. And of course, it is

impossible to predict what would happen in the wake of a successful, mass-casualty attack on U.S. soil.

There are three steps, however, that the United States ought to take immediately as the “war on terror” enters its second decade:

First, American leaders need to address the numerous institutional problems that remain in governmental organizations. In particular, there needs to be a thorough review of the intelligence community, which has grown massively since 9/11, resulting in inefficiencies and duplication of effort. The government also needs to consider the logic of remaining heavily reliant on contractors if we are, indeed, now in a quasi-permanent state of war.

Second, critics of the Afghan war have long noted that even “victory” there would be unlikely to eradicate the threat of terrorism, given the possibility that al Qaeda could “relocate” elsewhere. With the rise of AQAP, this is no longer a theoretical

possibility, but a reality. As a consequence, it is imperative for the United States to rebalance its military commitments across the full range of terrorist threats. It is a profound mistake to over-invest our commitment in the place that spawned the last major attack—rather than the likely next one.

Third, there needs to be additional sustained attention on the home front. The twin threats of domestic radicalization and rising anti-Muslim sentiment risk undermining whatever risk reduction efforts Americans have accomplished abroad.

These recommendations still hold, but it is clear that with the death of Osama bin Laden we have entered a new period of uncertainty in the “war on terror.” While there was great continuity between Bush and Obama, we are now in a new era, one that would benefit from a thorough reconsideration of American assumptions and goals. ■

Conclusions & Recommendations

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Endnotes



10 REPORT

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Are We **Winning?** 2010



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