

Why Have We Not Been Attacked Again?

Competing and Complementary Hypotheses for
Homeland Attack Frequency

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Final Report

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Since the events of September 11, 2001, America's intelligence operatives, uniformed military personnel, homeland security analysts, law enforcement officers, diplomats, and countless other professionals have labored to prevent another large-scale terrorist attack on the U.S. homeland. As of this writing, they appear to have succeeded. Or have they?

While there have been a number of terrorist plots in the more than six years that have passed since 9/11, no significant loss of life has occurred on American soil at the hands of terrorists. Though terrorist activity is on the rise in many regions of the world and militant ideologies continue to flourish, 9/11 has yet had no sequel. The efforts of America's national security community have doubtlessly contributed to the non-occurrence of a subsequent attack on the homeland. Yet a number of less obvious explanations may also have been at work. Among them is the possibility that, in contrast to repeated warnings that the nation faces an ever-present terrorist threat, our enemies have simply not made conducting another large-scale attack on the United States their overriding priority.

The accompanying study, conceived and funded by the Defense Threat Reduction Agency's (DTRA) Advanced Systems and Concepts Office (ASCO) and conducted in collaboration with Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC), examines a number of competing hypotheses that seek to explain terrorist attack frequency against the U.S. homeland. In short, the study explores the question, Why have we not been attacked again?

While numerous analyses of this question have been performed, no comprehensive effort has been made since 9/11 to enumerate and assess the validity of the various hypotheses concerning the non-occurrence of another large-scale domestic attack. The study thus fills an important gap in the scholarship surrounding this seminal event. However, the ultimate objective of the study is not to perform the empirically dubious task of proving a negative. Indeed, as former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger has observed, "it is never possible to demonstrate why something has not occurred."¹

Nevertheless, by looking back at the last six years and exploring alternative explanations for the lack of a major domestic terrorist incident, the study may improve our grasp of the relative value of U.S. counterterrorism efforts and the terrorists' responses to the changed security milieu. Although a worthy intellectual effort for its own sake, enhancing our understanding of why we have not been attacked again could have significant implications for the way the United States fights the Global War on Terror. The analysis therefore constitutes more than an academic exercise.

Complementing the research and analysis, the project included a two-day conference that brought together some of the nation's leading thinkers on terrorism issues. Charged not only with singling out the most compelling of the hypotheses, but also with identifying logical policy implications, the participants offered invaluable insights into this critical question. The authors hope that the results of this report and the accompanying conference will contribute to the continuing effort to protect the U.S. homeland from terrorist attack.

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¹ Kissinger, Henry. *Diplomacy*. New York: Simon & Schuster. 1994. pp. 608.

This report examines a number of competing and complementary hypotheses that seek to explain the non-occurrence of a large-scale terrorist attack on the U.S. homeland since 9/11. While the study's title seems implicitly to ask why *al-Qaeda* has not succeeded in a second homeland attack, the analysis also considers groups within the broader radical Islamist movement as well as non-religious groups and lone individuals. Before examining the competing hypotheses, several terms and assumptions must be clarified, each of which is linked to the way that the report, as well as the individual theories, has posed the basic question: Why has the United States not been attacked since 9/11?

Attack versus Successful Attack. Clearly a number of terrorist plots against the U.S. homeland have been identified since 9/11, a fact that confirms that the United States *has* been attacked again. However, the hypotheses put forward in this report should be read as seeking to explain the lack of a *successful* attack on the homeland. At the same time, the existence of attempted or thwarted attacks constitutes important evidence that bears upon the credibility of many of the hypotheses.

Large-scale versus Small-scale Attacks. In seeking to explain the non-occurrence of another attack, the report focuses predominantly on “large-scale” operations rather than “small-scale” attacks, especially in the analysis of terrorist capabilities. However, no rigorous attempt is made to define these terms precisely given that any boundaries are likely to be somewhat arbitrary as well as of uncertain utility. Moreover, because the U.S. homeland has suffered neither a large-scale attack since 9/11 nor a visibly successful terrorist attack since the 2001 anthrax mailings, many of the hypotheses implicitly address both scales of operations.

Why “Homeland Attack Frequency”? The term “attack frequency” is used to underscore the notion that even if a terrorist attack on the homeland were to occur in the near term, it would nevertheless be important to explore the competing explanations for why no attack occurred between 9/11 and that next attack. Correctly ascertaining the reasons for this lull might help policymakers and the general public respond in the aftermath of any subsequent event.

9/11: Anomaly or Sea Change? This report proceeds from the premise that 9/11 should not be viewed as anomalous. That is, the attacks were conducted by a terrorist network that had struck American interests repeatedly in the past, whose leaders have vowed to attack the U.S. homeland again, and whose operatives by all accounts have plotted to do so on several occasions since 9/11. Together with radical Islamists' enduring grievances over U.S. Middle East policies, their commissioning of religious edicts that sanction attacks against American civilians, and an assortment of other evidence, the authors consider the default assumption of a continued terrorist threat to the homeland to be well-grounded. This judgment also comports with one of the key conclusions of the July 2007 National Intelligence Estimate (NIE), which states that the U.S. homeland faces “a persistent and evolving terrorist threat” from a host of violent entities and that al-Qaeda in particular maintains an “undiminished intent to attack the Homeland.”²

Hypotheses

In preparing this analysis, the study team – consisting of SAIC national security analysts and professional staff from DTRA's Advanced Systems and Concepts Office – conducted an extensive open-source literature review to identify the various hypotheses that attempt to explain why the United States has not been attacked again. The final list of hypotheses, as well as the categories into which they are divided in the report, evolved through a qualitative process that combined the study team's prior terrorism-related knowledge with the evidence revealed through the literature survey.

² National Intelligence Estimate. “The Terrorist Threat to the U.S. Homeland.” July 17, 2007.

The hypotheses analyzed in this report can be divided roughly into two broad categories. The first category – Capabilities – suggests that terrorists have been unable to succeed in conducting another large-scale attack on the homeland due to the effectiveness of U.S. defenses or because of the terrorists’ limited capabilities. The second category – Motivations – assumes that a number of terrorist groups possess the ability to attack the United States but have chosen not to do so for a variety of reasons. These categories are further subdivided into the following four baskets:

Capabilities

Basket I – U.S. and Allied Counterterrorism Efforts: The hypotheses in the first basket posit that U.S. and allied initiatives have decisively limited terrorists’ capabilities to conduct attacks on the homeland. Major successes overseas include driving al-Qaeda’s leaders from their Afghanistan sanctuary, disrupting several terrorist plots, and forcing operatives to focus on preserving their own security rather than training for and carrying out new attacks. At home, potential targets have been hardened, coordination between government agencies has improved, and public awareness has increased scrutiny of suspicious behavior.

Basket II – Terrorist Attack Capabilities: The hypotheses in the second basket emphasize limitations on terrorist capabilities that are less dependent on U.S. and allied counterterrorism activities. This basket accounts for the necessity of time to repair the damage done to al-Qaeda and mobilize terrorist veterans of the Iraq war. Another theory focuses on al-Qaeda’s presumed efforts to acquire a chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear (CBRN) capability. Yet another hypothesis examines the capabilities of various non-Salafist groups. Finally, the basket addresses how the broad assimilation of U.S. Muslims has limited the pool of potential “homegrown” jihadists.

Motivations

Basket III – Another Attack Ill-Advised: The hypotheses in the third basket focus on the notion that terrorists have concluded that another strike on the United States is ill-advised, at least for the time being. This category includes speculation that al-Qaeda’s leaders have refrained from attacking the homeland again until they can surpass the devastation of 9/11. Other theories suggest that terrorists are concerned that another attack on the homeland would be counterproductive in achieving their objectives. Additional hypotheses focus on the limited motivations of non-Salafist networks, domestic extremist groups, and “lone wolf” terrorists.

Basket IV– Other Attack Priorities: The hypotheses in the fourth basket concern speculated shifts in the targeting preferences of al-Qaeda and other networks. Hypotheses in this category assume a robust attack capability among various groups but suggest that other targets – including in Europe and the Middle East – are more attractive than the U.S. homeland. This basket also includes the hypothesis that al-Qaeda’s largely autonomous affiliates and inspired cells have lacked the motivation to attack the United States and instead have chosen to focus on their particular regional aspirations.

In performing this analysis, it was necessary to limit the number of hypotheses to a manageable list that was nonetheless broad enough to encompass multiple similar theories. Identifying the endless permutations that would result from combining two or more hypotheses or subdividing the hypotheses into ever narrower definitions would have produced an unworkable list.

Analytic Issues: A number of important analytic issues emerged in the course of identifying and categorizing these hypotheses that should be reflected upon before turning to the results of the “Homeland Attack Frequency” conference:

- **Al-Qaeda’s 9/11 Objectives:** A surprising lack of consensus exists concerning al-Qaeda’s objectives in striking the United States in the first place. Explanations include Osama bin Laden’s desire to rally the Muslim ummah around the banner of jihad, possibly by provoking a rash U.S. response. Other theories suggest that the attacks were meant to so terrorize the American public that U.S. leaders would capitulate to al-Qaeda’s political demands. If the former is correct, the momentum of the radical Islamist movement may obviate another attack. If the latter is more accurate, al-Qaeda’s leaders may conclude that another attack is necessary to convince the American people that U.S. Middle East policies come at too high a cost. Uncertainty also abounds concerning al-Qaeda’s assessment of 9/11 and whether its leaders perceive that another homeland attack would contribute to or detract from the objectives of the radical Salafist movement.
- **Synergy of Hypotheses:** In all likelihood, no single hypothesis explains the non-occurrence of a successful attack on the homeland subsequent to 9/11. Instead, a number of factors have combined to make attacks on U.S. targets more difficult to conduct, to make overseas targets more attractive, and/or to persuade terrorists that attacking the United States is ill-advised, at least temporarily.
- **Accounting for Time:** Time is a critical factor in assessing the validity of many hypotheses. A particular theory might be persuasive in explaining the non-occurrence of an attack during a limited time frame while a hypothesis that was not persuasive for a prolonged period may become more compelling as time elapses.
- **Chain of Command:** It is important to recognize the distinction between the “al-Qaeda core” and al-Qaeda’s affiliate organizations and imitators, which range from relatively structured networks to small, self-formed cells. A hypothesis may be persuasive in explaining the operations of al-Qaeda’s leaders while holding comparatively less value in explaining those of “foot soldiers.”
- **Degree of Central Control:** One dimension of the al-Qaeda taxonomy question concerns whether the group’s leaders are capable of imparting orders to subordinates regarding target selection. Communications have become more difficult between terrorist commanders and operatives, with myriad implications to the hypotheses.
- **More Evidence Needed:** Lack of specific corroborating evidence makes the evaluation of some hypotheses especially difficult. One example concerns speculation that al-Qaeda does not wish to resuscitate international sympathy for the United States by conducting another attack. This hypothesis appears plausible, but supporting evidence is vague.

Having identified and analyzed more than two dozen working hypotheses, the study team convened a conference on September 25-26, 2007, that brought together 35 national security professionals to debate the question of homeland attack frequency. Participants included employees of the U.S. Departments of State and Homeland Security, Central Intelligence Agency, Defense Intelligence Agency, and the Sandia and Los Alamos National Laboratories. Academics from several universities as well as analysts from national security think tanks, terrorism research centers, and private analysis firms also took part in the discussion.

Most Compelling Hypotheses: Consistent with the judgment that multiple variables have factored in the non-occurrence of another major attack since 9/11, a handful of hypotheses were singled out as being especially significant in explaining this phenomenon. This list represents a blending of the points of agreement from the conference discussion and the more formal evaluation process that took place during the Working Group sessions. Neither the plenary discussion nor the individual hypotheses assessments involved scientifically rigorous evaluations of the evidence associated with each theory. Rather, the participants’ insights constituted largely qualitative judgments reflecting their general impressions of the hypotheses.

- **Hypotheses A and B: U.S. homeland security initiatives and overseas counterterrorism operations have combined to prevent another large-scale attack.** While acknowledging America's continued vulnerability to attack, participants assigned considerable credit for the non-occurrence of another homeland attack to the combined effects of U.S. intelligence, military, law enforcement, and homeland security actions taken since 9/11.
- **Hypothesis I: The assimilation of U.S. Muslims into mainstream American society has limited the pool of homegrown radicals who might conduct domestic attacks.** Though some mutual suspicion has been observed between the Muslim American community and many non-Muslims since 9/11, the cultural divide resembles nothing like the gulf separating religious communities in many European nations. Thanks to assiduous trust-building efforts by many law enforcement personnel and the patriotism of many Muslim Americans, warnings of homegrown jihadist activity in the United States have often come from within the Muslim community itself. Whether this phenomenon is relevant to large-scale homeland attack frequency was seen as more questionable. Neither the 1993 World Trade Center bombers nor the 9/11 hijackers received significant support from U.S. Muslims. The presence of a domestic support base may thus be inconsequential to terrorists' ability to conduct large-scale attacks.
- **Hypothesis L: Al-Qaeda's next attack on the U.S. homeland must surpass 9/11.** This hypothesis suggests that al-Qaeda's leaders believe that preserving the network's mystique demands that the next attack on the U.S. homeland must surpass the devastation of 9/11. By setting the bar so high on 9/11, any attack deemed worthy of the group will likely require considerable time, planning, and resources to execute.
- **Hypothesis S: 9/11 gave terrorism a bad name – domestic right-wing and left-wing extremist organizations have lacked the motivation to conduct a large-scale attack.** Prior to 9/11, domestic terrorist attacks periodically captivated the nation's attention, but the overwhelming public outrage that was necessary to make sympathy for political violence almost totally unacceptable in the United States had not yet reached critical mass. The attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon arguably changed that. The popular backlash against violent extremism dramatically reduced these groups' motivation to commit civilian-oriented violence.
- **Hypothesis V: Opportunities to attack Americans in Iraq have diverted jihadist resources that otherwise might be used to attack the U.S. homeland.** Many participants considered the ongoing occupation of Iraq to be a significant factor in shifting the terrorist threat away from the U.S. homeland. However, several participants questioned whether al-Qaeda's operations in Iraq have resulted from a recasting of the network's strategic objectives or have simply been the effect of positioning U.S. forces where they can be attacked more easily. That is, al-Qaeda's long-term designs may simply have been temporarily subordinated to the immediate priority of conducting operations in Iraq.
- **Hypothesis W: Al-Qaeda has shifted its focus from the U.S. homeland to attacking U.S. allies, especially in Europe.** Various explanations for this shift have been posited, ranging from decisions by al-Qaeda's leaders to the effects of U.S. security policies to the demographic makeup of European countries vis-à-vis the United States.
- **Hypothesis Y: Self-activated terrorist cells and regional Salafist groups are exercising their own prerogative in target selection and are not motivated to attack the U.S. homeland.** A number of participants noted that few of the attacks since 9/11 that are commonly ascribed to al-Qaeda have been the work of the core network. Rather, most have been carried out by groups and individuals who have nominally grafted themselves to the al-Qaeda movement.
- **Hypothesis CC: Non-Salafist terrorist groups have lacked the motivation to attack the U.S. homeland.** There was a general consensus among participants that the anti-Americanism of groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas has not translated into a motivation to conduct attacks on the U.S. homeland.

Unpersuasive Hypotheses: Several hypotheses were rejected outright during the conference discussion and Working Group sessions. These included Hypothesis F, which suggests that the terrorist threat has in fact been massively exaggerated, and Hypothesis P, which suggests that al-Qaeda has become sensitive to a possible Muslim backlash over the killing of American civilians.

Additional Hypotheses: Overall, the broad set of hypotheses presented at the conference remained intact following the discussion and is the subject of the more detailed exploration in Section III: Analysis of the Individual Hypotheses. Nonetheless, during the conference a number of additional hypotheses were identified to explain homeland attack frequency. These theories are described briefly in the section devoted to the conference.

Overarching Implications for U.S. Counterterrorism Efforts

Perhaps the most obvious conclusion of this study is that we simply do not know why the United States has not been successfully attacked again since 9/11. While it might appear that this conclusion could have been reached without conducting the study, in fact many analysts have concluded the opposite: that we do indeed know why. Unfortunately, there are more than two dozen competing explanations. In contrast, this study suggests that identifying a complete and consistent explanation for the non-occurrence of a subsequent attack on the U.S. homeland may not be possible. No matter how thorough the analysis, uncertainty about the competence, motivations, and priorities of our adversaries, as well as the efficacy of our own countermeasures, will persist.

While some of these uncertainties are amenable to reduction, others for the most part are not. Understanding the limitations of our knowledge crystallizes the need to embrace counterterrorism strategies that are independent of the answer to the question that this study poses. Failure to appreciate these uncertainties might invite national security personnel to conclude, in light of the non-occurrence of a subsequent homeland attack, that the equation for preventing terrorism on American soil has largely been solved.

The blind spots in our understanding of the terrorist threat that this analysis has illustrated point us in two principal directions. These implications are not tethered to any single hypothesis or group of explanations, but rather were formed during the broad course of the research and the accompanying conference. As such, their value lies in their insensitivity to the correct answer or answers to why the U.S. homeland has not been attacked again.

First, having identified areas in which uncertainty about our adversaries exists, America's security professionals should endeavor to reduce these ambiguities to the greatest degree possible. Consider our uncertainty about al-Qaeda's priorities in attacking the U.S. homeland versus striking targets in Europe. If evidence were to reveal a strong preference for attacking certain geographic targets outside the United States over a sustained period of time, our energy and resources might be more precisely focused to counter the threat. Likewise, if we determine that other terrorist groups are sufficiently motivated to attack the homeland but lack some final catalyst, such as approval from a state sponsor or the sanction of a religious authority, this discovery might compel us to concentrate on impeding that final activating mechanism.

Second, recognizing the areas in which uncertainty exists may help policymakers identify counterterrorism strategies that should be pursued independently of our understanding of the peculiar objectives and tactics of our adversaries. Many security measures are discretionary and may be modified or even eliminated depending on the exigencies of the moment. However, other strategic measures should be pursued precisely because they remain relevant despite the ever-changing nature of the terrorist threat.

Reducing Uncertainty: The following recommendations concern efforts that should be made to reduce areas of uncertainty surrounding the terrorist threat that were identified in the course of the study.

