

CRS Report for Congress

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Trends in Terrorism: 2006

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Summary

On April 28, 2006, the Department of State sent to Congress its annual report on global terrorism: *Country Reports on Global Terrorism 2005*. The 262-page report provides an annual strategic assessment of trends in terrorism and the evolving nature of the terrorist threat, coupled with detailed information on anti-terror cooperation by nations worldwide. The report and underlying data portray a threat from radical Jihadists that is becoming more widespread, diffuse, and increasingly homegrown, often with a lack of formal operational connection with al Qaeda ideological leaders such as Osama Bin Laden or Ayman al Zawahiri.

Three trends in terrorism are identified in the Department of State report which are independently reflected in the work of analysts elsewhere. First is the emergence of so called “micro actors,” in part spurred by U.S. successes in isolating or killing much of al Qaeda’s leadership. The result is an al Qaeda with a more subdued, although arguably still significant, operational role, but assuming more of an ideological, motivational, and propaganda role. Second is the trend toward “sophistication”; i.e. terrorists exploiting the global flow of information, finance, and ideas to their benefit, often through the internet. Third is an increasing overlap of terrorist activity with international crime, which may expose the terrorists to a broad range of law enforcement countermeasures.

The report notes an overall increase in suicide bombings, especially in Iraq, where terror incidents accounted for almost a third of all terror incidents globally in 2005 and more than half of terror related deaths worldwide. However, some observers suggest that much of what the report characterizes as terrorist incidents in Iraq would be better categorized as insurgent activity and also to some degree as criminal activity. The report suggests that active, direct, state sponsorship of terror is declining, with the notable exceptions of Iran and perhaps to some degree Syria.

Emerging trends that may require enhanced policy focus are (1) attacks that aim to cause economic damage such as attacks on transportation infrastructure, tourism, and oil installations, (2) the growing number of unattributed terrorist attacks, and (3) the growing power and influence of radical Islamist political parties in foreign nations. Recent suggestions that al Qaeda remains operationally active are of growing concern as well.

The State Department report suggests an immediate future with a larger number of “smaller attacks, less meticulously planned, and local rather than transnational in scope.” If so, some adjustment in implementation of United States anti-terror strategy and tactics to reflect a more international law enforcement oriented approach, such as that envisioned in the February 2003 *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*, may be warranted. As the global economic, political, and technological landscapes evolve, data being collected to identify and track terrorism may need to change.

This report will not be updated.

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Trends in Terrorism: 2006

Background

Purpose and Scope of Report

This report summarizes and discusses trends in terrorism as identified in recent analyses by the State Department, the National Counter Terrorism Center (NCTC), and independent analysts. Potential issues for Congress arising out of these analyses are identified and discussed as well.

This report is one of several related CRS reports discussing issues related to trends in terrorism.¹ A selection of additional CRS reports addressing terrorism is found at the conclusion of this report

Definition of Trends

For the purposes of this report, trends in terrorism can be defined as changes in the type, number, and lethality of terrorist attacks (*modus operandi*), attitudes of terrorist groups, and other factors, over time. Changes in terrorist infrastructure such as those related to command and control, capabilities, recruiting, and financing are often considered particularly meaningful. What are the capabilities of a terrorist group to inflict serious damage? Are they increasing or decreasing? For example, a large number of terrorist groups might be seeking to acquire a nuclear, chemical, or biological explosive device but may lack the resources or capability to achieve this objective and the technical expertise to employ such technology.² In what ways are terrorist capabilities and expertise changing?

Relevant as well is whether the leadership of a particular terrorist group or network is being weakened; is its recruitment base, network, or target list growing; and is the number of defectors from its ranks increasing or decreasing? To what degree may an organization be changing its role from an operational one to an ideological/inspirational one? Have the intentions or ideology of a movement or group changed and if so are they more or less radical — more or less focused on causing widespread damage? Are they becoming increasingly involved in criminal activities or seeking to cause violence for its own sake? Also relevant are changes in levels of popular and government support for specific terrorist organizations.

¹ CRS Report RL33160, *Combating Terrorism: The Challenge of Measuring Effectiveness* and CRS Report RL32417, *The Department of State's Patterns of Global Terrorism Report: Trends, State Sponsors, and Related Issues*, both by Raphael Perl.

² For a discussion of issues involved in measuring terrorist capabilities and government countermeasures, see CRS Report RL33160.

Importance of Trends

Identifying trends as indicators of terrorist activity can assist policymakers in a number of areas including (1) prioritizing counter-terror resources; (2) targeting terrorists and terrorist activity with the intention of preventing attacks; and (3) showing anti-terror progress where it has been achieved.

In addition to trends influencing government responses, government anti-terrorism strategies and tactics may also affect terrorism trends.³ For example, hardening U.S. government physical infrastructure overseas or in the United States might cause terrorists to shift the focus of attacks to softer non-government targets, or to employ new explosion delivery methods such as improvised explosive devices (IEDs), or to deploy suicide bombers. Likewise, better systems to evaluate the authenticity and content of travel entry documents at lawful U.S. ports of entry might prompt terrorists to switch from the legal entry tactics employed by the 9/11 hijackers to crossing the U.S. border at unsecured locations.

Trends in terrorism may also be influenced by responses perceived by terrorists as directly related to advancing their cause or detracting from it — such as the number of governments that embrace appeasement policies — and the amount of media coverage the terrorists receive. A related issue is how U.S. policies and actions affect trends in terrorists' popular support and recruiting. Has the U.S. intervention in Iraq, for example, led to the demotivation, detention, or killing of more terrorists than the number of individuals it may have radicalized in areas important to U.S. interests around the world?