- **Improve Understanding of al-Qaeda's Strategic Logic:** The United States should redouble its efforts to understand al-Qaeda's chief motivations and how its leaders perceive tactical operations as contributing to the achievement of long-term strategic objectives.
- **Identify Potential Leverage Points:** Reducing uncertainty surrounding al-Qaeda's motivations and objectives could assist in identifying potential leverage points that could be exploited to shape decisions by core al-Qaeda leaders, inspired jihadists, and others about whether to invest their energies in attacking the United States.
- **Focus Beyond Core al-Qaeda:** The United States should not concentrate entirely on the al-Qaeda network to the exclusion of less established terrorist entities, inspired individuals, and non-Salafist networks such as Hezbollah and Hamas. Uncertainty about these groups' attitudes and intentions vis-à-vis the United States could increase our vulnerability to attack.

Pursuing Independent Counterterrorism Strategies: In contrast to the strategies outlined above, which are tailored to respond to a more identifiable set of terrorist threats, the following efforts should be pursued regardless of the shifting motivations, tactics, and objectives of America's terrorist adversaries.

- **Recognize the Potential for Unintended Consequences:** U.S. strategic planners must be mindful of the potential unintended consequences stemming from the nation's responses to terrorism. One example concerns the effect of U.S. counterterrorism policies on Muslim Americans. A number of conference participants expressed concern that heightened law enforcement and intelligence scrutiny of U.S. Muslims, premised on the perception of their increased likelihood of being associated with terrorist activities, could be counterproductive. Recognizing the danger of unintended consequences may help policymakers avoid precipitous responses in the aftermath of another attack.
- **Foster a National Psychology of Resiliency:** An effort should be made to cultivate a national culture of resilience to terrorism among the American people. Among the potential payoffs of such an effort could be to influence terrorists' attack calculus by convincing them that incidents within the U.S. homeland will be unlikely to produce the desired effects. Increasing the public's understanding of terrorist motivations and objectives may also help citizens avoid reactions to attacks that conform to the terrorists' wishes. Relevant initiatives could range from the concrete, such as increasing government consequence management capabilities, to the more abstract, such as avoiding the inadvertent overstatement of the terrorist threat.
- **Sustain Long-Term Support for Counterterrorism:** During the conference several participants wondered whether the intensity of the national counterterrorism effort can be sustained over the long-term. Many government statements have quietly acknowledged the concern that public complacency may grow with each year that passes since 9/11. Perhaps even more alarming is the potential that outright hostility toward counterterrorism policies will develop, signs of which have arguably begun to emerge already. In short, maintaining support for the Global War on Terror and guarding against adverse consequences stemming from its prosecution will likely remain challenges for America's public leaders in the next decade.

In the six years that have passed since 9/11, the non-occurrence of another large-scale terrorist attack on the U.S. homeland has been both a relief and a puzzle. Indeed, scarcely had the attacks concluded before the American people and their leaders began bracing themselves for a subsequent blow. As U.S. military, intelligence, and law enforcement personnel set in motion the nation's response to the attacks, they also scrambled to erect homeland defenses against the next strike that most Americans thought was inevitable.

Since then a number of terrorist plots potentially rivaling 9/11 have been thwarted while others have failed to materialize for unknown reasons. Yet these reprieves do not suffice to explain why another major attack has not occurred on American soil. While U.S. and allied counterterrorism efforts have disrupted several sophisticated attacks – most notably the 2006 al-Qaeda plot to bring down U.S.-bound aircraft over the Atlantic using liquid explosives – these operations speak only to the relatively small cohort of terrorists who have attempted to attack American targets. What of the remaining pool of al-Qaeda operatives who have been responsible for the steady rise in terrorist violence from Europe to Southeast Asia since 2001? Or the foot-soldiers who have flocked to the battlefields of Iraq? What motivations, objectives, apprehensions, or directives have informed their decision to conduct attacks outside the U.S. homeland versus within it? Or simply to refrain from conducting attacks altogether?

At first glance, the subtitle of this study – Why have we not been attacked again? – implicitly asks why *al-Qaeda* has not succeeded in a second large-scale domestic strike. But the question is intended to cast a much broader net, including the dozens of groups – religious, secular, and nationalist – that are unaffiliated with the radical Salafist movement but are nonetheless overtly anti-American.³ For various reasons these groups have not seized the opportunity after 9/11 to land their own blow against the United States. Why not? Attempting to answer these questions entails sifting through a vast admixture of variables that has resulted in the failure of our adversaries to achieve what many Americans have assumed – perhaps mistakenly – to be the ultimate terrorist prize: pulling off the next 9/11.

Initial Premises

Before examining the competing hypotheses, several initial assumptions must be clarified, each of which is linked to the way that the report, as well as the individual theories, has posed the basic question: Why has the United States not been attacked since 9/11?

Attack versus Successful Attack

First, the authors are well aware that several attempted attacks on the United States have occurred. Thus, according to one perspective, the United States has been and continues to be attacked on a somewhat regular basis. That these plots have been thwarted or have failed for other reasons simply means that no *successful* attack has occurred, an interpretation that hinges on the stage at which a terrorist “plot” is considered to evolve into an “attack.” A number of would-be terrorists have been arrested allegedly planning attacks in the United States, yet several of these plots have been notably amateurish and may never have actually been attempted. In contrast, a suicide bomber intercepted en route to target would be

³ Salafism refers to the radical Sunni movement, of which al-Qaeda is one part, that advocates returning to the form of Islam practiced by the Prophet Muhammad's companions and the two generations of believers that followed them.

considered an “attack” by most definitions.⁴ In this regard, the hypotheses discussed below should be read as seeking to explain the lack of a successful attack on the homeland. At the same time, the existence of attempted or failed attacks is also an important data point that bears upon the credibility of some of the hypotheses put forward.

Large-scale versus Small-scale Attacks

In seeking to explain the non-occurrence of another terrorist attack, the report focuses predominantly on “large-scale” operations rather than “small-scale” ones, especially in the analysis of terrorist capabilities.⁵ However, no rigorous attempt is made to define these terms precisely given that any boundaries based on number of casualties are likely to be arbitrary as well as of uncertain utility. Moreover, numerous small attacks conducted simultaneously may become qualitatively more significant simply by virtue of the symbolism of the targets or the ingenuity of the attack.⁶ Because the U.S. homeland has suffered neither a large-scale attack since 9/11 nor a visibly successful terrorist attack since the 2001 anthrax mailings, many of the hypotheses implicitly address both scales of attack. Additionally, the absence of even small-scale attacks in the United States, such as the seriatim suicide bombings that have plagued Israel and more recently America’s allies in Europe, is an important data point that is taken into account in assessing some of the theories discussed below.

Why “Attack Frequency”?

Third, the term “homeland attack frequency” is used to underscore the possibility that the next successful terrorist attack on the United States could occur at any time. If such an incident were to occur in the future, it would nevertheless be important to identify and assess the various theories that seek to explain the lack of an attack during the considerable period of time that passed after 9/11. For example, correctly ascertaining the explanations for the absence of attacks might help policymakers, as well as the general public, respond in the aftermath of the event. Rather than assuming, as many did in the weeks following 9/11, that a follow-on attack was imminent, a greater understanding of the variables that affect homeland attack frequency may encourage more circumspect responses to the terrorist threat.⁷

9/11: Anomaly or Sea Change?

Finally, the report proceeds from the premise that the events of 9/11 should not be viewed as anomalous. That is, the attacks were conducted by a terrorist network that had struck American interests repeatedly in the past, whose leaders have vowed to attack the U.S. homeland again, and whose operatives by all accounts have plotted to do so on several occasions since 9/11. These unsuccessful operations in turn recall al-Qaeda’s established

⁴ For further discussion of this subject, see “Underlying Reasons for Success and Failure of Terrorist Attacks: Selected Case Studies.” Homeland Security Institute final report, June 4, 2007.

⁵ Some analysis has been performed that attempts to demonstrate the interaction between government counterterrorism activity following a high level of terrorism and the size of subsequent terrorist attack plots. See for example, Jensen, Thomas. “Terrorism, Anti-Terrorism, and the Copycat Effect.” Department of Economics, University of Copenhagen, July 15, 2007.

⁶ The 2004 Madrid train bombings, which killed 191 civilians, arguably qualify as a large-scale attack given the coordination of the explosions and the profound effect on the subsequent Spanish election.

⁷ Some statistical analysis has been performed that attempts to relate the severity and frequency of terrorist attacks using historical data. See for example Clauset, et. al. “On the Frequency of Severe Terrorist Events.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 2007.

modus operandi of refining plots over many years until an attack is successful.⁸ Together with radical Islamists' enduring grievances over U.S. Middle East policies, the steady issuance of religious edicts that sanction attacks against American civilians, and an assortment of other evidence, the authors consider the assumption of a continued terrorist threat to the homeland to be well-grounded. This judgment also comports with one of the key conclusions of the July 2007 National Intelligence Estimate (NIE), which states that the U.S. homeland faces "a persistent and evolving terrorist threat" from a host of violent entities and that al-Qaeda in particular maintains an "undiminished intent to attack the Homeland."⁹

Several hypotheses suggest, either implicitly or explicitly, that there may be reason to view 9/11 as an outlier in a limited sense. For example, one hypothesis speculates that the terrorist threat has been greatly exaggerated, a perspective that suggests a low probability of another large-scale attack occurring. Another considers the notion that 9/11 was meant to be a one-time attack that would serve its purpose without requiring subsequent strikes on the homeland. Nonetheless, in its totality the report assumes a continued terrorist threat to the United States and analyzes the non-occurrence of another successful attack through this lens.

Report Roadmap

The material presented in the sections below sets out the results of the study team's analysis of the competing hypotheses and the proceedings of the accompanying conference.

- **Section I: Overview of the Approach to Competing Hypotheses** provides a brief overview of the approach taken in the study, including the principal categorical divisions between the hypotheses that were identified.
- **Section II: Conference Highlights** summarizes the main themes that emerged from the "Homeland Attack Frequency" conference, including the participants' evaluation of many of the hypotheses and the discussion of possible implications for U.S. counterterrorism activities.
- **Section III: Analysis of the Individual Hypotheses** comprises the more detailed description, analysis, and evaluation of the full set of competing hypotheses that the study team considered. The section begins with a discussion of the analytical methodology used as well as the approach to the literature survey that served as the starting point of the analysis.

⁸ Lipton, Eric and Benjamin Weiser. "Threats and Responses: The Plots; Qaeda Strategy Is Called Cause For New Alarm." *The New York Times*, August 5, 2004.

⁹ National Intelligence Estimate, "The Terrorist Threat to the U.S. Homeland." July 17, 2007.

Section I: Overview of the Approach to Competing Hypotheses

Since the Global War on Terror began, there has been considerable speculation about the date, place, and manner of the next attack on the U.S. homeland. Government studies, congressional hearings, and media reports have reiterated, with varying degrees of alarm, the persistence of the terrorist threat. In May 2002, then Director of Homeland Security Tom Ridge said of the next terrorist strike, “I don’t think it’s a question of if, it’s a question of when.”¹⁰ In February 2003, former senior Intelligence Community official Michael Swetnam bluntly predicted that “it’s a virtual certainty that the United States will be attacked with weapons of mass destruction sometime in the next three to five years.”¹¹ Two years later in February 2005, Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security James Loy told the Senate Intelligence Committee that “any attack of any kind could occur at any time.”¹² Reflecting these warnings, an April 2007 Zogby survey found that 79 percent of Americans considered a terrorist attack on U.S. soil likely within the next five years.¹³

While the nature and timing of the next attack has been the subject of much conjecture, its presumed agents for the most part are not. As the October 2007 *National Strategy for Homeland Security* notes, the terrorist threat to the U.S. homeland stems “primarily from violent Islamic terrorist groups and cells.”¹⁴ The expected perpetrator of the next assault on the homeland is thus naturally the organization that most experts judge to be the greatest non-state threat to the United States: the al-Qaeda jihadist network headed by Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri. Given the group’s capabilities, its leaders’ past declarations of war against the United States, and its history of successful attacks against American targets, al-Qaeda rightly remains the chief focus of U.S. counterterrorism efforts. For this reason, al-Qaeda also figures prominently in the hypotheses that follow.

Yet terrorism is not synonymous with al-Qaeda. Within the broader radical Islamist movement are a number of networks that may possess either an established infrastructure or at least the latent capability to conduct attacks against the homeland. These include regionally-focused terrorist networks, such as the Southeast Asian group Jemaah Islamiyah and the Pakistani network Jaish-e-Mohammed, as well as principally nationalist organizations, such as Lebanese Hezbollah and the Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement, or Hamas, whose principal preoccupation is their conflict with Israel. Nor is the terrorist threat confined to radical Islamists or even highly organized networks. The modern American landscape has been dotted with indigenous terrorist groups, from the left-wing Weather Underground of the 1960s and 1970s to the right-wing militia movement of the 1990s. Violent religious cults such as the Rajhneeshees and the Branch Davidians have also arisen on U.S. soil. In 1995 the United States witnessed its first case of large-scale “lone wolf” terrorism when Timothy McVeigh destroyed the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. In the 2000s the Animal and Earth Liberation Fronts waged sporadic arson campaigns in

Why No Attack? – Two Views

“...the terrorists have not succeeded in launching another attack on our soil. This is not for the lack of desire or determination on the part of the enemy.” – President George W. Bush, 2006.

“As for the delay in carrying out similar operations in America, this was not due to failure to breach your security measures. Operations are under preparation, and you will see them on your own ground once they are finished, God willing.” – Osama bin Laden, 2006.

¹⁰ O’Toole, James. “‘Not if, but when:’ Ridge warns that another terror attack is inevitable.” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, May 20, 2002.

¹¹ Kitfield, James. “Wounded, Not Crippled.” *The National Journal*, February 22, 2003.

¹² Priest, Dana and Josh White. “War Helps Recruit Terrorists, Hill Told.” *The Washington Post*, February 17, 2005.

¹³ “Majority Give Bush Negative Ratings on Keeping U.S. Safe from Terrorism.” UPI/Zogby poll, 2007.

¹⁴ *National Strategy for Homeland Security*. Homeland Security Council, October 2007.

protest of various environmental and economic practices. The analysis below thus includes hypotheses that address a number of disparate religious and political groups, as well as individual actors who are unaffiliated with organized extremist networks.

The hypotheses addressed in the report were identified on a rolling basis as the study team canvassed the open-source literature base concerning 9/11 and the question of homeland attack frequency.¹⁵ While some hypotheses require no extensive knowledge of terrorism to formulate – for example, the notion that terrorists have simply been unable to penetrate America’s post-9/11 defenses – several more detailed explanations were identified only after surveying a broad cross-section of the relevant literature. An effort was made to identify the full spectrum of theories offered by terrorism experts, scholars, government officials, and other credible sources to explain terrorist attack frequency in general and the absence of another large-scale attack on the U.S. homeland in particular.¹⁶ Hypotheses were occasionally discarded following a judgment that a minimum threshold of evidence could not be identified to support their inclusion. The final list of hypotheses, as well as the categories into which they are divided in the report, evolved through a qualitative process combining the study team’s prior terrorism-related knowledge with the evidence revealed through the literature survey.

The resulting hypotheses can be separated into two broad categories. The first category – Capabilities – suggests that terrorists have been unable to achieve another large-scale attack on the homeland due to the effectiveness of U.S. defenses or because of the terrorists’ limited capabilities. The second category – Motivations – assumes that a number of terrorist groups possess the ability to attack the United States but have chosen not to do so for a variety of reasons. The following tables further divide the hypotheses into four “baskets” with greater specificity. While some theories are applicable to more than one basket, the categorization below represents the most logical structure for analyzing the selected hypotheses.

Consider these four sets of explanations for homeland attack frequency:

Capabilities: Basket D) Limited terrorist capabilities to attack the homeland due to U.S. and allied counterterrorism efforts:

Hypothesis A	U.S. homeland security efforts and general public vigilance have made large-scale domestic attacks more difficult to conduct.
Hypothesis B	U.S. and allied counterterrorism operations have prevented al-Qaeda from training recruits and forced its leaders to focus more on survival than planning attacks.
Hypothesis C	The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have succeeded in drawing jihadists away from the U.S. homeland.
Hypothesis D	Reduced state support for terrorism since 9/11 has constrained terrorists’ ability to conduct large-scale attacks on the U.S. homeland.
Hypothesis E	Crackdowns on private financing of terrorism since 9/11 have constrained terrorists’ ability to conduct large-scale attacks on the U.S. homeland.

Taken as a whole, the first basket of hypotheses suggests that U.S. and allied initiatives, both domestically and overseas, have decisively limited terrorists’ ability to conduct another

¹⁵ For further elaboration on the literature search methodology, including the advantages and disadvantages of the study’s reliance on unclassified material, see the introduction to Section III: Analysis of the Individual Hypotheses.

¹⁶ Throughout the report, the terms “hypothesis” and “theory” are used interchangeably. They are defined by the American Heritage Dictionary as “A tentative explanation for an observation, phenomenon, or scientific problem that can be tested by further investigation,” and “An assumption based on limited information or knowledge; a conjecture,” respectively. The use of “hypothesis” vice “theory” in particular passages is not meant to imply greater “testability.”

successful attack on American soil.¹⁷ Peter Brookes, a Heritage Foundation Senior Fellow and former CIA operations officer, summarized this interpretation during congressional testimony close to the five-year anniversary of 9/11: “The fact that we have not suffered a terrorist attack here in the United States in nearly five years may have more to do with their inability to undertake an attack in the post-9/11 environment due to the homeland security measures we’ve taken and improvements in intelligence collection and analysis than their desire to strike us.”¹⁸

According to this narrative, for more than six years the United States has relentlessly hunted terrorist operatives, shut down training camps and safe houses, dried up sources of funding, monitored individuals of concern, and carried out many other operations as part of the Global War on Terror. Driven from their sanctuary in Afghanistan, al-Qaeda’s senior leaders have been killed, captured, or otherwise reduced to preserving their own survival rather than carrying out new attacks. At home, high-value potential targets have been hardened, coordination between military, intelligence, and law enforcement agencies has improved, and general public vigilance has increased the scrutiny of suspicious behavior.¹⁹ Overseas, U.S. personnel have collaborated with their foreign counterparts to maintain constant pressure on terrorist networks and disrupt planned attacks. These efforts have included the enactment of formal state policies to impede the support and financing of terrorism. A less tangible, though nevertheless consequential, development is the possibility that foreign governments have refrained from supporting terrorism for fear of U.S. and allied reprisal. Finally, the first basket includes the effects of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan on the broader security milieu. Though this subject remains controversial, a significant school of thought holds that these military operations have succeeded to some extent in engaging terrorists abroad and thus sparing the American people from further violence at home.

Capabilities: Basket II) Limited terrorist capabilities to attack the homeland due to other factors:

Hypothesis F	The terrorist threat has been massively exaggerated.
Hypothesis G	Time is required to rebuild al-Qaeda’s capabilities after the death or capture of most of its senior leaders and operatives.
Hypothesis H	Al-Qaeda is waiting to acquire a CBRN capability.
Hypothesis I	The assimilation of U.S. Muslims into mainstream American society has limited the pool of homegrown radicals who might conduct domestic attacks.
Hypothesis J	A lull is occurring between the disruption of al-Qaeda after 9/11 and the next generation of transnational terrorists that will rise from the Iraq war.
Hypothesis K	Non-Salafist terrorist groups such as Hezbollah have lacked the capability to attack the U.S. homeland.

The second basket emphasizes limitations on terrorist attack capabilities that are less dependent on U.S. and allied counterterrorism initiatives. Perhaps the most provocative of these hypotheses is the argument that the terrorist threat has been massively exaggerated. According to this hypothesis, 9/11 was an aberration – the chance success of a terrorist network whose capabilities have been greatly overblown. In keeping with this logic, the threat to the homeland has been inflated out of all proportion to reality.

¹⁷ For the purposes of this study, terrorist capabilities are evaluated through the lens of the ability to conduct sophisticated, large-scale attacks.

¹⁸ Brookes, Peter. Testimony before the House International Relations Subcommittee on International Terrorism and Nonproliferation, September 7, 2006. pp. 7.

¹⁹ Gunaratna, Rohan. “The Rise and Decline of Al Qaeda.” Testimony before the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, July 9, 2003.

The second basket also accounts for the necessity of time to repair the damage that has been done to al-Qaeda in the post-9/11 crackdown and replenish its overseas attack capability. In a variation of this theme, another theory concerns the time needed to mobilize the cohort of terrorists whose operational capabilities have been honed on the battlefields of Iraq; or, alternatively, the time needed for self-activated jihadists – either Iraq veterans or simply those who have been radicalized by the U.S. occupation – to take action against the United States. Another capabilities-linked hypothesis focuses on al-Qaeda’s presumed efforts to acquire a chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear (CBRN) capability. Yet another theory concerns one of the critical distinctions between the security landscapes in the United States and Europe: the general absence of a large, disaffected Muslim community in America that could produce homegrown jihadists. Finally, the second basket addresses the limited overseas “reach” of non-Salafist terrorist groups such as Hezbollah.

Motivation: Basket III) Limited terrorist motivation to attack the homeland due to concern that an attack would be counterproductive or otherwise inopportune:

Hypothesis L	Al-Qaeda’s next attack on the U.S. homeland must surpass 9/11.
Hypothesis M	9/11 was a strategic miscalculation that al-Qaeda does not wish to repeat.
Hypothesis N	Al-Qaeda has refrained from attacking the U.S. homeland again out of concern for preserving its sanctuary in Pakistan.
Hypothesis O	Terrorists believe that striking the U.S. homeland again could rally international support for America and weaken the radical Islamist movement.
Hypothesis P	Al-Qaeda has become more sensitive to possible Muslim backlash from the killing of American civilians.
Hypothesis Q	Al-Qaeda is undertaking a campaign to warn the United States of its intent to attack and give Americans the chance to convert to Islam.
Hypothesis R	Al-Qaeda needs success – and believes that failure is offensive to God and success is reflective of God’s will – resulting in conservative planning.
Hypothesis S	9/11 gave terrorism a bad name – domestic right-wing and left-wing extremist organizations have lacked the motivation to conduct a large-scale attack. ²⁰
Hypothesis T	“Lone Wolf” terrorists have lacked the motivation to conduct a large-scale attack.
Hypothesis U	Hezbollah has the motivation and capability to attack the United States, but has been restrained by Iran and Syria.

A number of hypotheses in the third basket challenge one of the canonical assumptions of the Global War on Terror – the notion that al-Qaeda and its sympathizers remain committed to attacking the United States. Instead, many of the theories set forth acknowledge that various terrorist organizations, perhaps including al-Qaeda, possess the means to conduct operations on American soil but have chosen not to attack the homeland for a variety of reasons.

These hypotheses center chiefly on the notion that terrorists perceive an attack on the United States as ill-advised, at least for the time being. With regard to al-Qaeda, this line of argument has multiple variations. It includes speculation that al-Qaeda’s image-conscious leadership has refrained from attacking the homeland again until the network can surpass the devastation of 9/11. Another variant is that al-Qaeda’s leaders have come to believe that 9/11 was a strategic miscalculation that should not be repeated. A corollary of this theory concerns the network’s heightened sensitivity to preserving its sanctuary in Pakistan following the loss of Afghanistan as a base of operations. Accordingly, al-Qaeda has shown

²⁰ The portion of the title “9/11 gave terrorism a bad name” was added at the suggestion of several participants during the conference.

restraint in conducting operations in the homeland for fear of precipitating a U.S. incursion into Pakistan’s ungoverned tribal areas.

Other theories concern speculation about the efficacy of attacking the homeland again and whether al-Qaeda’s leaders have concluded that another attack would be counterproductive to its strategic aims. One such hypothesis posits that al-Qaeda has become more sensitive to a possible Muslim backlash over indiscriminate attacks on American civilians; another suggests that the delay in attacks is explained by al-Qaeda’s observance of a drawn-out pre-attack protocol prescribed by the Koran. Another hypothesis asserts that a new attack could rally international support for the United States and harm the global jihadist movement at a time when American power is perceived to be waning and radical Islamism is ascendant. Yet another hypothesis melds al-Qaeda’s religious sensitivities with its image consciousness by suggesting that the network requires successful attacks to reflect a supernatural endorsement and thus win favor among its audience. This phenomenon in turn impels the group to be conservative and methodical in planning new attacks.

Still other hypotheses focus on the specific motivations of domestic extremist groups and “lone wolf” terrorists, which are not seen as being inclined toward large-scale attacks at present. One unifying hypothesis that encompasses many such groups suggests that 9/11 gave terrorism a “bad name,” thereby discouraging extremists from conducting civilian-oriented attacks in pursuit of strategic objectives. Finally, another theory examines the restraining effect of state sponsorship on Hezbollah. According to this hypothesis, the network has possibly been dissuaded from conducting homeland attacks out of concern for preserving its Iranian and Syrian patronage.²¹

Motivation: Basket IV) Limited terrorist motivations to attack the homeland due to other attack priorities:

Hypothesis V	Opportunities to attack Americans in Iraq have diverted jihadist resources that otherwise might be used to attack the U.S. homeland. ²²
Hypothesis W	Al-Qaeda has shifted its focus from the U.S. homeland to attacking U.S. allies, especially in Europe.
Hypothesis X	Al-Qaeda’s focus has returned to toppling “apostate” Middle Eastern regimes.
Hypothesis Y	Self-activated terrorist cells and regional Salafist groups are exercising their own prerogative in target selection and are not motivated to attack the U.S. homeland. ²³
Hypothesis Z	Al-Qaeda’s priority after 9/11 has been to “bleed” the United States dry economically but believes this goal is best achieved by conducting attacks outside the U.S. homeland.
Hypothesis AA	9/11 was meant to be a one-time attack that would catapult al-Qaeda to the front of the radical Islamist movement.
Hypothesis BB	Al-Qaeda is focused on preventing Shia ascendancy in the Middle East.
Hypothesis CC	Non-Salafist terrorist groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas have lacked the motivation to attack the U.S. homeland.

²¹ An additional hypothesis was initially included in this basket positing that “Terrorists have already attacked the United States again but in a manner designed to damage our economy without being detected as terrorism.” This hypothesis was ultimately excluded from the analysis due to the general rejection of its plausibility among conference participants.

²² Originally titled, “Terrorists have seized on Iraq as an opportunity to bloody the United States and establish a Muslim theocracy,” the title was changed in response to participants’ suggestions during the conference. The original wording incorrectly suggested that insurgents in Iraq are monolithic in their objective – establishing an Islamic state governed by Sharia law – when in fact many are nationalists, common criminals, or have other less defined motives for fighting.

²³ Originally titled, “Self-activated terrorist cells and regional Salafist groups such as Jemaah Islamiyah and Jaish-E-Mohammed are exercising their own prerogative in target selection,” the title was changed in response to participants’ suggestions during the conference. The original wording did not capture a key element that explains the lack of al-Qaeda affiliate attacks on the U.S. homeland: lack of motivation.

The fourth and final basket focuses on a speculated shift in the targeting preferences of al-Qaeda and other extremist groups following 9/11. Like the third basket, these hypotheses generally assume a robust attack capability among various terrorist networks but suggest that other targets are more attractive than the U.S. homeland. Variants include the argument that opportunities to attack Americans in Iraq have diverted terrorist resources that otherwise might be mobilized to attack the U.S. homeland; that al-Qaeda has committed itself to penalizing U.S. allies, especially in Europe, for their support of the Iraq invasion; that al-Qaeda has returned to its goal of overthrowing the “apostate” regimes of the Middle East, one of the objectives that first inspired the jihadist movement²⁴; and that al-Qaeda has become more preoccupied with resisting the ascendancy of Shia Muslims in Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East than inflicting another blow to the United States. This basket also includes the hypothesis that al-Qaeda’s post-9/11 decentralization has given its regional franchise organizations more discretion in target selection. These networks in turn have chosen to focus on achieving their more parochial aspirations rather than attacking the United States.

Additionally, the fourth basket addresses al-Qaeda’s professed desire to cripple the United States economically and suggests that the network’s leadership has focused on attacks outside the U.S. homeland to accomplish this objective.²⁵ One theory also disputes the belief that al-Qaeda had always desired to conduct a follow-on attack in the years after 9/11; according to this hypothesis, the attacks were meant to be an isolated event that would achieve its purpose – catapulting the network to the front of the jihadist movement – without subsequent strikes. The final hypothesis considers the lack of motivation to attack the U.S. homeland among non-Salafist groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas.

Establishing a Manageable Number of Hypotheses

Among the most challenging tasks of the study was limiting the number of posited hypotheses to a relatively small list that was nonetheless broad enough to encompass multiple, faintly similar theories. The alternative to this approach – listing the endless permutations that would result from combining any two or more hypotheses or, conversely, subdividing the hypotheses into ever more granular definitions – would have muddled an already highly nuanced set of theories.

Consider the overlap between Hypothesis G, which argues that time is required to rebuild al-Qaeda’s capabilities after the incapacitation of its senior leadership, and Hypothesis Y, which speculates that “self-activated” cells and autonomous al-Qaeda affiliates are exercising their own prerogative in target selection and are not motivated to attack the U.S. homeland. A hybrid of these two theories might suggest that there are numerous homegrown jihadists who are motivated to attack the United States, but the thinning of al-Qaeda’s ranks has limited the pool of seasoned operatives who might offer instruction, financing, and the critical final nudge from radicalism to jihadism. Such a hybrid hypothesis would have blended together two elements – the weakened capabilities of al-Qaeda and the targeting preferences of homegrown cells – that are analytically distinct.

In contrast, some hypotheses can be subdivided to produce more narrow explanations for the non-occurrence of an attack. For example, Hypothesis B can be divided into two discrete

²⁴ The term “apostate” regime refers to U.S.-supported Middle Eastern governments such as Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia. For the purposes of this study, the term implicitly excludes the government of Iraq, whose targeting by al-Qaeda is the subject of a distinct hypothesis.

²⁵ For further discussion, see Dunn, Lewis, et. al., “Economic Terrorism and Economic Warfare in the 21st Century.” October 20, 2006. See especially Givner-Forbes, Rebecca and Matthew Kovner. “The Emerging Emphasis of Economic Terrorism in Jihadist Strategic Literature.” (2006).

hypotheses – one that concerns al-Qaeda’s inability to train new operatives since 9/11 and a second regarding its leaders’ inability to plan new attacks as they constantly seek to avoid death and capture. Another is Hypothesis W, which concerns the postulated shift in al-Qaeda’s attack preference from the U.S. homeland to America’s allies in Europe. The incidents that form the basis of this hypothesis – chiefly the London and Madrid train bombings – may simply have resulted from the greater ease with which self-activated European terrorists can conduct attacks in their own countries rather than from any deliberate shift in al-Qaeda’s targeting preferences. For the sake of succinctness, these competing explanations for the rise in terrorist activity in Europe are not treated as distinct hypotheses. Readers may wish to challenge the wording or categorization of a particular hypothesis as it is presented in the report; however, initial concerns may be allayed in the more detailed analysis in Section III, in which the critical assumptions associated with each hypothesis are presented and a sampling of supporting and contradictory evidence is offered.

Analytic Issues

Before turning to the results of the conference in Section II and the more detailed analysis of the individual hypotheses in Section III, a number of key observations that emerged from the study are worth reflecting upon. These points illustrate the obstacles that stand in the way of a definitive explanation for the non-occurrence of another major attack on the homeland. While in some cases they offer guidance for more focused analysis, in others they highlight uncertainties that for the most part cannot be reduced.

Al-Qaeda’s 9/11 Objectives

The difficulty of answering the question of why the homeland has not been attacked again is compounded by the wide disagreement about al-Qaeda’s objectives in striking the United States in the first place. Lay readers may find surprising the lack of consensus that exists on this subject among Middle East scholars, al-Qaeda experts, and other students of terrorism. On one hand, the grievances of radical Salafists against the United States and the West are generally well understood. The historical narrative to which they subscribe – which centers around perceptions of Muslims’ humiliation at the hands of Western imperialists, the corruption of modern governments, and the necessity of restoring Islam’s early purity – is simply an extreme expression of a mindset that is held by many pious Muslims. Likewise, the movement’s long-term strategic objectives – toppling the secular regimes of the Middle East, erasing the region’s colonial borders, and resurrecting a pan-Islamic caliphate – are for the most part clear. However, the movement’s more intermediate objectives and tactics are often hotly debated.

With respect to 9/11, much of the disagreement centers around al-Qaeda’s intended audience for the attacks, variously assumed to be either the global Muslim ummah (or “community of believers”), the American public, or some combination of the two. Within the former school of thought, explanations for the attacks include Osama bin Laden’s desire to rally the ummah around the banner of global jihad, in part by tarnishing America’s aura of invincibility and possibly provoking a rash U.S. military response that would inflict harm on innocent Muslims. Princeton University Professor Michael Scott Doran argues that

Bin Laden produced a piece of high political theater he hoped would reach the audience that concerned him the most: the umma, or universal Islamic community. The script was obvious: America, cast as the villain, was supposed to use its military might like a cartoon character trying to kill a fly with a shotgun. The media would see to it that any use of force against the civilian population of

Afghanistan was broadcast around the world, and the umma would find it shocking how Americans nonchalantly caused Muslims to suffer and die.²⁶

One variant of this argument is the notion that bin Laden had hoped to draw the United States into an armed conflict on “Muslim soil” in a reprise of the mujahideen victory over the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, an objective that previous al-Qaeda attacks against American targets had failed to accomplish.²⁷ Another line of thinking suggests that the attacks were intended to energize a moribund Islamist movement and catapult al-Qaeda to the leadership of the jihadist cause. Yet another variant speculates that bin Laden’s goal was to inspire self-activated terrorist cells to launch attacks around the world as part of an amorphous global jihad.

Other explanations point instead to the American people and their leaders as the intended audience of the attacks. As Johns Hopkins University Professor Mary Habeck asserts,

Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda’s leadership thought that landing a stunning blow against the United States would cause it to retreat from Muslim lands. The original goal, despite what some terrorists say today, was not to suck the United States into a war of attrition.²⁸

According to this interpretation, the attacks were meant to so terrorize the American public that the United States would capitulate to al-Qaeda’s demanded changes to U.S. Middle East policy. These demands include withdrawing U.S. support for Israel, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan as well as removing U.S. military forces from the region. Another theory suggests that the attacks were intended to notify the American people of a concept that for years had been plainly understood within the jihadist movement – that a grand conflict was underway between the United States and the vanguard of the Muslim ummah. Perhaps the most chilling interpretation, reinforced through fatwas, or Islamic clerical edicts, that sanction the use of weapons of mass destruction against U.S. civilians, is that jihadists simply perceive the killing of Americans to be an objective good for its own sake to avenge the supposed murder of millions of Muslims at American hands.^{29,30}

The uncertainty surrounding al-Qaeda’s short- and medium-term objectives *before* 9/11 is highly significant in addressing the question of why another attack has not occurred on American soil. Having taken stock of the attacks and America’s broad response to them, al-Qaeda’s leaders may no longer consider attacking the U.S. homeland as contributing to the long-term objectives of the radical Salafist movement.³¹

If one assumes that the 9/11 attacks were intended to provoke the United States into war and rouse the Muslim ummah against it, America’s decline in popularity in the Muslim world as it prosecutes wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, coupled with the post-9/11 reinvention of the

²⁶ Doran, Michael Scott. “Somebody Else’s Civil War.” *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2002.

²⁷ Wright, Lawrence. *The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11*. New York: Knopf, 2006. pp.272.

²⁸ Habeck, Mary. “Knowing the Enemy: Jihadist Ideology and the War on Terror.” MIT Security Studies Program Seminar, February 15, 2006.

²⁹ al Fahd, Nasir bin Hamid. “A Treatise on the Legal Status of Using Weapons of Mass Destruction Against Infidels.” May 21, 2003.

³⁰ A 2007 RAND report entitled “Exploring Terrorist Targeting Preferences” identifies four hypotheses to explain al-Qaeda’s use of violence to achieve strategic objectives: 1) the “coercion” hypothesis: inflicting sufficient pain on the United States to induce its withdraw from the Middle East; 2) the “damage” hypothesis: inflicting damage to America’s economic, political and military power as a means of reducing its ability to project power in the Middle East; 3) the “rally” hypothesis: inspiring Muslims to undertake international jihad; and 4) the “franchise” hypothesis: supporting the operations of affiliated jihadist groups. (pp. xiv).