Some analysts question whether the diverse nature of individual terrorists and terrorist networks — which often seek to cultivate surprise — allows for meaningful trend analysis. Others point out the potential pitfall of using past trends as predictors of future activity, such as assuming that because a particular activity has not been observed for a long period of time, there is no concomitant threat. The absence of violent conflict or even decreases in terrorist activity may simply mean that terrorists are focusing attention on economic, political, or social spheres, or just that they are in a planning or “waiting period.”⁴ Another potential pitfall is to project trends in

³ Insight into this phenomenon comes from a media report of a document reportedly contained on a computer chip found June 7, 2006, on the body of Abu Musab Zarqawi, the Jordanian born al Qaeda leader in Iraq. The document is said to list a number of allied successes against terrorist activity including massive arrests, tightening financial outlets, confiscating weapons and ammunition, and a media campaign successful in portraying terrorism as harmful to the population and in magnifying the terrorist's mistakes. A need is cited for counteractions designed to improve the image of the terrorist “resistance,” increase its number of supporters, and exploit social, ethnic and class divisions within the society and between it and the allies. Building the group's own armaments industry is cited as a revised goal as well. See “Papers Reveal Weakening Terror Group,” by Rowan Scarborough, *The Washington Times*, June 16, 2006, p.1.

⁴ For example, in *The One Percent Doctrine: Deep Inside America's Pursuit of Its Enemies Since 9/11*, Ron Suskind reports that al Qaeda's leadership called off a planned gas attack (continued...)

a linear fashion. Such projections can miss qualitative changes in modus operandi, particularly those that move to new types of terror.

Trends are usually identified by the executive branch and independent analysts on the basis of empirical data collected by public and private sources. As the global economic, political, and technological landscape evolves, and as terrorists may seek to surprise and attack through more fluid organizational structures and in innovative ways, data being collected to identify and track terrorism may need to change. Hence, one challenge facing the counter-terrorism community is how to facilitate incorporation of new data indicative of new trends while maintaining the continuity of earlier data where relevant.⁵ Another challenge is how to anticipate sinister trends and prevent them before they materialize. Such anticipation, supported by accurate intelligence, is widely regarded as central to an effective policy of deterrence and preemption.

Markedly different pictures can be presented depending on what one chooses to include in data relating to terrorism. For example, some would argue that the Iraq casualties — which are largely the product of sectarian violence, rampant criminal activity, and home grown insurgency — grossly distort the global terrorism picture and perhaps should not be attributed to terrorist activity. According to NCTC data, outside of Iraq, the total number of incidents with ten or more deaths remained at approximately the 2003-2004 level — 70 per year. This suggests that, excluding Iraq, the number of higher casualty terror attacks remains relatively stable.

⁴ (...continued)

on the New York subway system in 2003, speculation being that it was not deemed spectacular enough. See “Book Argues al Qaeda Planned NYC Gas Attack,” Reuters dispatch of June 17, 2006, and book excerpt in *Time*, p. 27-35, June 26, 2006. Calling off a planned attack, if true, may suggest the presence of a trend of avoiding small-to-medium incidents in the United States — or conversely — concentrating on a mega-attack that would dwarf the incidents of 9/11 in terms of horror, casualties and economic damage. A common pitfall of those seeking to identify or enumerate trends is an overreliance on *quantitative* indicators at the expense of their *qualitative* significance. For example, a single large scale attack causing many casualties could have a major impact, far more than a dozen relatively small attacks.

Moreover, a single qualitatively creative/different incident may prove to be the beginning of a trend by triggering a wave of copycat follow-on terror incidents with a resultant change in terrorists’ strategy, weapons, tactics, and targets. See for example: “ Hamas Trying to Add Toxic Chemicals to Bombs,” by Amos Harel, [<http://www.haaretz.com>], (Israeli Daily), June 6, 2006, citing Israeli security sources.

⁵ An example of such efforts is the recent upgrading by the National Counter Terrorism Center (NCTC) of its collection methodologies to support the State Department’s annual report on terrorism and the changes in format and content of the report [currently titled: *Country Reports on Terrorism, 2005*]. See CRS Report RL32417, *The Department of State’s Patterns of Global Terrorism Report: Trends, State Sponsors, and Related Issues*, by Raphael Perl.

Reported Trends in Terrorism

2006 State Department Report

On April 28, 2006, the Department of State sent to Congress its annual report on global terrorism: *Country Reports on Global Terrorism 2005*.⁶ Statistical data on terrorist incidents, which form the basis for the report's analysis, are provided by the newly created National Counter Terrorism Center (NCTC).⁷ The 262-page report provides an annual strategic assessment of trends in terrorism and the evolving nature of the terrorist threat, coupled with detailed information on anti-terror cooperation by nations worldwide. The report focuses on trends related to: (1) state sponsors of terrorism; (2) foreign terrorist organizations; (3) the terrorist situation in individual countries (including those that provide safe haven for terrorists); (4) potential terrorist acquisition of weapons of mass destruction (WMD); and (5) U.S. anti-terrorism coalition building efforts and cooperative endeavors. Within its discussion of policies intended to shape trends in a desired direction, the report emphasizes building international will and capacity for counterterrorism, including the issue of countering terrorism on the economic front.

The report and underlying data portray a threat from radical Jihadists which is becoming more widespread, diffuse, possibly more deadly, and increasingly homegrown, often with a lack of apparent formal operational connection with al Qaeda ideological leaders although perhaps inspired by them or assisted through training. This homegrown phenomenon of looser, and more local, networks was manifest in the May 2003 restaurant, hotel, and Jewish cultural center bombings in Morocco; the 2004 attacks on Madrid's trains; the July 7 and July 21, 2005 terrorist attacks on London's transit system; and more recently — after the report's release — in the June 2, 2006, arrests of 12 men and 5 juveniles in Ontario, Canada on bombing conspiracy-related charges.⁸ This emergence of a global-homegrown terror movement has lent itself to the characterization of terrorism as a "glocal" phenomenon.

Five major trends in the evolution of terrorism are included in the State Department report:

⁶ [<http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/crt/c17689.htm>] See also: testimony of John Scott Redd, Director, National Counterterrorism Center, and testimony of Henry A. Crumpton, Coordinator for Counterterrorism before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in a hearing on "Counterterrorism: The Changing Face of Terror," June 13, 2006.