³¹ One hypothesis examined below (Hypothesis M) explores the possibility that al-Qaeda’s leaders have concluded that 9/11 was a strategic miscalculation that should not be repeated.

radical Islamist movement, may suggest that another attack is unnecessary. If, however, the attacks were principally intended to demoralize the American people and produce wholesale shifts in U.S. foreign policy, al-Qaeda's "far enemy" may yet require more encouragement. While the 2003 departure of American troops from Saudi Arabia removed a perennial source of bin Laden's anger, other pillars of U.S. Middle East policy have withstood the post-9/11 sea change. The ruling regimes in Riyadh, Amman, Cairo, and other Arab capitals continue to enjoy U.S. aid; the United States has made no serious effort since 9/11 to encourage true democratic governance in those countries; and American sympathies continue to tilt toward Israel in its conflict with the Palestinians. Furthermore, the American public's impatience with progress in the Iraq war, while arguably growing, has not created sufficient political pressure to induce significant withdrawals of U.S. troops from the country. Thus, al-Qaeda's leaders may conclude that another large-scale attack, perhaps even exceeding the carnage of 9/11, is necessary to convince the American people that their Middle East policies come at too high a cost.

Synergy of Hypotheses

Just as a variety of motivations and objectives have been posited to explain al-Qaeda's original attack on the United States, in all likelihood no single theory suffices to explain the non-occurrence of another major attack on the homeland since 9/11 – by al-Qaeda as well as other terrorist organizations. Rather, a number of factors have combined to make operations against domestic targets more difficult to conduct, to persuade terrorists that attacking the United States is ill-advised, at least temporarily, or to make overseas targets more attractive. These factors may stem from a variety of phenomena, including U.S. and allied counterterrorism policies, terrorists' resource allocations, or developments over which neither party has much control. Daniel Benjamin and Aidan Kirby synthesize a number of these explanations in "The Evolving Threat of Terrorism," produced as part of a fifth-year assessment of the Global War on Terror by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). They argue that

The United States has been fortunate not to have been struck again since 9/11, and a number of reasons can be adduced for this. The American Muslim community has thus far been largely immune to the jihadist virus. It is more difficult for radicals from abroad to gain entry to the country. Al Qaeda is on the one hand not as capable and on the other hand determined that its next attack will top its last one in drama and impact. And, of course, it is easier for jihadists to kill Americans in Iraq than it is in the United States...³²

This interaction of variables increases the difficulty of determining the hypotheses that have the greatest explanatory power and, consequently, identifying actionable implications. Nevertheless, it remains possible to establish the hypotheses that are most applicable to the elements that make up a given terrorist entity (e.g., al-Qaeda's core leadership, new leaders outside of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border area, tactical commanders in the field, mid-level operatives, and homegrown devotees). Additionally, by narrowly identifying the competing explanations for homeland attack frequency, the study potentially serves as a foundation for more in-depth analysis in the future concerning how the various hypotheses interact.

Accounting for Time

The validity of some hypotheses clearly varies over time. For example, a particular theory might be largely persuasive in explaining the non-occurrence of an attack during a limited

³² Benjamin, Daniel and Aidan Kirby. "The Evolving Threat of Terrorism." Chapter 5, *Five Years After 9/11*, CSIS, September 2006. pp. 6.

period but by now may be judged to be no longer valid. Returning to the notion that al-Qaeda's core leaders and operatives have been "on the run" since their eviction from Afghanistan, this hypothesis was probably correct for some period after the fall of Tora Bora in late 2001. However, as al-Qaeda has become entrenched in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas, re-extended control over parcels of territory in Afghanistan, and taken to directing operations in Iraq, the explanatory power of this hypothesis becomes ever more questionable.

Another example can be found in a letter written to alleged 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed in June 2002 by al-Qaeda operative Abd-Al-Halim Adl, who despaired over the network's dwindling fortunes. "Today we are experiencing one setback after another and have gone from misfortune to disaster," Adl wrote. "I say today we must completely halt all external actions until we sit down and consider the disaster we caused [on 9/11]....My beloved brother, stop all foreign actions, stop sending people to captivity, stop devising new operations..."^{33,34} Even if we believe that Adl's recommendation had been heeded, there is little reason to believe that the pause in operations that he urged remains in effect today.

Likewise, a hypothesis that was not persuasive for a prolonged period may become increasingly compelling as time elapses. For example, according to one hypothesis, al-Qaeda's senior leaders have refrained from conducting another attack on the U.S. homeland for fear of provoking a U.S.-led invasion of Pakistan's tribal areas and thus losing yet another sanctuary. While this hypothesis likely had little explanatory power in the first years after 9/11, it may become more persuasive as Pakistan becomes more and more indispensable for training recruits, broadcasting propaganda, and maintaining al-Qaeda's contact with Americans and Britons of Pakistani descent who travel between the countries each year.

Chain of Command

In assessing homeland attack frequency, care must be taken to distinguish between "al-Qaeda core" – the centralized, hierarchical organization built around Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri – and al-Qaeda's many successor organizations and imitators. The latter groups range from relatively large, structured networks such as the al-Qaeda Organization in the Islamic Maghreb to small, self-formed cells like the perpetrators of the London and Madrid bombings.

A particular hypothesis may be persuasive in explaining the operational decisions of al-Qaeda's high-level leaders, who are sensitive to the network's image and long-term strategic objectives, while holding comparatively little value in explaining those of "foot soldiers," whose attacks may be more opportunistic and tactical in nature. As Washington Institute scholar Matthew Levitt has observed of the Hamas terrorist network,

Some decisions are made at the group's headquarters level by a governing council, political bureau, or secretary general. Others may be decided at the level of a regional commander in charge of a network of cells, by a single rogue cell acting on its own, or even by groups of individuals or single members operating on their own as 'lone wolves.'³⁵

To at least some extent, the same decision-making construct is likely true of al-Qaeda and other terrorist networks. As an illustration of this principle, consider the hypothesis set forth below suggesting that al-Qaeda's leaders believe that the next attack on the U.S. homeland

³³ Bergen, Peter. "War of Error: How Osama bin Laden beat George W. Bush." *The New Republic*, October 15, 2007.

³⁴ Bergen, Peter. "Could it Happen Again?" *The National Interest*, September/October 2006.

³⁵ Levitt, Matthew. "Could Hamas Target the West?" *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, November 2007.

must surpass 9/11. This belief may influence the group's senior leaders not to dispatch operatives to conduct small-scale attacks that they perceive as subtracting from the network's mystique. However, concern about al-Qaeda's image may be less likely to influence the operations of small, self-activated jihadist cells that possess more modest capabilities. These entities may consider small-scale attacks preferable to staying on the sidelines of the global jihad altogether.

Degree of Central Control

Many of the hypotheses speculating that al-Qaeda's attack patterns have reflected a deliberate shift in targeting preference since 9/11 depend on the ability of the group's leaders to communicate orders to followers and the extent to which those orders are obeyed. One dimension of the al-Qaeda taxonomy question concerns whether the group's central leadership has retained command and control over its affiliates and is capable of imparting instructions concerning target selection and attack mode. As a 2007 RAND Corporation report on al-Qaeda's operational preferences notes, "To the extent the organization's leadership retains such authority, al Qaeda's target preferences matter. If al Qaeda is unable to exercise such control, however, then it is the priorities of the groups or individuals carrying out the attack that count."³⁶

A number of factors suggest that the authority of al-Qaeda core over its subordinate groups has diminished to some degree. In part, communications have become more difficult between al-Qaeda leaders in Pakistan's tribal areas and the group's supporters, operatives, and inspired organizations. This has likely resulted from the geographical isolation of Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri and other senior leaders, their presumed shifting of locations to avoid capture, and the elaborate security precautions that they have adopted to prevent interception of messages. In testimony before the Senate in June 2006, veteran CIA operative Hank Crumpton stated flatly that "Al-Qaeda's core leadership no longer has effective global command and control of its networks."³⁷ This isolation cuts both ways, preventing homegrown jihadist aspirants from linking up with the veteran operatives that they have grown to idolize on the Internet. As journalist Matt Korade notes,

The new members [of al-Qaeda]...are not able to connect with al Qaeda's leadership. The severe military and financial pressure that the world has placed on al Qaeda has forced the group to go online to communicate, making it difficult for the leadership to exert any control over or even to communicate with member groups.³⁸

In Iraq and elsewhere, new and relatively autonomous jihadist entities have sprung up that nonetheless nominally profess allegiance to al-Qaeda. In July 2007, the U.S. military announced the capture of Iraqi jihadist Khalid al-Mashadani, who was accused of acting as an intermediary between the leaders of al-Qaeda in Iraq and core leaders Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri. Al-Mashadani was described as having facilitated "a flow of strategic direction, of prioritization of messaging and other guidance that comes from al Qaeda senior leadership to the al Qaeda in Iraq leadership."³⁹ To the extent that some degree of autonomy exists, however, the question must be raised about whether an attack by al-Qaeda sympathizers can rightly be called the work of "al-Qaeda" at all.

³⁶ Libicki, et al. "Exploring Terrorist Targeting Preferences." RAND, 2007. pp. 70.

³⁷ Crumpton, Henry A. Testimony before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, June 13, 2006.

³⁸ Korade, Matt. "Al Qaeda Transforming Into a Leaderless Youth Movement, Author Contends." *CQ*, February 19, 2008.

³⁹ "U.S.: Senior al Qaeda in Iraq leader held." CNN.com, July 18, 2007.

Another example can be found in the July 2005 London Underground bombings. The official British government report on the attacks suggests only a tenuous connection between the bombers, two of whom had traveled to Pakistan, and al-Qaeda: "Who they may have met in Pakistan has not yet been established, but it seems likely that they had some contact with Al Qaida figures....There is as yet no firm evidence to corroborate...the nature of Al Qaida support [to the bombers], if there was any."⁴⁰ By contrast, Bruce Riedel argues that "al-Qaeda has used Pakistan extensively as a fertile recruiting ground to penetrate the large Pakistani expatriate population in the United Kingdom for operations. The 7 July 2005 attack on the London Underground was a dramatic demonstration of this approach to attacking Europe."⁴¹ In short, rather than suggesting that al-Qaeda had merely served as an inspiration to the bombers, Riedel assigns direct responsibility to al-Qaeda central for conducting the attacks.

More Evidence Needed

The paucity of corroborating evidence makes the evaluation of many of the hypotheses more difficult. Illustrative of this deficit is the hypothesis concerning al-Qaeda's views on the ascendancy of Shia Muslims in the Middle East and what implications their accumulation of power foreshadows for the Salafist movement. Substantial evidence confirms the group's antipathy toward the Shia, not least the late Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's indiscriminate attacks on Shia civilians in Iraq. Numerous Salafist manifestos put forward a view of the Shia as heretics only slightly less contemptible than Zionists and "Crusaders." Therefore, the notion that al-Qaeda has become fixated on reversing the rise of the Shia in Iraq cannot be rejected out of hand. Yet little direct evidence suggests that the network's anti-Shia enmity has caused it to redirect resources that otherwise might be spent attacking the U.S. homeland.

Another example concerns the speculation that al-Qaeda does not wish to resuscitate international sympathy for the United States by conducting another attack on American soil. This hypothesis appears reasonable given the observable decline in America's esteem in many parts of the world and the satisfaction that one can assume the Salafists derive from our nation's troubles. However, direct primary source evidence is lacking that the preservation of America's unpopularity is an objective that factors into al-Qaeda's attack calculus. There are numerous examples of other areas in which increased intelligence gathering and analysis could clarify our understanding of the terrorist threat to the homeland.

⁴⁰ Home Office of the United Kingdom. "Report of the Official Account of the Bombings in London on 7th July 2005." May 11, 2006.

⁴¹ Riedel, Bruce. "Al Qaeda: The Return of the Knights." Centre for European Policy Studies, ESF Working Papers, July 25, 2007.

Section II: Conference Highlights

Having identified more than two dozen relevant hypotheses, the study team convened a two-day “Homeland Attack Frequency” conference in McLean, Virginia, on September 25-26, 2007, that brought together more than 35 professionals to debate the question of why the United States has not experienced another large-scale attack since 9/11. Conference attendees brought to bear a range of operational and academic experience relating to terrorism and national security policy. In addition to SAIC and DTRA/ASCO staff members, participants included employees of the U.S. Departments of State and Homeland Security, the Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency, and the Sandia and Los Alamos National Laboratories. Academics from several universities, as well as analysts from national security think tanks, terrorism research centers, and private analysis firms also took part in the discussion. Participants possessed expertise ranging from homeland security policy and critical infrastructure vulnerability to advanced knowledge of al-Qaeda and other terrorist networks. Individuals with specialized expertise included catastrophic risk analysts, Arabic-language linguists, and experts on Islamic culture and terrorist network dynamics. The following section considers some of the main themes that emerged from the discussion.

The conference began with a presentation that explained the methodology used to analyze the hypotheses and the logic behind the two principal categories – Capabilities and Motivations – as well as the four “baskets.” After providing initial observations on the scope and purpose of the study, the conference participants were divided into three Working Groups reflecting the following categories of hypotheses:

- 1) Hypotheses suggesting that U.S. and allied efforts have prevented another attack or that terrorists have limited attack capabilities (Baskets I & II);
- 2) Hypotheses suggesting that terrorists view a major attack on the U.S. homeland as ill-advised or counterproductive for the time being (Basket III); and
- 3) Hypotheses suggesting that since 9/11, terrorists have had more pressing priorities than attacking the U.S. homeland (Basket IV).

In short, these categories can be summarized as follows: since 9/11 terrorists have desired to attack the United States again but have been unable to do so; terrorists have not desired to attack the United States again; and finally, regardless of desire, terrorists have been occupied elsewhere in the intervening years. During these Working Group sessions, the participants examined only the hypotheses in the category to which they were assigned. In particular, they were asked to consider whether additional hypotheses should be included in the study and whether any theories should be eliminated as demonstrably wrong or lacking in credibility. Finally, each hypothesis was evaluated using a rudimentary scoring tool to assess the likelihood that the hypothesis is valid and register the confidence that the participants assigned to their answers. The use of the assessment tool in the Working Group sessions had two principal purposes: to provide a general sense of the validity of the hypotheses and to serve as a jumping-off point for discussion among the participants.⁴²

It should be noted that identifying the correct explanations for the non-occurrence of another successful attack is not as simple as assembling an exhaustive list of hypotheses and then choosing the most convincing from among them. In any expert opinion elicitation process, participants’ judgments may often reflect their own political, institutional, or personal beliefs. For example, intelligence and military personnel may be more inclined to stress operations against the enemy as the most powerful explanation for the lull in attacks, while

⁴² See Appendix B for a description of the methodology used and the tables showing the results for each hypothesis.

homeland security and law enforcement personnel may be more disposed to assign credit to improvements in the nation's homeland defenses. Likewise, academics and other students of terrorist behavior may have a tendency to view the question principally through the lens of their subjects' motivations, objectives, and preferences. These individuals could in turn be more likely to ascribe the non-occurrence of an attack to the deliberate decision-making of terrorists.⁴³ Thus, while the exercise was useful in generating discussion of the hypotheses and identifying areas in which more focused analysis may be necessary, the assessments should not be construed as having conclusively established the validity of each hypothesis.

The second day of the conference featured presentations to the plenary session by the facilitators of the three Working Groups, which highlighted key themes that emerged from their discussions. These presentations allowed the results of the assessments to be shared and discussed among the participants as a whole. The conference concluded with a panel discussion led by Dr. Lewis A. Dunn of SAIC that included two noted experts in the field of terrorism studies: Mr. Daniel Benjamin, Brookings Institution Senior Fellow and co-author of *The Next Attack: The Globalization of Jihad*, and Dr. Walid A. Phares, Director of the Future Terrorism Project at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies and author of *Future Jihad: Terrorist Strategies against America*.

What follows are a number of observations and discussion points derived from the plenary sessions, Working Group discussions and concluding panel. These include some points related to current thinking about homeland attack frequency as well as the conference participants' views on the most and least compelling hypotheses examined in the study. Several new hypotheses or subtle variations of existing hypotheses are also presented. In some instances, recommended adjustments to the wording of a number of hypotheses were incorporated in the more detailed analysis in Section III.

Most Compelling Hypotheses

Consistent with the judgment that multiple variables have factored in the non-occurrence of another major homeland attack since 9/11, a handful of hypotheses were singled out during the conference as being especially significant in explaining this phenomenon. The list discussed below represents the authors' best effort to blend the points of agreement that emerged from the plenary discussion and the more formal evaluation process that took place during the Working Group sessions. However, it should be noted that neither the plenary discussion nor the Working Group assessments involved scientifically rigorous evaluations of the evidence associated with each hypothesis. Rather, the insights offered by the participants constituted largely qualitative judgments that reflected their general impressions of the hypotheses as presented during the conference.⁴⁴

Hypotheses A & B: Homeland security initiatives *and* overseas counterterrorism operations have prevented another large-scale attack.

The participants acknowledged America's continued vulnerability to attack and its inability to completely neutralize the terrorist threat. Nevertheless, they assigned considerable credit for the lull in attacks since 9/11 to the efforts of the nation's intelligence, military, law

⁴³ In spite of the study team's effort to include a diverse body of participants, the latter group was under-represented at the conference, in part because the scheduling of the conference coincided with the start of the academic year. This should be noted when evaluating the hypotheses judged to be "most compelling." However, commentary by individuals representing these fields is extensively cited in Section III: Analysis of the Individual Hypotheses.

⁴⁴ In fact, it may be unnecessary to identify a single or small number of hypotheses as being most persuasive; rather, simply separating the theories that are reasonably compelling from those that are plainly unconvincing may be sufficient to draw actionable implications.

enforcement, and homeland security personnel. These individuals have collectively made it far more difficult for terrorists to operate against the United States. Likewise, while the pool of potential jihadists in the Muslim world ensures a steady stream of potential terrorist recruits, hundreds of key al-Qaeda personnel have been killed or captured, diminishing the operational capabilities of the organization and increasing the challenge of dispatching skilled operatives to the United States. Among operatives who remain at large, their perception of the difficulty of conducting operations in the United States may have resulted in more meticulous planning and thus delays in carrying out major attacks.

Hypothesis I: The assimilation of U.S. Muslims into mainstream American society has limited the pool of homegrown radicals who might conduct domestic attacks.

Perhaps no item of discussion elicited more agreement than the notion that U.S. Muslims' assimilation into mainstream American society is one of the nation's great strengths in the Global War on Terror. Though some mutual suspicion has been observed between the Muslim American community and many non-Muslims since 9/11, the cultural divide in the United States resembles nothing like the gulf separating the religious communities of many European nations. In *Leaderless Jihad*, former CIA operative and forensic psychologist Marc Sageman outlines a four-stage process in which radicalization typically occurs among alienated Muslims in Europe. The Economist summarizes Sageman's theory thusly:

The initial trigger is a sense of moral outrage, usually over some incident of Muslim suffering in Iraq, Palestine, Chechnya or elsewhere. This acquires a broader context, becoming part of what Mr. Sageman calls a 'morality play' in which Islam and the West are seen to be at war. In stage three, the global and the local are fused, as geopolitical grievance resonates with personal experience of discrimination or joblessness. And finally the individual joins a terrorist cell, which becomes a surrogate family, nurturing the jihadist world-view and preparing the initiate for martyrdom.⁴⁵

This evolution has no close analogue in the United States. Indeed, thanks to assiduous trust-building efforts among many law enforcement personnel and the patriotism of many Muslim Americans, warnings of homegrown jihadist activity in the United States have often come from within the Muslim community itself. Whether this phenomenon is relevant to large-scale terrorist attack frequency was seen as more open to debate. Several factors seem to qualify the power of this hypothesis to explain the lack of a major attack on American soil since 9/11. For example, in two homeland attacks involving foreign operatives – the 1993 World Trade Center bombing and the 9/11 hijackings – the terrorists received only limited support from U.S. Muslim residents, whose foreknowledge of the attacks has never been conclusively established. Thus, the presence of a sympathetic support base within the Muslim community may not be critical to terrorists' ability to conduct large-scale attacks.

Hypothesis L: Al-Qaeda's next attack on the U.S. homeland must surpass 9/11.

One hypothesis that has gained considerable currency among the terrorism commentariat is the notion that al-Qaeda's leaders believe that maintaining the network's mystique demands that the next attack on the U.S. homeland must equal or surpass 9/11. As author Steve Coll notes, "many al Qaeda watchers...believe that bin Laden or his followers may be husbanding their resources, planning and waiting until they can carry off an attack big enough to match

⁴⁵ "How Jihad Went Freelance." *The Economist*. January 31, 2008.

or exceed the last.”⁴⁶ Former Department of Homeland Security (DHS) inspector general Clark Kent Ervin seconds this assessment:

If their aim were merely to blow up the odd bus or to level a supermarket, doing so would be a very short order. But, the more spectacular the scale of a plot, the longer it takes to plan, the costlier it is to finance, the more operatives you need to carry it out, and the greater the chance that something will go awry.⁴⁷

By setting the bar so high on 9/11, perhaps higher than even al-Qaeda’s leaders anticipated, any attack now deemed worthy of the organization will likely require considerable time, resources, and manpower to execute.

Although this hypothesis is among the most frequently cited by counterterrorism experts, surprisingly little primary source evidence in the form of al-Qaeda manifestos or intercepted communications supports the theory beyond mere supposition, well-reasoned though it may be. The hypothesis is instead based largely on observations of past patterns of terrorist operations, in which various factors have pushed militant groups toward steady escalations of violence. RAND terrorism expert Brian Michael Jenkins describes the phenomenon in the following way:

Terrorists [at one time] had a sense of morality, a self-image, operational codes, and practical concerns – they wanted to maintain group cohesion, avoid alienating perceived constituents, and avoid provoking public outrage, which could lead to crackdowns. But these constraints gave way to large-scale indiscriminate violence as terrorists engaged in protracted, brutal conflicts; as the more squeamish dropped out; as terrorism became commonplace and the need for headlines demanded higher body counts; and as ethnic hatred and religious fanaticism replaced political agendas.⁴⁸

The maturation of al-Qaeda’s attack capabilities suggests that the network may follow a similar pattern. Past spectacular attacks by al-Qaeda operatives have demonstrated evolving levels of sophistication, from the simultaneous truck bombings of the U.S. embassies in Africa in 1998 to the water-borne explosive attack on the U.S.S. Cole in 2000 to the hijackings of 9/11.

Interestingly, while belief in the “escalation” hypothesis is widespread, so too is the consensus that al-Qaeda is interested in inflicting damage to the U.S. economy. There is some dissonance between these theories. Spectacular attacks, while visually or symbolically gratifying to al-Qaeda and its target audience, may not produce substantial economic effects. In contrast, a prolonged campaign of low-intensity suicide bombings of the sort witnessed in London in 2005 may cause severe economic damage while falling short of the benchmark of grandiosity set by the 9/11 attacks. The absence of small-scale seriatim suicide attacks in the United States of the sort that have plagued Israel therefore emerges as a key data point in studying the frequency of large-scale attacks. To wit, many terrorism experts’ initial puzzlement over al-Qaeda’s failure to attack “soft” targets such as American shopping malls has given way to more chilling interpretations of the network’s relative domestic inactivity.

⁴⁶ Coll, Steve. “What Bin Laden Sees in Hiroshima.” *The Washington Post*, February 6, 2005.

⁴⁷ Ervin, C.K. “10 Ways to Avoid the Next 9/11: Qaeda Set the Bar High.” *The New York Times*, September 10, 2006.

⁴⁸ Jenkins, Brian Michael. “The New Age of Terrorism.” Chapter 8: *The McGraw-Hill Homeland Security Handbook*, 2006. pp. 118.

Hypothesis S: 9/11 gave terrorism a bad name – domestic right-wing and left-wing extremist organizations have lacked the motivation to conduct a large-scale attack.

Although the conference focused predominantly on the various strains of Islamist terrorism, some discussion took place concerning domestic terrorist groups, including the right-wing militia movement and radical environmentalists. Prior to 9/11, homegrown terrorist attacks periodically captivated the nation's attention, but the overwhelming public outrage that was necessary to make sympathy for political violence almost universally unacceptable had not yet reached critical mass. The attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon arguably changed that. A March 2008 Los Angeles Times piece on the decline of the militia movement offered the following explanations for its slide into ignominy and destitution:

Though violent extremist groups have been around in America for decades, they surged in the 1990s, a decade of spectacular domestic mayhem – at a cabin in Ruby Ridge, Idaho; on a compound outside Waco, Texas; in downtown Oklahoma City...Today the groups are shadows of themselves, with many of their leaders dead, imprisoned, disillusioned or just inept. Many observers attribute that to Sept. 11, for diverting the rage of disaffected Americans away from the U.S. government and toward foreigners, and for fueling the subsequent Patriot Act-driven crackdown....The aftermath of the Sept. 11 attacks also brought stronger law enforcement tools, most notably the Patriot Act, and reinforced FBI field offices with Joint Task Forces to seek and destroy unfolding terrorist plots.⁴⁹

While several participants cautioned that domestic extremists may still pose a latent threat to homeland security, there was a general consensus that 9/11 had dramatically reduced these groups' appetite for civilian-oriented violence. In the lament of John Trochmann, the co-founder of the white supremacist Militia of Montana, "9/11. Boy, did it ever change things."⁵⁰

Hypothesis V: Opportunities to attack Americans in Iraq have diverted jihadist resources that otherwise might be used to attack the U.S. homeland.

In keeping with the view of the Iraq war as a boon to the global jihadist cause, many conference participants considered the ongoing U.S. occupation to be a significant factor in shifting the terrorist threat away from the homeland. Journalist Carter Andress summarizes this notion succinctly, arguing that

The far enemy became the near enemy...the moment the American army invaded Iraq. How could al Qaeda think of attacking America when the U.S. Army was occupying one of the inner lands of Islam? Yet the difference now is that the jihadis are not facing Americans going about their everyday business, but soldiers and others ready for a fight. This is the primary reason we have not seen an al-Qaeda terrorist attack in the U.S. in the six years since 9/11.⁵¹

While this line of thinking appears persuasive, many participants debated whether al-Qaeda's operations in Iraq have resulted from a recasting of the network's strategic objectives or have simply been the short-term effect of positioning U.S. forces in a region where they can be attacked more easily. That is, al-Qaeda's long-term designs may have been temporarily subordinated to the immediate priority of killing Americans in Iraq.

⁴⁹ Serrano, Richard A. "Domestic terror groups in disarray after Sept. 11." *The Los Angeles Times*, March 11, 2008.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Andress, Carter. "The Connection." *National Review* Online, September 11, 2007.

Hypothesis W: Al-Qaeda has shifted its focus from the U.S. homeland to attacking U.S. allies, especially in Europe.

Unsurprisingly given the spate of attacks and plots that have occurred in Britain, Spain, France, and Germany in recent years, the hypothesis concerning terrorists' shift in focus away from the United States and toward Europe was viewed as highly significant. Various explanations for this shift were put forward, including deliberate strategic decisions by al-Qaeda's leaders, the practical effects of the security environment in the United States as compared to Europe, and the demographic makeup of many European countries.

According to the line of argument positing a deliberate decision by al-Qaeda's leaders, radical jihadist leaders have consciously chosen to attack U.S. allies in Europe at least in part as punishment for having participated in the coalition that invaded and occupied a Muslim country. Osama bin Laden himself alluded to this explanation in his October 2004 election eve broadcast. Challenging President Bush's suggestion that al-Qaeda is simply the enemy of freedom, bin Laden suggested, "then let him explain to us why we don't strike for example, Sweden."⁵² Another variant of this hypothesis is that "threat shifting" has occurred as a result of fortifying the U.S. homeland, which has persuaded jihadists to direct their attacks against the comparatively softer target of Europe.

A simpler explanation put forward for the attacks in Europe is that the relative disaffection in many European Muslim communities has proven more fertile soil for producing "homegrown" jihadists. These individuals manifest their hostility by attacking the societies that they perceive to have rejected them. Evidence of this phenomenon can be found in both the Madrid and London train bombings, which are generally believed to have been the work of self-activated cells that were independently radicalized by al-Qaeda's ideology and events in the Middle East.⁵³ Though the greater assimilation of U.S. Muslims has been greatly emphasized by Americans, the growth of the jihadist movement in Europe should be highly troubling to U.S. officials. According to many participants, the ease of passage between Europe and the United States is a relic of simpler times that may facilitate terrorist transit across the Atlantic.

Hypothesis Y: Self-activated terrorist cells and regional Salafist groups are exercising their own prerogative in target selection and are not motivated to attack the U.S. homeland.

Consistent with the discussion concerning the proper taxonomy of "al-Qaeda," a number of conference participants noted that very few of the terrorist attacks since 9/11 that are commonly ascribed to al-Qaeda have been the work of the core network headed by Osama bin Laden. Rather, most have been carried out by regional Salafist groups and individuals who have grafted themselves, at least nominally, to the al-Qaeda movement. Examples include the 2002 Bali bombings carried out by Jemaah Islamiyah, the 2005 Amman bombings carried out by Al-Qaeda in Iraq, and the 2007 Algiers bombings carried out by the al-Qaeda Organization in the Islamic Maghreb. According to many experts, this diffusion of authority is implicit in al-Qaeda's name – translated from Arabic as "the base" – which connotes a foundation uniting disparate groups under the banner of jihad rather than a hierarchical organization with a centralized structure. If correct, this hypothesis diminishes the explanatory power of a number of theories, especially those involving deliberate shifts in the targeting preferences of al-Qaeda core.

⁵² "Transcript of Osama bin Laden's Speech." Aljazeera.net, October 30, 2004.

⁵³ Sageman, Marc. "The Next Generation of Terror." *Foreign Policy*, March/April 2008.

Hypothesis CC: Non-Salafist terrorist groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas have lacked the motivation to attack the U.S. homeland.

Despite the recognition that the threat to the United States has for the last six years stemmed principally from al-Qaeda, for the sake of comprehensiveness the conference also addressed non-Salafist groups that could potentially launch attacks against the homeland. Among the most obvious candidates for discussion are Lebanese Hezbollah and Palestinian Hamas, both of which possess what their supporters would consider a strong prima facie grievance against the United States for its support of Israel. However, in spite of these groups' hostility to the United States, there was a consensus among the conference participants that this general sentiment has not yet provided adequate motivation to conduct attacks on American interests, much less the U.S. homeland. Nevertheless, they believed that U.S. policymakers should be mindful of this potential threat, a subject that will be discussed at greater length below.

Unpersuasive Hypotheses

Several hypotheses that were included in the report for the sake of comprehensiveness were generally dismissed during the conference. These included Hypothesis F, which suggests that the terrorist threat has in fact been massively exaggerated, and Hypothesis P, which suggests that al-Qaeda has become more sensitive to a possible Muslim backlash over the killing of American civilians. Unsurprisingly given the professional orientation of the conference participants, many of whose careers have been devoted to countering the terrorist threat, the theory concerning the exaggeration of the terrorist threat was judged to be lacking any real substance. With respect to the latter hypothesis, there is some evidence that senior al-Qaeda leaders have recognized the revulsion that their attacks have produced in the Muslim world. However, this backlash has principally concerned attacks that kill fellow Muslims and has not extended to the deaths of Americans on their own soil.

Other hypotheses were discounted despite having rather strong intuitive claims to validity. One such example is Hypothesis H, which suggests that al-Qaeda is waiting to acquire a CBRN capability before attacking the United States again. Several factors seem to support this theory, not least that national security experts and public officials have persistently underscored the danger of WMD terrorism since 9/11. In a rare moment of agreement during the first 2004 presidential debate, when President George W. Bush and Senator John Kerry were asked to identify "the single most serious threat to the national security [of] the United States," both candidates answered with references to WMD terrorism.^{54,55} Furthermore, the CBRN hypothesis is consistent with the frequently repeated supposition that al-Qaeda's leaders believe that their next attack on the U.S. homeland must surpass 9/11. Indeed, killing more than 3,000 civilians would be exceedingly difficult without using a chemical, biological, or nuclear weapon. Nevertheless, all six of the participants who evaluated this hypothesis in the Working Group session judged its validity to be "remote."

An additional point of interest concerns the participants' assessment of several of the more obscure hypotheses whose principal proponents are nevertheless highly regarded in their fields. One such example is Hypotheses Q, which suggests that al-Qaeda is undertaking a meticulous campaign to warn the United States of its intent to attack and give Americans the chance to convert to Islam. Support for this theory among terrorism thinkers appears

⁵⁴ Senator Kerry's exact response was "Nuclear proliferation," followed by a discussion of "terrorists trying to get their hands on [nuclear materials] today." President Bush's exact response was "weapons of mass destruction in the hands of a terrorist network."

⁵⁵ "Debate Transcript: The First Bush-Kerry Presidential Debate." University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida, September 30, 2004.

limited to a few luminaries such as Dr. Michael Scheuer, the former head of the CIA's bin Laden unit, and Dr. Fawaz A. Gerges, a scholar at Sarah Lawrence College. Nonetheless, four of the seven participants who evaluated the hypothesis in detail considered it to be "Probably Likely" while only one rated the theory as "remote." A contrasting example is Hypothesis R, which suggests that Al-Qaeda needs success – and believes that failure is offensive to God and success is reflective of God's will – resulting in conservative planning. Despite having been articulated by the highly regarded RAND terrorism expert Brian Michael Jenkins, six of the seven participants judged it to be "remote" or "unlikely;" four of those in the "remote" camp made their judgment with high confidence.

Additional Hypotheses

Overall, the broad set of hypotheses presented at the conference remained intact following the discussion and is the subject of the more detailed exploration in Section III. Nonetheless, during the conference a number of additional hypotheses were identified to explain homeland attack frequency. In some instances, these hypotheses entailed further subdivision of an existing hypothesis. For example, Hypothesis B argues that the United States has not been attacked again chiefly because U.S. counterterrorism activities overseas have succeeded. However, some participants suggested that the two principal dimensions of this hypothesis – preventing al-Qaeda from training new recruits and forcing its leaders to focus more on survival than planning new attacks – are in fact discrete phenomena that should be analyzed separately. In other instances, several new hypotheses were put forward. These merit brief mention, though they were not analyzed in detail during the conference, nor was any attempt made to identify supporting or contradictory evidence subsequent to their identification.⁵⁶ Thus, the inclusion of these theories below does not reflect a judgment concerning their validity relative to others that were singled out for their explanatory power.

Al-Qaeda is still coasting on 9/11.

According to one theory put forward, the 9/11 attacks were so injurious to the American psyche and so electrifying to the global Muslim ummah that another large-scale strike on the U.S. homeland is unnecessary for the foreseeable future. As William Gibson suggests, "Another attempt on the scale of the 2001 attacks hasn't been necessary. The last one is still doing the trick..."⁵⁷

While al-Qaeda's true audience for the attacks – either Americans and their political leaders or, conversely, would-be jihadist sympathizers in the Muslim world – remains the subject of debate, the attacks were seen as sufficiently impressive to either group to obviate their repetition in the near term. From the perspective of al-Qaeda, there is no need to conduct another attack in the United States until the benefits stemming from 9/11, including U.S. homeland security expenditures, public anxiety over terrorism, and overseas troop deployments, begin to diminish. As author Ron Suskind notes,

The lack of another U.S. attack, [U.S. personnel] assumed, might be due to a host of strategic decisions by al-Qaeda: namely, the idea that fear created by 9/11 would carry, like an echo, until it was supplanted by another attack – an attack whose scale would act, anew, as a gauge of al Qaeda's capability and intent.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ The authors' decision not to analyze these additional hypotheses more thoroughly in Section III partly reflects the fact that several were variants of theories included in the original analysis. This set was seen by the participants to be a sound overall collection of the competing hypotheses concerning homeland attack frequency.

⁵⁷ Gibson, William. "What Really Scares Us." *The New York Times*, September 10, 2006.

⁵⁸ Suskind, Ron. *The One Percent Doctrine*. pp. 180.

Likewise, the strength of the radical Islamist movement, energized by recent wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Lebanon, appears to be in no danger of waning.