⁷ [<http://www.nctc.gov>]

⁸ Canadian officials have stated that the majority of those arrested in the June 2nd operation were native born Canadians. Note, however, that some experts, such as Peter Bergen and Alexis Debat, think there was some Ayman Al Zawahiri involvement in the London train attacks — such as training of the bomb makers and perhaps in the Madrid attacks as well. See Bergen article cited in note 27 below. See also: "Al Qaeda Video Emerges on Eve of Anniversary" by Alan Cowell, *New York Times*, July 6, 2006, suggesting al Qaeda sought to be associated with the July 2005 train and bus bombings.

More Micro-Actors. The report depicts the emergence of micro-actors as having been spurred by the widespread use of the internet, militant preachers and the impact of Arabic language television, coupled with U.S. and allied successes in capturing, isolating, and killing much of al Qaeda's leadership in Afghanistan, thereby reducing its centralized command and control capability. The result, according to the report, is an al Qaeda seen to be assuming more of an ideological, motivational, propaganda role, and a reduced operational role.⁹

The report views the operational component of the movement as increasingly being assumed by small autonomous cells and individuals — often homegrown with a resultant diversity in identity profiles, structures, motives, and tactics. Such operational cells may be new to the terrorism landscape, may be technologically savvy and small, decentralized, and without regular communication with other groups or cells.¹⁰ These characteristics make their actions extremely difficult to detect or counter. As a result, according to the report, a growing percentage of future terrorist attacks may be carried out by micro-actors using traditional bombs and bullets rather than more lethal weapons.

Increased Sophistication. Increasingly, according to the report, terrorists are seen as exploiting the global movement of information, finance, and ideas to their benefit. They are also seen as improving their technological sophistication across many areas of operational planning, communications, targeting, and propaganda.¹¹ According to some observers, terrorism has become a “web directed” phenomenon.¹²

Overlap with International Crime. The report describes a growing overlap between terrorism and international crime. Such a trend, to the extent that terrorists do indeed use the same supply, transport, and money-moving networks used by criminal groups, creates a major vulnerability that can be exploited by law enforcement authorities: the more terrorists engage in non-terror forms of criminal activity, the more likely they are to show up on the law enforcement radar screen and

⁹ See CRS Report RL32759, *Al Qaeda: Statements and Evolving Ideology* by Christopher M. Blanchard.

¹⁰ This lack of regular communication should not be construed as implying that such relationships are necessarily casual.

¹¹ Many experts are concerned about the vulnerability of global infrastructures to attacks by cyber-terrorists. See CRS Report RL32114, *Computer Attack and Cyberterrorism: Vulnerabilities and Policy Issues for Congress*, by Clay Wilson. Some speculate that al Qaeda-linked terrorists attach numerological significance to the selection of dates for terror attacks. For example, some suggest one possibility would be that a massive cyber-attack might occur on the date 4/11, the phone number commonly dialed for information. For a discussion of the overall issue of technology and terrorism, see “The Future of Terrorism” by the editors of *Discover*, v. 27, No.7, July 2006, p. 32-42,76.

¹² See for example: “Terrorists Turn to the Web as Base of Operations” by Steve Coll and Susan B. Glasser, *Washington Post*, Aug.7, 2005, p. A1 and *Terror on the Internet: The New Arena, the New Challenges* by Gabriel Weimann, United States Institute for Peace (Washington, D.C.) 2006, 309 p.

the more likely they are to be subject to arrest and prosecution under a far reaching umbrella of general criminal statutes and more specific terror related laws as well.¹³

Increase in Suicide Bombings/Links between U.S. Iraqi Operations and Global Terror. Also cited in the report are an increase in suicide bombings,¹⁴ and a strong connection between the ongoing unrest in Iraq and the broader war on terrorism. Terror incidents in Iraq, according to the report, accounted for almost a third of all terror incidents globally in 2005 and more than half of all the terror related deaths worldwide. There is concern that Iraq will become an exporter of seasoned terrorists, weapons, and shared tactics — especially the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) with “spillover” not only into the neighboring Gulf nations, but to Europe and other regions as well.¹⁵

Decline in State-Sponsored Terrorism and Increased State Antiterrorism Cooperation.¹⁶ Aside from **Iran**, and perhaps to some degree **Syria**, the report suggests that, with a few notable exceptions, active state sponsorship of terror is declining. The report continues to list **Iran** as the most active state sponsor of terrorism.¹⁷ As in previous years, **Syria** is cited for providing political and material support (presumably weapons) to both Hizballah and Palestinian terrorist groups, which also enjoy sanctuary in Syria. **Cuba** and **North Korea** are primarily cited for lack of anti-terror cooperation and past involvement in

¹³ Reportedly, criminal activity financed, in part, the 2004 Madrid bombings (drug trafficking) and the 2005 London bombings (credit card fraud).

¹⁴ Although the total number of suicide bombings increased in 2005, is not fully clear that the ratio of suicide bombings to other forms of attacks has increased concomitantly.

¹⁵ NCTC data indicate that Iraq accounted for almost 30% of worldwide terrorist attacks in 2005, and 55% of the fatalities. Moreover, attacks on non-combatants in Iraq also increased significantly last year.

¹⁶ Nations on the State Department’s legislatively mandated list of state sponsors of terrorism are Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Sudan, and Syria. Libya was certified by the Secretary of State as being eligible for removal from the list on May 12, 2006. See Presidential Determination No. 2006-14, May 12, 2006, which went into effect June 28, 2006. [<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/05/20060515-5.html>]

¹⁷ As in preceding years, the report cites Iran as the most active state supporter of terrorism and states that its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and Ministry of Intelligence and Security were directly involved in the planning and execution of terrorist acts. That included providing Lebanese Hizballah and Palestinian terrorist groups with extensive funding, training and weapons. The Revolutionary Guard, it is asserted, was increasingly involved in supplying “lethal assistance” to Iraqi militant groups with the effect of destabilizing Iraq. Also addressed was Iran’s continued development of a nuclear program and that Iran is “also capable of producing biological and chemical agents or weapons.” Iran, the report states, “could support terrorist organizations seeking to acquire WMD.” The report does not specifically address growing concerns among some experts that Iran might use surrogate organizations with broad networks, e.g. Hizballah, as delivery vehicles for dirty bombs for the enriched radioactive material generated by its “nuclear research.” The report also does not discuss Iran’s allegedly active role in training and equipping insurgents in Iraq. See June 22, 2006, Press Conference of Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld.

terrorist incidents thereby possibly suggesting a trend of less active support for terrorism than in previous decades.