One hypothesis included in the study – Hypothesis Z – partially addresses this possibility by suggesting that al-Qaeda’s priority after 9/11 has been to “bleed” the United States dry economically, a strategy best achieved by conducting attacks outside the U.S. homeland. This language does not address the possibility that al-Qaeda’s goal of forcing the United States to hemorrhage large sums on security countermeasures can be achieved without attacking us at all, either within the homeland or abroad. Rather, the mere perception of a terrorist threat, nurtured by periodic demonstrations of al-Qaeda’s capability, is sufficient to ensure continued spending on homeland defenses.

Terrorists are simply waiting for the right conditions to attack.

Another hypothesis suggests that U.S. and allied successes against al-Qaeda have been illusory and that the terrorists are simply biding their time before conducting another large-scale attack, which may even now be entering the final phase of planning. Retired senior CIA official Paul R. Pillar argues that

[T]he absence of attacks during a period that for the terrorist is a blink of a historical eyelash can set off debates in Washington about whether the leaders at Jihad Central have been crippled or are working on something really big. In fact, the patterns may reflect simply the happenstance of operational opportunities, including the skills of the next aspiring martyr to walk through the door.⁵⁹

Although implicitly addressed in a number of hypotheses in Basket II – namely, Hypothesis G: Time is required to rebuild al-Qaeda’s capabilities, Hypothesis H: Al-Qaeda is waiting to acquire a CBRN capability, and Hypothesis J: A lull is occurring before the next generation arises from the Iraq war – some participants felt that this theory deserved to stand alone as a separate hypothesis in its own right.

The U.S. response to another attack is too uncertain to jeopardize current successes.

Many participants agreed that the hypothesis concerning 9/11 as a “strategic miscalculation” on the part of al-Qaeda is an intriguing theory. However, some suggested that the hypothesis incorrectly conflates al-Qaeda’s original miscalculation of the effects of the attacks – especially its ability to withstand the American military response – with its leaders’ current thinking on the wisdom of attacking the United States again. That is, while Osama bin Laden and other senior leaders may have miscalculated the effects of 9/11, it does not necessarily follow that they do not wish to attack the homeland again as a result of their earlier misjudgment.

The most obvious illustration of this viewpoint is the Iraq war, which many believe has provided al-Qaeda with a new and powerful *raison d’être* following the group’s setbacks after 9/11. According to this view, though Osama bin Laden misidentified the battlefield, his hope of drawing the United States into a protracted conflict on “Muslim soil” has indeed been realized. Other developments for which bin Laden can claim at least partial credit are the sharp downturn in America’s popularity abroad and a rise in sympathy for radical Islam in the Middle East and elsewhere. Thus, the most pertinent question is not whether al-Qaeda’s leaders viewed 9/11 as a strategic miscalculation, but whether they are sufficiently confident about the effects of another attack to risk jeopardizing al-Qaeda’s strategic agenda, which

⁵⁹ Pillar, Paul R. “Counterterrorism Gives, Iraq Takes Away.” *Foreign Affairs*, September 11, 2006.

they likely view as on track. Journalists Peter Grier and Faye Bowers ask, “When Osama bin Laden looks out from his probable Pakistani mountain redoubt, does he approve of the tide of world events? Is he happy about Iraq, or frustrated? Is he eager to disrupt the U.S. election, and to attack more capitalist monuments?”⁶⁰ The answers to these questions may heavily influence the decision about whether another attack on the homeland should be deferred for the time being.

Overarching Implications for U.S. Counterterrorism Efforts

Dr. Gordon Woo has observed that, “Just as no seismologist can predict when the next major earthquake will occur, nobody can predict the precise timing of the next major terrorist attack” on the U.S. homeland.⁶¹ Nor, as this study demonstrates, can analysts offer a wholly satisfactory explanation for why no such attack has occurred since 9/11.

In the final analysis, perhaps the most unassailable conclusion of the study is that we simply do not know why the United States has not been successfully attacked again. While it might appear that this conclusion could have been reached without conducting the study, in fact many analysts have concluded the opposite: that we do indeed know why. Unfortunately there are more than two dozen competing explanations. In contrast, this study suggests that identifying a complete and consistent explanation for the non-occurrence of a subsequent attack on the U.S. homeland may not be possible. The intersection of so many complementary variables, the opacity of terrorists’ decision-making processes, and the effect of pure happenstance on human events may suggest that the answer is simply unknowable. No matter how thorough the analysis, uncertainties about the competence, motivations, and priorities of our adversaries, as well as the efficacy of our own countermeasures, will undoubtedly persist. While some of these uncertainties are amenable to reduction, others for the most part are not. Yet even this latter acknowledgement is no cause for hand-wringing. Indeed, it may be one of the most valuable insights to emerge from this undertaking.

Understanding the limitations of our knowledge is tremendously important, for it crystallizes the need to embrace counterterrorism strategies that are independent of the answer to the question that the study poses. Failure to appreciate these uncertainties might invite national security personnel to conclude, in light of the non-occurrence of a subsequent homeland attack, that the equation for preventing terrorism on American soil has largely been solved. Such a conclusion, in turn, could nurture a complacent belief that adapting to shifts in terrorist motivations and objectives is unnecessary.

In exploring a comprehensive body of hypotheses to explain homeland attack frequency, one of the key objectives of the study was to identify implications for the way we defend the United States from terrorist attack. The blind spots in our understanding of the terrorist threat that this analysis has illustrated point us in two principal directions. These implications are not tethered to any single hypothesis or group of explanations but rather were formed during the broad course of the research and the accompanying conference. As such, their value lies in their insensitivity to the correct answer or answers to why the U.S. homeland has not been attacked again.

First, having identified areas in which considerable uncertainty about our adversaries exists, America’s security professionals should endeavor to reduce these ambiguities to the greatest degree possible. Consider our uncertainty about al-Qaeda’s preference for attacking the U.S. homeland versus striking targets in Europe. If evidence were to reveal a strong preference for attacking certain geographic targets outside the United States over a sustained period of

⁶⁰ Grier, Peter and Faye Bowers. “Inside the Mind of Al Qaeda.” *The Christian Science Monitor*, October 13, 2004.

⁶¹ Woo, Gordon. “Understanding Terrorism Risk.” Risk Management Solutions, *The Risk Report*, January 2004.

time, our energy and resources might be more accurately focused to counter the threat. Likewise, if we determine that other terrorist groups are sufficiently motivated to attack the homeland but lack some final catalyst, such as approval from a state sponsor or the sanction of a religious authority, this discovery might compel us to concentrate on impeding that final activating mechanism.

Second, our recognition of the areas in which uncertainty exists may help policymakers identify counterterrorism strategies that should be pursued independently of our understanding of the peculiar objectives and tactics of our adversaries. Many security measures are discretionary and may be modified or even eliminated depending on the exigencies of the moment. Others, however, remain constant regardless of the security environment of the moment. On a small scale, baggage screening at airports and vehicle barriers around government buildings are examples of the latter variety of policies. On a grander scale there may be a number of more strategic security measures that should be pursued precisely because they maintain their relevance despite the ever-changing nature of the terrorist threat.

Reducing Uncertainty

The following recommendations concern efforts that should be made to reduce areas of uncertainty surrounding the terrorist threat that were identified in the course of the study.

Improve Understanding of al-Qaeda's Strategic Logic

Far from being the irrational actors of many Americans' imagination, al-Qaeda's leaders have often calibrated their operations with great sensitivity to achieving the radical Salafist movement's short- and long-term objectives. As such, many of the hypotheses analyzed in the report emphasize the perceptions and calculations of the group's senior leaders. Among these is the possibility that they have concluded that another large-scale attack on the U.S. homeland would be counter-productive or would distract them from more pressing priorities. Yet any speculation about these leaders' views on the wisdom of a follow-on attack will be incomplete without a more definitive understanding of what they originally hoped to achieve by attacking the United States. The wide divergence of opinion on this matter underscores the need for further analysis on al-Qaeda's tactical and strategic aims. The U.S. national security community should redouble its efforts to understand al-Qaeda's chief motivations and how its leaders perceive the group's tactical operations as contributing to the achievement of objectives. Informed by this improved understanding, U.S. policies can potentially be more effective in either overtly or subtly influencing terrorists' perception of the desirability of attacking the United States.

Identify Potential Leverage Points

A number of hypotheses center on al-Qaeda's relationship with its intended core constituency, the global Muslim ummah, and whether this audience views the group's operations favorably or unfavorably. Evidence presented in this study suggests that senior al-Qaeda leaders have evinced some sensitivity in the past to the Muslim world's reaction to the killing of civilians; in particular, the perception of the network by other radical Islamists has been seen to influence al-Qaeda's "public relations" efforts. The group's commissioning of fatwas to provide theological justification for its methods also suggests a desire to observe – or at least be seen as observing – Koranic precepts concerning the conduct of just war. In keeping with these observations, U.S. counterterrorism personnel should seek to identify potential leverage points that may be exploited to shape decisions by core al-Qaeda leaders, inspired jihadists, and others about whether to invest their energies in attacking the United States. In part, this effort will require a better understanding of how the Salafist movement

in general is perceived in the Muslim world and to what extent al-Qaeda's ideology resonates among the ummah. Attempting to reduce the appeal of this message should be a natural outgrowth of such an effort. One facet of this undertaking involves encouraging Muslim political and spiritual figures to take uncompromising stands against violent extremism. At present a general consensus holds that U.S. efforts in this arena have had little success and that without a more diligent effort, the answer to former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's famous question – "Are we capturing, killing or deterring and dissuading more terrorists every day than the madrassas and the radical clerics are recruiting, training and deploying against us?" – will likely be an emphatic "No."⁶²

Focus Beyond Core al-Qaeda

Though the preponderance of the analysis in this study focuses on Osama bin Laden's terrorist network, the U.S. government must not concentrate exclusively on al-Qaeda to the exclusion of less established terrorist entities and inspired individuals under the umbrella of the radical Salafist movement. Furthermore, non-Salafist groups represent a potential threat that has been largely overlooked as a result of the regional and nationalist objectives that animate most organizations within this category. Hezbollah in particular was singled out during the conference as an organization whose overseas attack capability may one day surprise us. The United States should thus strike a delicate balance: we must continue to focus on al-Qaeda and other Salafist jihadists while hedging against the threat from ostensibly regional organizations whose objectives and ideology can unexpectedly evolve. Crucially, the latter activity should avoid conflating disparate groups under the sometimes simplistic designation of "terrorists" and, by doing so, increasing rather than decreasing the threat that these organizations pose. As Daniel Byman notes, U.S. counterterrorism policy "must seek to avoid turning groups with primarily local aspirations into ones that share al-Qaeda's global agenda."⁶³

Non-Muslim groups, too, merit continued scrutiny, especially apocalyptic religious or ideological groups that may gain access to weapons of mass destruction. Many experts agree that the Oklahoma City bombings and 9/11 attacks have made large-scale terrorism increasingly unattractive to domestic extremist groups, who recognize the revulsion that such attacks would inevitably produce among their target audience. However, organizations that are oblivious to public opinion – for example, religious groups whose "audience" is otherworldly – may be less constrained in inflicting mass casualties. Another potential example cited was the potential danger of biological weapons in the hands of extreme environmentalists who may believe that causing a massive drop in the human population is necessary to reverse man-made environmental degradation.

Studying terrorist networks that possess the capability but not the motivation to attack the United States could also assist in efforts to dissuade these groups from viewing an attack on American interests as desirable. One example concerns a counterterrorism strategy that is occasionally mentioned in official documents but is rarely practiced: deterrence. The 2002 *National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction* notes that "one of the most difficult challenges we face is to prevent, deter, and defend against the acquisition and use of WMD by terrorist groups."⁶⁴ Though various efforts are in place to prevent terrorist acquisition of WMD and defend the homeland against their use, little direct investment

⁶² Kaplan, Fred. "Rumsfeld's Pentagon Papers." Slate.com, October 23, 2003.

⁶³ Byman, Daniel L. "Al-Qaeda as an Adversary: Do We Understand Our Enemy?" *World Politics*. October 2003.

⁶⁴ *National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction*. The White House, December 11, 2002.

appears to have been made to deter terrorists from attacking the United States.⁶⁵ Leaders of organizations such as Hezbollah undoubtedly have their own conception of what form an American response might take to attacks by their operatives. However, a more explicit clarification of the consequences of attacking the United States may discourage any ambitions that these groups harbor to attack the homeland.

Pursuing Independent Counterterrorism Strategies

In contrast to the strategies outlined above, which are tailored to respond to a more identifiable set of terrorist threats, the following efforts should be pursued regardless of the shifting motivations, tactics, and objectives of America's terrorist adversaries.

Recognize Potential for Unintended Consequences

As part of the effort to develop a long-term approach to combating violent extremism, U.S. decision-makers should be mindful of potential unintended consequences stemming from the nation's responses to the terrorist threat. One example concerns the degree to which U.S. counterterrorism policies affect the assimilation of U.S. Muslims into mainstream American society. This phenomenon may be especially pertinent to the question of why self-activated jihadist cells have not arisen in the United States to conduct small-scale suicide attacks of the sort that occurred in London and Madrid. One worrisome possibility is that heightened law enforcement and intelligence scrutiny of Muslim Americans, premised on the perception of their increased likelihood of being associated with terrorist activities, could be self-fulfilling. According to this hypothetical, policies that nurture Muslims' sense of persecution by their own government could erode the pattern of inclusion in mainstream society that arguably limits the appeal of militant Islam. The federal government's most recent *National Strategy for Homeland Security* acknowledges this danger, noting that

Potential catalysts for radicalization within Muslim American communities include feelings or perceptions of social discrimination that generate a sense of alienation from society and distrust of the government; perceptions of political and economic inequalities; and dissatisfaction with foreign and domestic U.S. policies viewed as hostile to Muslims.⁶⁶

According to this perspective, whatever short-term security advantages accrue from disproportionately monitoring this segment of society may ultimately be eclipsed by threats arising from Muslims who feel unwelcome and harassed in their own country. Other less obvious examples undoubtedly exist. Recognizing the danger of unintended consequences may help U.S. policymakers avoid precipitous responses in the aftermath of another attack.

Foster a National Psychology of Resiliency

Operating from the assumption that the terrorist threat to the homeland can never be fully extinguished, there is a need for investments that are designed to cultivate a culture of resilience to terrorism among the American people. The goal of such investments would be to ensure that future terrorist attacks do not result in public panic, economic paralysis, partisan recriminations over the assignment of blame, ethnic or religious scapegoating, or policy overreactions by public leaders. This effort to strengthen public resiliency would be especially important if the American people became convinced that vulnerability to terrorism

⁶⁵ This statement excludes the concept of deterrence-by-denial, in which an adversary is persuaded not to conduct an attack because the likelihood of achieving an objective is questionable. The practice of hardening domestic targets since 9/11 constitutes such a deterrence posture.

⁶⁶ *National Strategy for Homeland Security*. Homeland Security Council, October 2007.

is a truly national phenomenon; even after the 9/11 attacks, many Americans reasoned that those living outside major East Coast metropolitan areas were at little risk to terrorism.

Not least among the payoffs of such a psychology of resiliency could be to influence terrorists' targeting calculus by convincing them that attacks against the U.S. homeland will be unlikely to produce their desired effect. Increasing the public's understanding of terrorist motivations and objectives could help Americans avoid reactions to attacks that conform to the terrorists' wishes. Specific policy prescriptions would likely range from the concrete, such as increasing government agencies' consequence management capabilities, to the more abstract, such as not inadvertently overstating the terrorist threat.

Sustain Long-Term Support for Counterterrorism

In light of the belief – unverifiable but nonetheless widespread – that the six-year reprieve from terrorist attacks can be explained largely by active U.S. initiatives, a logical question was posed during the conference: Can the intensity of the current counterterrorism effort, encompassing both tangible activities such as target hardening and more intangible factors such as the general public's vigilance, be sustained over the long-term? Many government statements, such as those reminding the American people of the “long war” against violent extremism, have quietly acknowledged the concern that public complacency may grow with each year that passes since 9/11.⁶⁷ Perhaps even more alarming is the potential that outright hostility to counterterrorism policies will develop, signs of which have arguably begun to emerge already. Impatience with inconvenient domestic security measures continues to percolate; legal challenges to and congressional scrutiny of domestic surveillance policies have become commonplace; and opposition to the Iraq war and dissatisfaction over setbacks in Afghanistan have increased. In short, maintaining support for the Global War on Terror and guarding against adverse consequences stemming from its prosecution will likely remain challenges for America's public leaders in the next decades.

⁶⁷ 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review.

Section III: Analysis of the Individual Hypotheses

Literature Search

The process of identifying, categorizing, and analyzing the various hypotheses included in this study began with an initial review of the literature that explicitly addressed homeland attack frequency since 9/11. This literature base included a number of relatively cursory treatments in news magazines such as the New York piece, “Reasons They Haven’t Hit Us Again,” the Telegraph’s “Why New York Hasn’t Been Attacked Again,” and Slate’s “Safer Than You Think: The Security We’ve Enjoyed Since September 11 Isn’t Just a Matter of Dumb Luck.” More scholarly examinations of the subject included reports such as the RAND Corporation study, “Exploring Terrorist Targeting Preferences” and Terrorism Monitor’s “Three Explanations for al-Qaeda’s Lack of a CBRN Attack.”

Moving beyond this narrow focus, the literature search was expanded to include government reports, congressional testimony, political periodicals, scholarly journals, media interviews, and privately funded analyses that offered insight into the question of homeland attack frequency. In the case of news publications, a strenuous effort was made to rely on mainstream, ideologically-neutral periodicals whose reporting and analysis is consistent with high journalistic standards. To the extent that publications were used that are associated with a particular ideological persuasion, such as the right-leaning National Review or the left-leaning New Republic, care was taken to ensure that readers would be aware of the source of information. Regardless of the source, the data and quotations included in the report are footnoted as meticulously as possible to allow for further study as desired.

When appropriate, primary source terrorist materials used incorporated in the analysis, including intercepted communications, propaganda statements, and English translations of jihadist manifestos. However, the overwhelming majority of the material identified in the literature search and used in the analysis was produced either in the United States or other English-speaking countries, especially the United Kingdom. This practice of drawing largely from American and allied sources represents an obvious shortcoming in that the study findings reflect a largely Western-centric perspective. However, given the limited time and resources allocated to the study team, this deficiency was unavoidable.

Classification

As with any unclassified study that relies upon open-source material, researching the question of homeland attack frequency was constrained to some degree by the lack of access to classified information. Nevertheless, open-source analysis of this subject is not only possible, but in many ways adds value that might be absent in a study that is based largely on classified information. First, the identification of a wide spectrum of hypotheses provides a helpful starting point that individuals with access to classified information may use to assess which of the theories are most compelling. The available material also allows for the grouping of the hypotheses into analytically useful categories, which further assists in assessing their strength. Additionally, a number of key analytic issues were identified that have merit regardless of the particular list of hypotheses being examined or the strength of the evidence associated with each theory. One such example is the demonstration that certain hypotheses or categories of hypotheses have greater applicability depending on the character of a particular terrorist organization or the differing capabilities and motivations of the individuals that comprise them.

Perhaps most importantly, a great number of both producers and potential consumers of information concerning homeland attack frequency operate outside of the classified realm. Many of the world's foremost experts on terrorists' motivations, targeting preferences, and other characteristics lack security clearances and thus do not have access to guarded information. While government analysts are obviously capable of harnessing such expertise, there is some uncertainty about the extent to which they do so. Likewise, officials at various levels of government often make policy decisions related to homeland security without access to the nation's most closely kept secrets. To the extent that this report and others like it provide useful insights, such information should be accessible beyond the narrow domain of cleared government personnel.

The study can also help facilitate debate concerning why the homeland has not been attacked again among individuals who are outside of the national security community, including private citizens. Sustaining broad-based support for the Global War on Terror among the American people requires an understanding of how counterterrorism policies and other phenomena have contributed to the non-occurrence of another attack. This demands that citizens be informed, or at least have the opportunity to be informed, about the factors that lie at the heart of this question.

Despite the advantages of open-source analysis, the authors acknowledge that frontline intelligence personnel, law enforcement officers, and members of the armed forces undoubtedly possess information that could clarify many of the hypotheses, if not produce several altogether new ones. Thus, some humility is in order when making assumptions, however well-reasoned, that cannot be confirmed without particularly rarified information. Consider one example: A New York Times report on the fifth anniversary of 9/11 asked ten public figures to answer two intertwined questions: "What is one major reason the United States has not suffered a major attack since 2001, and what is the one thing you would recommend the nation do in order to avoid attacks in the future?"⁶⁸ Former Middle East-based CIA operative Melissa Boyle Mahle, who left the Agency in 2002, answered the first question unequivocally: "Though it may not be immediately apparent to the casual viewer, Al Qaeda is attacking when and where it chooses...It has not hit America because it has chosen not to."⁶⁹ Intelligence personnel with more recent and direct knowledge of counterterrorism operations against al-Qaeda might bristle at such an unqualified explanation. In light of this understanding, the authors are under no illusions of having presented a definitive body of evidence for each hypothesis.

Methodology

Once identified from the survey of the relevant literature, each of the individual hypotheses addressed in the study was analyzed using the following methodology:

First, each hypothesis is summarized by a series of quotes derived in the course of the literature search. These quotes reflect the perspectives of a variety of commentators, from elected officials and government personnel to journalists and scholars to terrorist spokesmen and ideologues. Most often the quotations either reinforce or flatly contradict the hypotheses with which they are associated. In some cases quotations are included simply to add texture, context, or nuance to a particular hypothesis.

Second, several critical assumptions for each hypothesis are set out that must be generally true for a hypothesis to have explanatory power. These assumptions were derived deductively from the arguments put forward by proponents of the various hypotheses. Their

⁶⁸ "10 Ways to Avoid the Next 9/11." *The New York Times*, September 10, 2006.

⁶⁹ Mahle, Melissa Boyle. "We Can't Kill an Ideology." *The New York Times*, September 10, 2006.

utility lies in helping to distinguish between phenomena that may be true but may also be inconsequential and phenomena that have genuine validity in explaining the non-occurrence of another large-scale attack. To cite one example, Hypothesis E posits that crackdowns on private financing of terrorism have constrained terrorists' ability to conduct attacks on the homeland. While the hypothesis may be true, it may also be wholly irrelevant if al-Qaeda has consciously chosen not to attack the United States again because of its pursuit of other objectives.

It should be noted that a number of these critical assumptions, if viewed outside the context of the methodological structure, may convey an endorsement of the hypothesis in question that the authors do not intend. For example, among the assumptions underlying Hypothesis C, which posits that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have drawn jihadists away from the homeland, is the following statement: "In prosecuting the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States has killed, captured or otherwise occupied the attention of more terrorists than have been created as a result of Muslim anger over U.S. foreign policy." The study makes no attempt to support or refute this notion; it merely suggests that the statement must generally be true for the hypothesis to be persuasive.

Third, the paper sets out supporting and contradictory evidence for each hypothesis. This evidence reflects the authors' judgment and is intended to be a jumping-off point for further discussion. Readers may question some of the evidence or desire to put forward additional information that has not been addressed. Naturally, some evidence fits more than one hypothesis, just as data that supports one hypothesis may contradict another. Several different forms of evidence also stand out, including known terrorist operations, public statements or captured communications from terrorist leaders, and inferences that can be drawn from such established data points. While executed terrorist attacks offer relatively unambiguous opportunities for study, terrorists' public statements must be critically examined to account for the authoritativeness of the source, deliberate attempts to mislead, and the terrorists' target audience.

Less straightforward evidence can take the form of reasoned speculation or argument about "the facts" that, while more abstract, can be applied to support or cast doubt on a particular hypothesis. Where applicable, this study offers such speculation as "evidence" with the understanding that it often cannot be definitively proven or disproven. For example, the lack of attacks against "soft" domestic targets such as shopping malls is not evidence per se of al-Qaeda's decision to refrain from all but the grandest operations within the homeland. However, the relative ease of such attacks suggests that the absence of low-intensity terrorism on American soil is more a function of al-Qaeda's attack preference than its capabilities. To the extent that the quotes introducing the hypotheses contain data or empirical observations from the speaker's professional experience, they, too, constitute a form of evidence.

In the interest of being comprehensive, the paper presents a relatively lengthy and diverse set of hypotheses. As such, some hypotheses partially overlap with others. Moreover, some hypotheses are self-evidently more compelling than others. No single hypothesis appears fully correct or fully satisfactory – or completely incorrect or wholly unsatisfactory. Taken together, however, the analysis that follows provides a framework that may help to identify the implications of the non-occurrence of the "next 9/11" for U.S. counterterrorism policies, including the allocation of resources, operational priorities, intelligence focus, and other activities.

Basket I: Limitations on terrorist capabilities due to actions undertaken by the United States and its allies.

Hypothesis A	U.S. homeland security efforts and general public vigilance have made large-scale domestic attacks more difficult to conduct.
Hypothesis B	U.S. and allied counterterrorism operations have prevented al-Qaeda from training recruits and forced its leaders to focus more on survival than planning attacks.
Hypothesis C	The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have succeeded in drawing jihadists away from the U.S. homeland.
Hypothesis D	Reduced state support for terrorism since 9/11 has constrained terrorists' ability to conduct large-scale attacks on the U.S. homeland.
Hypothesis E	Crackdowns on private financing of terrorism since 9/11 have constrained terrorists' ability to conduct large-scale attacks on the U.S. homeland.

The first bin of explanatory hypotheses is summarized in the opening of the July 2007 National Intelligence Estimate (NIE), which assesses that “greatly increased worldwide counterterrorism efforts over the past five years have constrained the ability of al-Qa’ida to attack the U.S. Homeland again and have led terrorist groups to perceive the Homeland as a harder target to strike than on 9/11.”⁷⁰ Specifically, the United States has undertaken two broad categories of policies akin to “offense” and “defense” in sporting parlance – counterterrorism efforts, both at home and overseas, designed to disrupt terrorist networks before they are able to conduct attacks and domestic homeland security initiatives designed to make the U.S. homeland more difficult terrain for terrorists to navigate.

Overseas, the cardinal objective of the Global War on Terror has been, in the words of President Bush, “taking the fight to the enemy” – killing or capturing terrorist operatives, hamstringing their financial support network, preventing access to lethal weapons and undercutting state support for terrorism.⁷¹ Illustrated most dramatically by the U.S.-led campaign to evict al-Qaeda from Afghanistan, this effort encompasses the full toolkit of America’s intelligence and military capabilities. The global nature of the campaign relies on the close cooperation of allied governments and, in some cases, the coercion of unfriendly regimes to ensure that terrorists remain isolated, insecure and on the run.

On the home front, security measures have been put in place not only to increase the difficulty of conducting attacks, but also to influence terrorists’ perception of the “hardness” of domestic targets. Such efforts have largely focused on identifying the individuals who might launch domestic attacks and the means with which they would do so. The focus on the human element of the terrorist threat is often associated with the increased scrutiny of U.S. resident aliens from countries of concern, as well as visitors to the United States. Other policies have emphasized increasing America’s protection from mass-casualty weapons, such as the installation of radiation detectors in U.S. ports and major metropolitan areas.

Among the myriad U.S. counterterrorism policies enacted since 9/11, the role of the Iraq war has unquestionably been the most controversial; indeed, its very inclusion as part of the Global War on Terror is hotly contested in many quarters. Nevertheless, according to one hypothesis contained within this basket, the U.S. occupation of Iraq has become a

⁷⁰ National Intelligence Estimate, “The Terrorist Threat to the U.S. Homeland.” July 17, 2007.

⁷¹ Bush, George W. “President Discusses Global War on Terror.” Washington, D.C. September 5, 2006.

terrorist “flypaper” in which jihadists from across the globe have been drawn away from the United States and other Western targets. While acknowledging that “most of al Qaida in Iraq’s rank and file fighters and some of its leadership are Iraqi,” President Bush and other members of the intelligence and military communities argue that attacking the U.S. homeland would be attractive to many of the group’s militants in the absence of American targets in Iraq. In a July 2007 speech concerning the Iraq war, the president asserted that, “If we were not fighting these al Qaida extremists and terrorists in Iraq, they would not be leading productive lives of service and charity. *Most* would be trying to kill Americans and other civilians elsewhere – in Afghanistan, or other foreign capitals, or on the streets of our own cities [Emphasis added].”⁷²

⁷² Bush, George W. “President Bush Discusses War on Terror in South Carolina.” Charleston, South Carolina, July 24, 2007.

Hypothesis A) U.S. homeland security efforts and general public vigilance have made large-scale domestic attacks more difficult to conduct.

“Why has al-Qa’eda not repeated the attacks it staged in New York and Washington six years ago to the day? Because it can’t.”⁷³ – Judith Miller, *The Telegraph*, September 2007.

“Because of al-Qaeda’s own mistakes, and because of the things the United States and its allies have done right, al-Qaeda’s ability to inflict direct damage in America or on Americans has been sharply reduced.”⁷⁴ – James Fallows, *The Atlantic Monthly*, September 2006.

“Today, when a gasoline tanker truck goes missing, a quantity of dynamite is stolen from a quarry or a suspicious person attempts to buy a quantity of ammonium nitrate fertilizer, people quickly report these incidents and alerts are issued. This simply did not happen prior to 9/11.”⁷⁵ – Fred Burton and Scott Stewart, *Stratfor*, July 2007.

“The country has made great strides toward improving the security of our homeland since September 11th. Whether by land, sea, or air, it is now substantially more difficult for terrorists to enter the United States; homeland security professionals are sharing information like never before; and America’s citizens are better prepared for a natural disaster or terrorist attack.”⁷⁶ -- Department of Homeland Security Fact Sheet.

Critical Assumptions

- Attacking the U.S. homeland again remains a high priority of al-Qaeda and possibly other terrorist networks.
- Terrorists have attempted to attack the U.S. homeland since 9/11 and have been thwarted; alternatively, terrorists have refrained from attempting new attacks because of their perception that the changed domestic security landscape has diminished their prospects for success.
- Widely publicized gaps in domestic security, including the ease of illegal passage across U.S. borders and the vulnerability of the nation’s critical infrastructure, are not sufficient to allow for terrorist exploitation.

Supporting evidence

- Between September 2001 and December 2006, the U.S. Congress appropriated more than \$270 billion in homeland security funding.⁷⁷
- Numerous U.S. government agencies have been established or comprehensively reorganized – with new authorities and instrumentalities added – to improve homeland security. These include the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, the Department of Homeland Security, the Transportation Security Administration, and the Homeland Security Council. State and local homeland security and intelligence offices such as the Intelligence Division of the New York Police Department have complemented federal activities.

⁷³ Miller, Judith. “Why New York hasn’t been attacked again.” *The Telegraph*, September 11, 2007.

⁷⁴ Fallows, James. “Declaring Victory.” *The Atlantic Monthly*, September 2006.

⁷⁵ Burton, Fred and Scott Stewart. “Al Qaeda and the Strategic Threat to the U.S. Homeland. *Stratfor Terrorism Intelligence Report*. July 25, 2007.

⁷⁶ Department of Homeland Security Fact Sheet, “An Overview of America’s Security Since 9/11.”

⁷⁷ De Rugy, Veronique. “Facts and Figures about Homeland Security.” *American Enterprise Institute*, December 14, 2006.

- Cooperation between U.S. military, intelligence and law enforcement agencies – and among U.S. and foreign intelligence services – has improved considerably. Emblematic of this improved cooperation is the National Counterterrorism Center, which was established to facilitate the sharing of information among CIA, FBI and other intelligence and law enforcement personnel.⁷⁸
- Policies concerning immigration and visitation to the United States have been made more stringent, and domestic surveillance of suspicious persons has increased, conceivably constraining terrorists' ability to operate in the United States.^{79,80} (U.S. immigration policies are known to have influenced al-Qaeda operations even before 9/11: at least three would-be hijackers were dropped from the 9/11 plot due to their inability to obtain U.S. entry visas; no attempt appears to have been made to smuggle them into the country illegally.)^{81,82}
- Heightened vigilance among U.S. intelligence, homeland security and law enforcement personnel, as well as the general American public, has disrupted a number of domestic terrorist attacks and increased the difficulty of concealing plots.
 - In July 2003, Jordanian national Ra'ed Mansour al-Banna was denied entry at Chicago's O'Hare Airport by a Customs and Border Protection officer. According to U.S. officials, al-Banna later conducted a suicide car bombing in Iraq in February 2005 that killed 132 people.⁸³
 - A U.S. government database composed of lists maintained by the TSA, FBI and State Department prevented the entry into the United States of Egyptian Omar Ahmed Ali, who later conducted a suicide bombing in Qatar in 2005.⁸⁴
 - Concerned citizens have alerted authorities to numerous domestic terrorist cells and plots, including the Lackawanna Six in 2002, Sayed Abdul Malike in 2003, James Elshafay and Shahawar Matin Siraj in 2004, and the Fort Dix Six in 2007.

Contradictory evidence

“For all its accomplishments, the federal government’s efforts to protect America at home have failed to articulate an overarching homeland security architecture, one with a specific structure, requirements, priorities, and timelines for implementation. Today, the most important question – are we prepared? – cannot be answered, mainly because the government’s response to the terrorist threat remains by and large ad hoc and incomplete.”⁸⁵ – David Heyman and Eric Ridge, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 2006.

“[T]he Department of Homeland Security...has earned its reputation as the most dysfunctional agency in all of government. It has played little role in keeping us safe since 9/11....If after spending some \$20 billion on securing the nation’s airways since 9/11 we are still vulnerable in the skies, one shudders to think how much more vulnerable our seaports, land borders, mass transit systems, chemical plants and ‘soft targets’ like shopping malls and sports arenas are to terrorist attack.”⁸⁶ – Clark Kent Ervin, former DHS Inspector General, September 2006.

⁷⁸ Kean, Thomas H. and Lee H. Hamilton. “Are we safer today?” *The Washington Post*, September 9, 2007.

⁷⁹ Benjamin, Daniel and Steven Simon. “Muslims in America – and Europe.” *The Globalist*, February 22, 2006.

⁸⁰ Weisberg, Jacob. “Five Years Free: Why Haven’t We Been Attacked Again?” *Slate.com*, September 6, 2006.

⁸¹ “Suspect ‘reveals 9/11 planning.’” *BBC News*, September 22, 2003.

⁸² “This One, They Didn’t Let In.” *CBS News*, June 6, 2002.

⁸³ Bonner, Robert C. Remarks before the American Society of Travel Agents, Montreal, Canada, November 7, 2005.

⁸⁴ Nakashima, Ellen. “Terror Suspect List Yields Few Arrests.” *The Washington Post*, August 25, 2007.

⁸⁵ Heyman, David and Eric Ridge. “America’s Domestic Security.” CSIS, 2006. pp. 16.

⁸⁶ Ervin, C.K. “10 Ways to Avoid the Next 9/11: Qaeda Set the Bar High.” *The New York Times*, September 10, 2006.

“The deeply classified debate over why Zawahiri had called off the [potassium cyanide] attacks [on the New York City subway system], meanwhile, shed its old self-congratulatory thesis that this might be due to the pressure the United States was putting on al Qaeda’s structure. That line of analysis gave way to growing evidence that al Qaeda might not have been trying to attack the United States in the three years since its singular triumph of 9/11.”⁸⁷ – Ron Suskind, *The One Percent Doctrine*, 2006.

“The terrible losses our country suffered on 9/11 should have catalyzed efforts to create an America that is safer, stronger and wiser. We still have a long way to go.”⁸⁸ – Thomas H. Kean and Lee H. Hamilton, 9/11 Commission, September 2007.

- According to a 2007 Government Accountability Office report released shortly before the sixth anniversary of 9/11, the Department of Homeland Security had achieved fewer than half of the 171 objectives set forth at the establishment of the department.^{89,90}
- The final report on the implementation of the 9/11 Commission’s 41 recommendations awarded five F’s (e.g., risk-based homeland security funds and airline passenger pre-screening) and 12 D’s (e.g., critical infrastructure assessment, checked bag and cargo screening, international collaboration on borders and document security, and government-wide information sharing).⁹¹
- Anecdotal evidence reveals substantial remaining gaps in homeland security:
 - Security enhancements for General Aviation – which make up more than 75 percent of all domestic flights – have not corresponded to the measures enacted to prevent terrorist bombings and hijackings of commercial passenger airliners. A March 2005 New York Times piece on a joint DHS-FBI report pointed to intelligence indicating that al-Qaeda has expressed interest in hijacking chartered aircraft.⁹²
 - According to a 2006 CSIS report, five years after 9/11 less than 15 percent of commercial aircraft cargo is screened for explosives.⁹³
 - In April 2007, DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff raised concern that “clean skin” terrorists with no detectable links to terrorism could enter the United States under the Visa Waiver Program, which allows more than 18 million people from 27 designated countries to visit the United States annually for up to 90 days without a visa.⁹⁴
 - Entry into the United States represents no significant obstacle to terrorists. The Border Patrol estimates that only 20-30 percent of the 3-4 million immigrants who illegally cross U.S. borders each year are apprehended.⁹⁵
 - Considerable quantities of narcotics are imported into the United States despite more than \$12 billion spent annually in the nation’s War on

⁸⁷ Suskind, Ron. *The One Percent Doctrine*. pp. 340.