The report says that the **Saudi Government** “carried out numerous operations resulting in the capture or killing of all 26 wanted terrorists publicized in a December 2003 state announcement.” The report cites close cooperation with **Pakistan’s** security services and notes that Pakistan “captured or killed hundreds of terrorists, significantly increasing the effectiveness of its counterterrorism operation,” and stresses that President Musharraf has declared a “Jihad on extremism” and promised to close down extremist institutions. Some observers might argue, however, that the report tends to mute criticism of nations of strategic importance to the United States, such as **Pakistan** and **Saudi Arabia**, that arguably could do much more to curb terror.

Echoing language of previous years’ versions of the report, the 2006 edition states that **Libya** and **Sudan** “continued to take significant steps to cooperate in the global war on terror.” Although specific examples of cooperation are cited for each of the two nations, the report — which was drafted and went to press early in 2006 — otherwise contained little to support speculation that Libya would be subsequently proposed for removal from the U.S. list of state sponsors of international terrorism.

2005 NCTC Statistical Data

Beginning with data collected in 2005, the NCTC substantially revised its methodology for reporting incidents and increased the priority and number of personnel assigned to compiling data on terrorism incidents and trends, leading to what Administration officials characterize as more accurate and comprehensive reporting. These methodological changes contributed to a significant increase in the reported number of terrorism incidents.¹⁸

Data released by the NCTC concurrently with the Department of State’s 2006 terror report indicate the following:

In 2005, the NCTC lists roughly 40,000 individuals wounded or killed in terrorist incidents as compared to 9,300 the previous year and 4,271 in 2003. Reported terror-related deaths in 2005 numbered 14,602 as compared to 1,907 deaths in 2004 and 625 in 2003. The report placed the number of total reported terrorist attacks in 2005 at 11,111 as compared to 3,168 in 2004 and 208 in 2003. Foiled attacks are not included in the data reported.

¹⁸ See for example: “Terrorists Killed More than 14,500 People in 2005, Report Says,” *Bloomberg*, April 28, 2006, citing public comments by Russell Travers, a Deputy Director at the NCTC. Note that NCTC data come from a variety of open and closed sources both U.S. and foreign, public sector and private sector/academia, including efforts at rigorous tracking of incidents by U.S. Embassy personnel stationed overseas. However, it has always been difficult to pin down details of attacks in villages in rural areas such as those of Algeria or Egypt, for example, where the press and local government reporting of incidents may be incomplete and sketchy.

Other highlights of the NCTC's data include:

- armed attacks and bombings accounted for the vast majority of fatalities in 2005.
- of the 11,111 attacks reported, 6,000 or roughly 54%, were against facilities and resulted in no casualties.
- of the approximately 40,000 persons worldwide killed or wounded — at least 10 to 15 thousand were Muslim with approximately 80 mosques being attacked, in most cases by Muslim extremists, with a high percentage of these incidents occurring in Iraq.
- approximately 6,600 police, 1000 children, 300 government officials, 170 clergy/religious figures, 140 teachers, and 100 journalists were killed or wounded by terrorists in 2005.

Trends Reported by Other Sources

Trends in terrorist activity have been the subject of analysis by many other organizations and analysts. In many instances, such independent analysis is consistent with the trends identified by the State Department in its recent report. In some instances, the emergence of additional trends is also suggested. For example, a 2006 report by the Netherlands Central Intelligence and Security Services cites trends of:

- increasing home grown terrorism;
- decentralization and implantation of international jihad;
- radicalization and emergence of local networks and;
- incitement of jihad through the internet — to include self-radicalization, possibly of lone operating terrorists.¹⁹

A multi-authored 2005 study by the RAND Corporation finds:

- increased focus on soft civilian-focused targets;
- ongoing emphasis on economic attacks;²⁰
- continued reliance on suicide attacks;
- a desire to attack with WMD but little ability to execute attacks;

¹⁹ *Violent Jihad in the Netherlands: Current Trends in the Islamist Terrorist Threat*, [http://english.nctb.nl/Images/Violent%20jihad%20in%20the%20Netherlands%202006_tcm127-112471.pdf]

²⁰ When discussing attacks aimed to cause economic damage, analysts often cite as examples attacks on oil related targets such as planned attacks on Saudi oil installations in February and March 2006, the October 2002 attack on the French supertanker, Limberg, in the Straits of Hormuz off the Yemeni coast, and a likelihood of future attacks on oil installations in the Persian Gulf and possibly in Nigeria. Also notable and well documented are attacks aimed at damaging tourism (e.g. Bali, Luxor) and those disrupting transportation infrastructure (Madrid, London, and plots foiled in July 2006 reportedly aimed at the Holland tunnel in New York).

- more homegrown attacks and;
- the possibility of future attacks from the far right, anarchists, and radical environmentalists.²¹

Trends noted by others include

- decreases in the average age of terrorist recruits;
- greater organizational/operational roles for women and non-Muslims;
- potentially more terrorist acts rooted in a “backlash” against the impact of globalization;
- more near-simultaneous coordinated attacks with follow-up attacks on first responders;
- potentially wider use by criminals of terrorist-type tactics;
- more terrorists acts that remain unclaimed by those committing them; and
- an overall rise in the number of terrorist attacks, potentially encompassing acts rooted in a variety of causes and committed by a growing diversity of groups and individuals.²²

Some of the core “terrorism-enabling” factors that these sources view as contributing to and facilitating many of the trends highlighted by the Department of State and others include:

- Weak legal and law enforcement systems in some countries that enable terrorist and criminal networks to operate with relative ease;
- Expanded, instant, and often relatively anonymous or secure communications and networking channels offered to terrorists by the Internet;²³ and
- The potential for “spillover” of battlefield skills, technology and ordnance from Iraq.

²¹ *Trends in Terrorism, Threats to the United States and the Future of the Terrorism Risk Insurance Act*, by Peter Chalk *et al*, RAND, Center for Terrorism and Risk Management Policy, 2005.

²² See the 2005 Princeton Colloquium on Public and International Affairs, “Rethinking the War on Terrorism,” June 19, 2005. [http://uc.princeton.edu/main/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=21&Itemid=11].

²³ See “Jihad 2.0” by Nadya Labi, *Atlantic Monthly*, July/Aug. 2006, v.297, No.6, p. 102-108. Note that intelligence sources suggest that at any one/given time there are some 4,500 active terrorist-affiliated websites in use. See also *Terror on the Internet: The New Arena, the New Challenges*, by Gabriel Weimann, United States Institute for Peace, (Washington, D.C.) 2006, 309 p.

Issues for Congress

Consistency/Compatibility and Significance of Data

One important issue raised by the Department of State report is whether data released by the NCTC concomitantly with the 2006 terror report can be used to support categorical assessments of trends in terrorist activity, since both the methodology for compiling such data and the resources devoted to the data have significantly changed over time.²⁴ Others might argue that in a long-term struggle against terror it may not be critical whether terrorist incidents are up or down within a particular time-frame. In the view of these observers, what might be more critical is the need to recognize that terror remains an evolving widespread, ongoing, deadly, and sustained threat that must be addressed on many fronts, and even if the data should indicate downturns in terrorist incidents, policymakers need to beware a false sense of complacency or victory.

A Weakened al Qaeda?

A controversial and politically volatile issue raised by the Department of State report is to what extent al Qaeda has been weakened operationally in the wake of capture and killing of a substantial number of its leaders and operatives.²⁵ The

²⁴ The NCTC uses a definition of terrorism for its 2005 data collection that is significantly broader and includes acts of terror which formerly might have been excluded because they were not considered truly international or that may have previously been excluded because the victims might have not have been defined as non-combatants. See NCTC: *Report on Incidents of Terrorism, 2005*, and NCTC: *Country Reports on Terrorism 2005, Statistical Annex*. The revised/broader definition of terrorism used by the NCTC is “premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets.” In past years, the report did not attempt to fully tally terrorist attacks that killed only the citizens of the country in which the attack took place. This was partly due to difficulties with the resources available to obtain accurate information on attacks that occurred in rural areas of some countries or where the United States did not see itself directly affected by the violence. However some observers argue that this resulted in not providing a sufficiently full picture of the terrorist situation, especially when a major attack might have had important political consequences, such as affecting peace talks or other developments.

In conjunction with the release of the 2006 State Department report, Rep. Henry A. Waxman, ranking minority member of the House Government Reform Committee, released a 4-page critique titled “The Bush Administration’s Data on Global Terrorism in 2005,” which expressed concerns about the meaning of the upsurge in incidents and the role of Iraq in the upswing.

²⁵ Note that in many ways this is evidence of success in implementing the priorities set by the September 2002, *National Security Strategy of the United States*, which states: “Our priority will be first to disrupt and destroy terrorist organizations of global reach and attack their leadership; command, control, and communications; material support; and finances.” [<http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss3.html>].

Contrast the new March 2006 *National Security Strategy of the United States*, which
(continued...)

common perception, correct or not, is that al Qaeda's command and control capabilities have been weakened to the point that the network is unwilling or unable to conduct operations, thereby prompting an evolution in al Qaeda's role to one of ideological inspiration and guidance. An alternate perspective is that a resilient and adaptive al Qaeda is planning the next mega-attack(s) and not wanting to get involved on the operational level in smaller scale attacks until execution of its next major operation.²⁶ Under such a mindset, involvement in operations before the next mega-attack is simply not a goal — topping the destruction and economic damage of 9/11 is. Moreover, the terrorists may calculate that operational involvement prior to the next mega-attack could compromise both the mega-attack and the organization as well, a risk they may not want to take.²⁷ An exception however, would appear to be ongoing operational engagement in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq.

²⁵ (...continued)

emphasizes that terrorism remains a global threat because of transnational inspiration, diffusion of tactics, and localized cells that require short-term and long-term responses: "Terrorist networks today are more dispersed and less centralized. They are more reliant on smaller cells inspired by a common ideology and less directed by a central command structure... From the beginning, the War on Terror has been both a battle of arms and a battle of ideas — a fight against the terrorists and against their murderous ideology. In the short run, the fight involves using military force and other instruments of national power to kill or capture the terrorists, deny them safe haven or control of any nation; prevent them from gaining access to WMD; and cut off their sources of support. In the long run, winning the war on terror means winning the battle of ideas, for it is ideas that can turn the disenchanted into murderers willing to kill innocent victims." [<http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss/2006/sectionIII.html>].

²⁶ See for example: "Al-Qaeda Still in Business" by Peter Bergen, *Washington Post*, July 2, 2006, p.B1. Historical data appear to indicate that al Qaeda has an established pattern of lying low between large-scale attacks as reflected by seemingly inactive periods between terror incidents in the 1990's. According to terrorism analyst Alexis Debat: "Al Qaeda's leadership has never made empty threats, which suggests that, while on the run, it is still connected to its "foot soldiers." From Bin Laden's call on attacking the West in 2002 to Ayman al Zawahiri's condemnation of Pervez Musharraf in 2003, which led to two unsuccessful assassination attempts on the Pakistani president, it seems that every warning formulated in these tapes was followed by action. There is also some evidence that the leaders of Al Qaeda remain in close touch with their "operational commanders." The interrogation of one of them, Abu Faraj al Libbi, shortly after his arrest in March 2005, established that he was in regular, if indirect, touch with Ayman al Zawahiri. Moreover, Pakistani intelligence sources tell ABC News that one of the suicide bombers in the July 7, 2005 terrorist attacks in London, personally spent three days with Ayman al Zawahiri in Pakistan's tribal areas in January 2005. See [ABCNews.com], January 2006 Terrorism column under the title "Al Qaeda Social Club." See also: Comments of Peter Bergen that "al Qaeda is not feeling the heat of the war on terror," CNN 360 Degree Report: "Ticking Time Bomb" by Anderson Cooper, July 6, 2006.

²⁷ For example, if one gives credence to reporting in the *One Percent Doctrine*, *op. cit* (footnote #5), the al Qaeda leadership was both quite informed about plans in 2003 to release hydrogen cyanide gas in the New York subway system and quite capable of calling it off, arguably because some future mega-attack — designed to top that of 9/11 — was in the pipeline.

The Rise in Influence of Radical Islamist Political Parties

One trend that some observers view as not sufficiently emphasized in the State Department report is the overall growth in numbers and political influence of radical Islamist fundamentalist political parties throughout the world, some of which reportedly serve — or might serve — as fronts for terrorist activity. Even if not actively serving as fronts for terrorist activity, some are concerned that the actions and agendas of such groups could facilitate creation of a political climate in their home countries which views terrorism as a politically acceptable tactic and which might make their home countries appear as an attractive location for active terrorist groups to establish a secure base. Examples of such groups cited by scholars and the media include the Justice and Prosperity Party and the Mujaheddin Council (MMI) in Indonesia, the Party Islam in Malaysia, and more recently the Islamic Courts Union which, as of the writing of this report, controlled much of southern Somalia.²⁸ Groups in Pakistan are notable as well, especially the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA or United Action Forum) and another long-standing Islamist party, the Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam faction led by Maulana Fazlur Rehman (JUI-F).²⁹

²⁸ This is not to say that the State Department report does not address such groups individually. At issue here is the collective synergy and impact generated by the activities of such groups and any trends indicative of the growth or decline of such synergy. See for example: “Radical Islamic Strain Clouds the Tolerance Displayed by Indonesia,” by Timothy Mapes and Andrew Higgins, *Asian Wall Street Journal*, Feb 25, 2005, p. A1. See also: “Indonesian Islamic Party Reaps Rewards of Goodwill” by Ellen Nakashima, *Washington Post*, Jan. 14, 2005, p. A13. See also: “Spread of Islamic Law in Indonesia Takes Toll on Women” by Jane Perlez, *New York Times*, June 27, 2006, p. A6; and “Out of the Woodwork: Islamist Militants in Aceh” by Zachary Abuza, research paper published Jan. 13, 2004. Note that the phenomenon of radical Islamist fundamentalist political parties, or like minded democratically elected representatives, is by no means limited to Indonesia and Malaysia.

For background on the Islamic Courts Union and U.S. concerns see “U.S. Puzzled by Changing Political Landscape in Somalia” by Michelle Kelemen, *National Public Radio*, Morning Edition, July 13, 2006. See also: “Q&A: Somali Islamist Advance,” *BBC News* (international version) June 28, 2006 (17:01GMT).

²⁹ See CRS Report RL33498, *Pakistan-U.S. Relations* and CRS Report RL32615, *Pakistan’s Domestic Political Developments*, both by Alan Kronstadt.

The Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA or United Action Forum) is a loose coalition of six Islamist parties formed for the 2002 elections. Its largest constituent is the Jamaat-i-Islami (JI), founded by Maulana Maududi in 1941 and considered to be Pakistan’s best-organized religious party. JI chief Qazi Hussein Ahmed serves as MMA president. Another long-standing Islamist party is the Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam faction led by Maulana Fazlur Rehman (JUI-F). The JUI is associated with religious schools that gave rise to the Afghan Taliban movement. In addition to promoting a central role for religion in Pakistani affairs, Islamists have been opposed to Westernization in both its capitalist and socialist forms. The leadership of the MMA’s two main constituents — the Jamaat-i-Islami’s (JI) Qazi Hussein Ahmed and the Jamiat-Ulema-Islami (JUI)-Fazlur’s Maulana Fazlur Rehman — are notable for their sometimes virulent anti-American rhetoric; they have at times called for “jihad” against what they view as the existential threat to Pakistani sovereignty that alliance with

(continued...)

Additional examples of the success of terror linked political groups include (1) the Hizballah political party in Lebanon with 14 elected representatives in the National Assembly as well as two ministers in the Government; and (2) the popularly elected Hamas-led legislature of the Palestinian Authority, which won by a landslide in January 2006, giving the party control of the governing Palestinian National Authority. Any rise in the power and influence of terror-linked or terror-supportive political parties — especially should their representatives be elected through democratic processes — presents major policy dilemmas for the United States, since it pits U.S. support for democracy directly against America's commitment to aggressively combat terrorism.

Adequacy of International Anti-terror Cooperation

Another potential issue related to the State Department report involves the adequacy of international anti-terrorism cooperation, an avowed core component of U.S. anti-terror strategy. Whereas the State Department's *Country Reports on Global Terrorism Report* provides substantive in-depth data and analysis on levels of anti-terrorism cooperation with individual countries on an individual basis, as well as cooperative efforts underway using international or regional organizations, some argue that it does not collectively link such levels of cooperation — or lack thereof — to any overall trend or trends. In the aggregate, are levels of foreign nation support or “buy-in” for U.S. counter-terror policy and programs increasing or decreasing? Critics suggest any effort to plot trends in international cooperation would be quite speculative and prone to stress quantitative factors, such as the number of countries meeting certain cooperative levels, rather than the relative importance of each country's cooperation to United States strategic goals and objectives.

What Are the Trends Related to Schools Teaching Radical Jihadism?

Schools for youth in countries where there is teaching of radical Jihadism and affiliated intolerance and hatred may serve as a breeding ground for terrorist ideology and pro-terrorist sentiment. Madrasas, religious schools often backed by Saudi money, are often perceived to encourage militancy and are a particular concern in

²⁹ (...continued)

Washington entails.

The May 2004 elevation of Jamiat-Ulema-Islami chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman to the position of Leader of the Opposition in Parliament spurred commentary that the “mullah-military alliance” had become a “Musharraf-Maulana alliance,” further marginalizing Pakistan's more secular opposition parties. JUI leader Maulana Fazlur Rehman reportedly said he considers Americans to be “criminals” and the Taliban “innocent” See; “MMA Opposes Pak-US Military Drive,” *News* (Karachi), June 24, 2003. See also: “Battle Ground: Despite U.S. Efforts, Pakistan Remains Key Terror Hub...” by Jay Solomon et al, *Wall Street Journal*, July 22, 2005, p.A1.

Pakistan, especially in areas along the Afghanistan border.³⁰ Therefore, it would seem important to have a better understanding of trends concerning these schools and their curricula.

Terror Groups Evolving into Criminal Groups

The overlap of terrorist activity with international crime presented by the Department of State's report suggests yet another challenge for consideration: To what degree, if at all, will terrorist organizations increasingly morph into criminal networks motivated by profit rather than ideology. It might be, at some later point in time, some terrorist groups would shy away from terrorism which is generally not considered good for criminal business activity. This is in line with thinking that engaging in criminal activity — especially the lucrative illicit drug trade — can become self-perpetuating as such criminal activity often becomes institutionalized making it difficult for groups to disengage themselves.³¹ A classic example involves the so-called Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) which initially provided hired protection to coca leaf growers and processors and subsequently moved into coca cultivation and processing. Notwithstanding, a more likely scenario appears to be that micro-terror actors will remain terror focused, but will increasingly turn to crime to finance terror.

Resource Allocation Between Larger and Smaller Attacks

Both the Department of State's trend analysis and that of non-government specialists paint a picture of Jihadist-inspired terror groups consumed by the desire to inflict major physical and economic damage with little ideological or moral constraints on mass casualty attacks. Some in these groups appear to be actively seeking the material, technology, and skills to carry out such attacks and, indeed, may already possess them. On the other hand, the number of day-to-day "low-tech" terror attacks using more traditional bombs and bullets appears to be dramatically rising in frequency and cannot be downplayed.

This situation might pose a challenge in allocating resources. Should anti-terrorism efforts and resources worldwide concentrate on preventing or mitigating the growing phenomenon of day-to-day relatively low impact and low casualty terrorist attacks, or should they concentrate on preventing or mitigating possible catastrophic damage mass-casualty attacks on a scale heretofore not experienced, but which may not be imminent? Are there measures which could negatively impact on both types of terrorist interest and activity?

³⁰ See "Pakistani Religious Schools Face Scrutiny," by Riaz Khan, AP dispatch of July 19, 2005 (07:13 GMT).

³¹ See "Narco-Terrorism: International Drug Trafficking and Terrorism — a Dangerous Mix," testimony before the Senate Committee on the Judiciary, May 20, 2003. For a legal framework for countering such terror/crime activity see "The Legal Basis for Counterterrorism Activities In the United States," by Raphael Perl, in *Hi-Impact Terrorism: Proceedings of a Russian American Workshop*, National Research Council, National Academies Press (Washington, DC 2002), p. 5-15.

Responding to Unclaimed/Anonymous Terrorism

Another potential issue is how to respond to the growing number of terrorist attacks that are unattributed, or claimed in a manner in which the true identity of their perpetrators is masked. Such a trend might suggest that increasingly the goal of terrorist attacks is to inflict as much damage on the enemy as possible without linking attacks to specific goals, such as the release of prisoners, and with little importance given to gaining publicity for the specific group inflicting the damage. Terrorists may believe that recruitment and popular support for terrorism will increase after each successful attack, and that it is relatively immaterial for the perpetrating group to publically identify itself. Moreover, not revealing — or masking — the real identity of the perpetrating group makes it more difficult for law enforcement or retaliatory operations to effectively target them.

In some instances it may not even be possible to determine if a particular event is an act of terror. For example, is a particular train wreck, an explosion at a chemical plant, a forest fire, an increase in computer viruses, or an outbreak of B.S.E. or West Nile virus, the result of negligence, an act of terror or an act of God?

Although there may not yet be sufficient data to confirm such a trend towards anonymous terror attacks, some homed in on the phenomenon of “stealth terrorism” as early as June of 1991 when it was discussed at a joint American Academy of Science/Russian Academy of Science workshop on high-impact terrorism.³² More recently, research conducted by the *National Journal*, which was largely based on State Department data, found that in 2001 about 20% of the attacks in the government’s database were not claimed by any terrorist organization; in 2002, it was 40%; in 2003, it was slightly more than half; and in 2004, more than 70% of attacks carried no claim of responsibility.³³ If validated, such a trend would have a direct impact on anti-terror policies, since current doctrines of deterrence of, and retaliation for, terrorist acts are predicated on: (1) identifying acts of terrorism and (2) identifying those who commit them.

Some Implications for U.S. Policy

Looking at NCTC data in the aggregate, one might reasonably conclude that terrorists are becoming less constrained and more indiscriminate in their targeting, thereby inflicting casualties on a broader range of potential targets and victims.

³² See “Terrorism Future: Tactics, Strategy, and Stealth,” by Peter Probst in *Hi-Impact Terrorism: Proceedings of a Russian American Workshop*, National Research Council, National Academies Press (Washington, D.C. 2002), p. 260-267.

³³ See “Foreign Policy — Terrorism Tally Not that Useless,” by Corine Hegland, *National Journal*, May 14, 2005. Note however, that in some cases there may be conflicting claims of “credit” and it is not always possible to definitively sort them out. When a group is cited by the NCTC as the culprit rather than a competing terrorist group, this does not necessarily reflect the best consensus of the intelligence community as NCTC statistical reporting is not designed to confirm the accuracy of perpetrator claims and public allegations against groups.

Moreover, the State Department's *Country Reports on Terrorism 2005* argues that the threat from small terrorist groups or lone terrorists is rising in frequency, as is the potential for these micro-actors to inflict deadly harm and costly economic damage. This finding appears consistent with other research and analyses. If the trend continues the immediate future is likely to bring "a larger number of smaller attacks, less meticulously planned, and local rather than transnational in scope." On the other hand, "an increasing number of such attacks could fail through lack of skill or equipment...."³⁴

Of growing concern is what many see as a trend by terrorists to launch near-simultaneous multiple attacks aimed at causing economic damage — such as attacks on transportation, tourism, and oil related targets and infrastructures. For example, in February 2006, Saudi security forces thwarted a suicide attack at an oil processing facility in the eastern part of that nation. An al Qaeda affiliated website subsequently claimed responsibility. A wave of arrests in the Saudi Arabia in late March 2006 reportedly thwarted a second refinery attack.³⁵

If terrorist acts are becoming more the product of localized micro-actors, it raises the question of whether United States anti-terror strategy and tactics should reflect a more international law-enforcement oriented approach. Such an approach was envisioned in the February 2003 *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*.³⁶ For example, the inclusion of the Drug Enforcement Administration's Office of National Security Intelligence as a member of the Intelligence Community will put in place new structures to share information on the ties between international terrorism and international drug trafficking. Increased sharing and cooperation between the law enforcement and the intelligence communities could well lead to disrupting some of the ties between terrorist and criminal groups, potentially "defunding" some terrorist activities.

³⁴ *Country Reports on Terrorism 2005*, p.13. Note however, that an attack(s) which is "unsuccessful" in terms of destruction and death may still have a devastating effect on the economy and emotional/social patterns of a nation, especially in terms of behavior and attitudes shaped by public perceptions of security.

³⁵ See "Saudis Thwart Oil Refinery Attack: al Qaeda claims responsibility on Web site," *CNN World*, February 24, 2006, and "Wave of Arrests in Saudi Arabia Thwarts Second Refinery Attack" by Stephen Ulph, in *Terrorism Focus*, Vol. 3 Issue 13 (April 4, 2006) published by the Jamestown Foundation.

³⁶ To the extent that terrorists interact with the criminal underworld for logistical support services — or to the extent that they bypass criminal groups and engage in other illegal activities themselves, their exposure and vulnerability to law enforcement activity increases as well. Much is being done to assist domestic law enforcement and security forces and institutions in foreign nations, especially training of investigators and prosecutors, through programs administered by the Department of Justice. In Mexico, for example, DEA has an extensive training program in place for both law enforcement personnel and prosecutorial staff. For background and analysis of the National Strategy for Combating Terrorism see CRS Report RL32522, *U.S. Anti-Terror Strategy the 9/11 Commission Report* by Raphael Perl. For the National Strategy see [<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/10/20051006-3.html>] An NCTC coordinated interagency National Implementation Plan (NIP) for the National Strategy for Combating Terrorism is reportedly in final stages of review and approval.

Overall, policymakers may consider expanding programs that support foreign law enforcement training and educational exchanges, joint/multilateral training exercises, the creation of bi-lateral or multilateral law enforcement task forces, staff exchanges of detailees among foreign and domestic law enforcement agencies, and expansion of so-called “rule of law” programs. Some observers call for more vigorous, focused, and better funded public diplomacy initiatives to counter terrorist efforts to generate popular support and gain recruits.³⁷

Collection and analysis of data which may reveal trends over time might also be strengthened. Some might argue that it could serve United States and allied interests to see more data analyzed and exchanged on terrorist motivations, tactics, and organizations by a wide range of institutions in the public and private sector. Greater participation in this process by industry, governments, and academia might prove fruitful. However, compiling and sharing the data on a timely basis may present yet another daunting challenge.³⁸

Most agree that the evidence shows that terrorists are seeking to kill as many people as possible and concentrating on hitting economic targets such as support infrastructure and tourism — rather than seeking to achieve immediate political objectives such as gaining the release of prisoners. If correct, this might argue for hardening targets, improving the technology and placement of detection equipment, and generally beefing-up the nation’s ability to respond to large scale disasters — whether caused by acts of God or acts of terror.³⁹

³⁷ Of potential importance here is the need for enhanced data to facilitate understanding of the factors terrorists exploit to generate support and gain recruits. On the issue of public diplomacy and anti-terrorism generally, see CRS Report RL32607, *U.S. Public Diplomacy: Background and 9/11 Commission Recommendations*, by Susan B. Epstein.

³⁸ International/regional organizations, such as the United Nations, NATO, and/or INTERPOL, though not without downsides, might serve as useful clearing houses for such data.

³⁹ See generally, Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff’s “Remarks to the Commonwealth Club of California,” July 28, 2005, especially those comments that discuss the importance of detection technology and the role of risk analysis.
[<http://www.dhs.gov/dhspublic/display?content=4700>]

For Additional Reading

CRS Report RS21937. *9/11 Terrorism: Global Economic Costs*, by Dick K. Nanto.

CRS Report RL32759. *Al Qaeda: Statements and Evolving Ideology*, by Christopher M. Blanchard.

CRS Report RL33038. *Al Qaeda: Profile and Threat Assessment*, by Kenneth Katzman.

CRS Report RL30252. *Intelligence and Law Enforcement: Countering Transnational Threats to the U.S.*, by Richard A. Best, Jr.

CRS Report RS22211. *Islamist Extremism in Europe*, by Kristin Archick et al.

CRS Report RL32816. *The National Counterterrorism Center: Implementation Challenges and Issues for Congress*, by Todd M. Masse.

CRS Report RS22373. *Navy Role in Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) — Background and Issues for Congress*, by Ronald O'Rourke.

CRS Report RL31672. *Terrorism in Southeast Asia*, by Bruce Vaughn et al.

CRS Report 97-960. *Terrorism, the Media, and the Government: Perspectives. Trends, and Options for Policymakers*, by Raphael Perl. (Archived: available from the author.)

CRS Report RL32758. *U.S. Military Operations in the Global War on Terrorism: Afghanistan, Africa, the Philippines, and Colombia*, by Andrew Feickert.