⁸⁸ Kean, Thomas H. and Lee H. Hamilton. “Are we safer today?” *The Washington Post*, September 9, 2007.

⁸⁹ Hsu, Spencer S. “GAO Criticizes Homeland Security’s Efforts to Fulfill Its Mission.” *The Washington Post*, September 6, 2007.

⁹⁰ Government Accountability Office report, “Department of Homeland Security: Progress Report on Implementation of Mission and Management Functions.” GAO-07-454, August 17, 2007.

⁹¹ “Final Report on 9/11 Commission Recommendations.” December 5, 2005

⁹² Lichtblau, Eric. “Security Report on U.S. Aviation Warns of Holes.” *The New York Times*, March 14, 2005.

⁹³ Heyman, David and Eric Ridge. “America’s Domestic Security.” CSIS, 2006. pp. 18.

⁹⁴ Harnden, Toby. “Britain ‘could stage another September 11.’” *The Daily Telegraph*, April 7, 2007.

⁹⁵ Hibbard, Wilthea J. and Robert J. Greenwalt, Jr. “Between Ports of Entry: Interdicting Radiological and Nuclear Smugglers.” Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, January 27, 2006. pp. i.

Drugs.⁹⁶ As nuclear terrorism expert Graham Allison has observed, “Anyone who doubts that terrorists could smuggle a nuclear warhead into New York City should note that they could always wrap it in a bale of marijuana.”⁹⁷

- In March 2007, the DHS Inspector General reported that the backlog of fugitive aliens – non-citizens who fail to depart the United States following an official order of removal – had increased from 331,734 in September 2001 to 623,292 in August 2006.⁹⁸
- According to author Ron Suskind’s book *The One Percent Doctrine*, in 2003 Ayman al-Zawahiri allegedly called off a hydrogen cyanide attack on the New York City subway that was in the final stages of preparation. If genuine, al-Zawahiri’s decision suggests that al-Qaeda has refrained from attacks by choice rather than its inability to overcome U.S. countermeasures.^{99,100}
- A multiyear period between al-Qaeda’s large-scale attacks was typical of the network’s long planning cycles before 9/11, and the intense pressure that has been placed on al-Qaeda since 9/11 may have increased the length of this cycle:
 - More than five years elapsed between Khalid Sheikh Mohammed’s conception of the 9/11 plan and the date of the attack.¹⁰¹ The same time period was required to plan and carry out the 1998 embassy bombings.¹⁰² Planning for the 2000 U.S.S. Cole bombing took four years.¹⁰³
 - While the planning cycle for al-Qaeda attacks in the post-9/11 era seems to have shortened – for example, the 2002 Bali bombing took only eight months to prepare – this shortened cycle may reflect the comparative “softness” of foreign targets, the greater ease of operatives’ movement in predominantly Muslim countries and the smaller scale of the attacks.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁶ Teslik, Lee Hudson. “The Forgotten Drug War.” Council on Foreign Relations backgrounder, April 6, 2006.

⁹⁷ Allison, Graham. “Russia’s ‘Loose Nukes’: The continuing threat to American security.” *Harvard Magazine*, Vol. 103, No. 1. pp. 34-35, September-October 2000.

⁹⁸ Taylor, James. Testimony before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security, March 27, 2007.

⁹⁹ Hosenball, Mark. “Too Close for Comfort.” *Newsweek*, June 18, 2006.

¹⁰⁰ Suskind, Ron. *The One Percent Doctrine*. pp. 218-220.

¹⁰¹ “Suspect ‘reveals 9/11 planning.’” BBC News, September 22, 2003.

¹⁰² Rabasa, et. al. “Beyond al-Qaeda: The Global Jihadist Movement.” RAND, 2006. pp. 25.

¹⁰³ Rabasa, et. al.

¹⁰⁴ Rabasa, et. al.

Hypothesis B) U.S. and allied counterterrorism operations have prevented al-Qaeda from training new operatives and forced its leaders to focus more on survival than planning attacks.

“Offensive action abroad has protected the homeland. Our military presence in Afghanistan and our aggressive policies around the globe have seriously disrupted the enemy. Through a mix of military and paramilitary action, pre-emptive strikes, deterrent threats and surveillance we have captured many terrorist leaders, destroyed training camps and structures of communication and control, and uncovered valuable intelligence troves.”¹⁰⁵ – Jack L. Goldsmith and Adrian Vermeule, Harvard University, September 2006.

“The al-Qaeda that existed in 2001 simply no longer exists. In 2001 it was a relatively centralized organization, with a planning hub, a propaganda hub, a leadership team, all within a narrow geographic area. All that is gone, because we destroyed it.”¹⁰⁶ – David Kilcullen, U.S. Department of State, September 2006.

“Al-Qaeda’s core leadership no longer has effective global command and control of its networks. The few enemy leaders that have avoided death or capture find themselves isolated and on the run....At the global level, al-Qaeda leaders are less and less able to offer practical support and leadership to their affiliated networks, because of the need to remain constantly on the run and in hiding.”¹⁰⁷ – Hank Crumpton, former CIA operative, June 2006.

“[Al-Qaeda’s] operational structures have been badly disrupted by the arrest or killing of hundreds of its operatives. Its Afghan sanctuary has long ago been destroyed, and it no longer has a central campus where recruits drawn from all over the world by the allure of global jihad can be trained. Instead, the movement has been forcibly decentralized, subject to ongoing harassment by intelligence and security services in all of its traditional stomping grounds and target zones...”¹⁰⁸ – Tony Karon, *Time*, August 2006.

Critical Assumptions

- The death or capture of key al-Qaeda operatives and planners has convinced the group’s surviving leaders that the threat to their safety is considerable. The energy and resources they consequently expend on avoiding capture and concealing communications necessarily subtracts from their ability to conduct large-scale attacks, especially against hardened U.S. targets.
- The crackdown on al-Qaeda after 9/11 has impacted not only the core leadership and organizational infrastructure in Afghanistan, but also the network’s dispersed operatives on other continents, severely diminishing al-Qaeda’s operational capacity.
- The lack of a centralized organization – complete with territory for training, lines of communication between operatives and commanders, and financing channels – makes large-scale attacks more difficult for al-Qaeda to execute.
- The support that al-Qaeda enjoys from resurgent Taliban forces in Afghanistan and tribal leaders in Pakistan has been insufficient to compensate for the loss of its pre-9/11 Afghanistan sanctuary.
- The present operational tempo and funding levels of U.S. military, intelligence and law enforcement counterterrorism activities overseas must be sustained if future terrorist attacks are to be deflected.

¹⁰⁵ Goldsmith, Jack L. and Adrian Vermeule. “10 Ways to Avoid the Next 9/11: How War Can Bring Peace.” *The New York Times*, September 10, 2006.

¹⁰⁶ Fallows, James. “Declaring Victory.” *The Atlantic Monthly*, September 2006.

¹⁰⁷ Crumpton, Henry A. Testimony before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, June 13, 2006.

¹⁰⁸ Karon, Tony. “How the Plot Underscores al-Qaeda’s Weakness.” *Time*, August 10, 2006.

Supporting evidence

- Numerous terrorist plots against the United States have been disrupted since 9/11, including large-scale attacks that potentially could have rivaled the 9/11 death toll. In August 2006, British authorities arrested 24 British Muslims in the final stages of an alleged plot to bring down as many as 12 commercial aircraft en route between Britain and the United States using liquid explosives.¹⁰⁹
- U.S. personnel have killed or captured numerous key al-Qaeda operatives, including 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, military commander Mohammed Atef, 9/11 coordinator Ramzi Binalshibh, U.S.S. Cole mastermind Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri, logistical coordinator Abu Zubaydah, and al-Qaeda in Iraq leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Approximately 775 detainees have been held at the Guantanamo Bay detention facility since its inception.¹¹⁰
- In January 2006, acting on intelligence concerning Ayman al-Zawahiri's whereabouts, U.S. aircraft launched strikes on the Pakistani village of Damadola, killing more than a dozen people.¹¹¹ Such attacks may reinforce the belief among al-Qaeda leaders' that their lives are constantly in danger.
- The lack of a publicly known, easily accessible base of operations such as the sanctuary that al-Qaeda enjoyed in Afghanistan prior to December 2001 increases the difficulty that would-be jihadists face in locating "credentialed" terrorist operatives for training, instruction and operational resources.¹¹² According to a *New Yorker* profile of American-born al-Qaeda spokesman Adam Gadahn, "there was little evidence of coordinated recruitment, coercion, or brainwashing [of al-Qaeda operatives]. Al Qaeda's leaders waited for aspiring jihadists to come to them – and then accepted only a small percentage."¹¹³ (9/11 pilots Mohammed Atta, Hani Hanjour, Marwan al-Shehhi, and Ziad Jarrah each attended terrorist training camps in Afghanistan, where they personally met with Osama bin Laden and received critical instruction pertaining to the 9/11 plot.)
- Anecdotal evidence since the start of the Global War on Terror suggests that al-Qaeda has been greatly weakened by U.S. and allied counterterrorism operations:
 - Following the death of al-Zarqawi in June 2006, a letter believed to have been written by al-Qaeda operative Atiyah Abd al-Rahman in December 2005 was recovered from Zarqawi's safe-house. Al-Rahman wrote to Zarqawi that al-Qaeda's leaders in Waziristan "wish that they had a way to talk to you and advise you, and to guide and instruct you; however, they too are occupied with vicious enemies here. They are also weak, and we ask God that He strengthen them and mend their fractures."¹¹⁴
- Various U.S. and allied mechanisms to restrict access to WMD have been strengthened since 2001, including the creation of the Proliferation Security Initiative.¹¹⁵ For example, following al-Qaeda's 2003 attempted shoot down of an Israeli passenger jet in Kenya, U.S.-led efforts to combat the threat from man-

¹⁰⁹ Laville, Sandra, et. al. "A plot to commit murder on an unimaginable scale." *The Guardian*, August 11, 2006.

¹¹⁰ Dedman, Bill. "In limbo: Cases are few against Gitmo detainees." MSNBC.com, October 24, 2006.

¹¹¹ Khan, Habibullah and Brian Ross. "U.S. Strike Killed Al Qaeda Bomb Maker." ABC News, January 18, 2006.

¹¹² Fallows, James. "Declaring Victory." *The Atlantic Monthly*, September 2006.

¹¹³ Khatchadourian, Raffi. "Azzam the American." *The New Yorker*, January 22, 2007.

¹¹⁴ DeYoung, Karen. "Letter Gives Glimpse of Al-Qaeda's Leadership." *The Washington Post*, October 2, 2006.

¹¹⁵ Kaplan, Eben. "The Proliferation Security Initiative." Council on Foreign Relations, October 19, 2006.

portable, shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles have resulted in 18,500 missiles being destroyed in 17 countries.¹¹⁶

Contradictory evidence

“Given the length of al Qaeda’s most ambitious planning cycles in the past, it is impossible to be confident yet that the absence of such attacks in the United States means that bin Laden’s previous headquarters-supported pursuit of spectacular violence on American soil has been fully disrupted.”¹¹⁷ – Steve Coll, Aspen Strategy Group report, July 2005.

“Al Qaeda was very much on the ropes four, five years ago at the end of Operation Enduring Freedom. Its leadership, I would say, was on the run then. I don’t see it being on the run right now.”¹¹⁸ – Bruce Riedel, Saban Center for Middle East Policy, June 2007.

“Many U.S., Pakistani and European intelligence officials now agree that al-Qaeda’s ability to launch operations around the globe didn’t diminish after the invasion of Afghanistan as much as previously thought.”¹¹⁹ – Craig Whitlock, *The Washington Post*, September 9, 2007.

- Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri remain at large and continue to provide some degree of inspiration, guidance and support to followers.
- Al-Qaeda attacks have continued without relent on several continents even after the loss of the group’s Afghanistan sanctuary in December 2001.¹²⁰
- Lawless areas in the Anbar province of Iraq and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan have provided new quasi-sanctuaries for al-Qaeda to establish training bases and plan attacks.
- Documents uncovered in two laptops during a raid on an al-Qaeda cell in Gujarat, Pakistan in July 2004 revealed a plot to attack financial targets in the United States. Much of the surveillance occurred before 9/11, and preparations for the attack possibly continued until months before the raid, suggesting a continuity of operations that was unaffected by the post-9/11 crackdown.¹²¹
- Thousands of web sites affiliated with or sympathetic to al-Qaeda have created what CSIS scholar Arnaud de Borchgrave calls a “virtual caliphate in cyberspace” that facilitates terrorist recruitment, ideological indoctrination, transmission of bomb-making instruction and other operational skills.¹²²
- Once set in motion, responsibility for conducting the 9/11 attacks was often delegated downward to field commanders, e.g., Mohammed Atta and Ramzi Binalshibh. Large-scale attacks planned before the ouster of al-Qaeda from Afghanistan may be in the final stages of preparation.

¹¹⁶ Hillen, John. Testimony before the House International Relations Subcommittee on International Terrorism and Nonproliferation, March 30, 2006.

¹¹⁷ Coll, Steve. “Al Qaeda’s Evolution Since September 11.” Aspen Strategy Group report, 2006. pp. 26.

¹¹⁸ “Al Qaeda Rising?” Council on Foreign Relations meeting, June 1, 2007.

¹¹⁹ Whitlock, Craig. “The New Al-Qaeda Central.” *The Washington Post*, September 9, 2007.

¹²⁰ Many al-Qaeda experts dispute this notion, arguing that few of the terrorist attacks since 9/11 that are commonly ascribed to al-Qaeda have been the work of the core network headed by Osama bin Laden. Rather, most have been carried out by regional groups and individuals who have grafted themselves to the al-Qaeda movement.

¹²¹ Pincus, Walter and John Mintz. “Pakistani-U.S. Raid Uncovered Terrorist Cell’s Surveillance Data.” *The Washington Post*, August 2, 2004.

¹²² de Borchgrave, Arnaud. Testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on International Terrorism, Nonproliferation and Trade, October 28, 2005.

Hypothesis C) The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have succeeded in drawing jihadists away from the U.S. homeland.

“This is what I would call a terrorist magnet, where America, being present here in Iraq, creates a target of opportunity, if you will. But this is exactly where we want to fight them....We prepared for them, and this will prevent the American people from having to go through their attacks back in the United States.”¹²³ – Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, former commander of ground forces in Iraq, 2003.

“It shouldn’t be surprising, then, that all available foot soldiers are being deployed on the main battlefield [in Iraq] and not being squandered in a low-percentage attempt to board heavily screened planes or otherwise penetrate heightened U.S. homeland security....By taking the fight to Iraq, we’ve concentrated terrorism far from home; anti-American forces don’t need to travel 6,000 miles to attack New York when there are Americans right there in Baghdad.”¹²⁴ – Christopher McDougall, *New York Magazine*, December 2004.

“Iraq is a great black hole that is sucking up all the [jihadist] elements in Europe.”¹²⁵ – French antiterrorist judge Jean-Louis Bruguiere, 2005.

“The Americans magnify [al-Qaida’s] role, even though they are responsible for a minority of resistance operations – remember that the Americans brought al-Qaida to Iraq.”¹²⁶ – “Dr. Zubeidy,” spokesman for the Iraqi insurgent group Ansar al-Sunna, July 2007.

“As unpopular as it is to say, in many ways Iraq has served as a sort of jihadist magnet, drawing young men from around the world to ‘martyr’ themselves. Pragmatically, every young jihadist who travels from Europe or the Middle East to die in Baghdad or Ar Ramadi is one less who could attack Boston, London, Brussels or Rome.”¹²⁷ – Fred Burton and Scott Stewart, *Stratfor*, October 2007.

Critical Assumptions

- Simultaneous campaigns against U.S. domestic targets and coalition military personnel in Iraq are largely mutually exclusive, whether due to shortages of trained terrorist operatives and leadership attention, operational requirements, or other factors.
- In prosecuting the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States has killed, captured or otherwise occupied the attention of more terrorists than have been created as a result of Muslim anger over U.S. foreign policy.

Supporting evidence

- Many jihadist leaders have used the Iraq war as a recruiting mechanism, sending Islamic extremists to Iraq to fight against the United States and its allies. In a January 2006 propaganda tape, Osama bin Laden noted that “Iraq has become a point of attraction and recruitment of qualified resources.”¹²⁸

¹²³ Sanchez, Ricardo. Interview on CNN’s “Late Edition.” July 27, 2003.

¹²⁴ McDougall, Christopher. “Reasons They Haven’t Hit Us Again.” *New York*, December 6, 2004.

¹²⁵ Nordland, Rod. “Terror for Export: Iraqi Jihadists Fan Out.” *Newsweek*, November 21, 2005.

¹²⁶ Milne, Seumas. “Out of the Shadows.” *The Guardian*, July 19, 2007.

¹²⁷ Burton, Fred and Scott Stewart. “Summer 2007: The Attack that Never Occurred.” *Stratfor Terrorism Intelligence Report*, October 17, 2007.

¹²⁸ “Text: ‘Bin-Laden tape.’” *BBC News*, January 19, 2006.

- In September 2006, al-Qaeda in Iraq leader Abu Hamza al-Muhajir released an audio message acknowledging that more than 4,000 foreign fighters had been killed in Iraq since the 2003 invasion.¹²⁹ The actual number of insurgents killed in Iraq since 2003 may be an order of magnitude higher.
- According to data provided to the news media by the Department of Defense in September 2007, 19,429 insurgents had been killed in combat with U.S. and allied forces since the 2003 invasion of Iraq.¹³⁰
- According to declassified key judgments of a 2006 NIE, “The increased role of Iraqis in managing the operations of al-Qaida in Iraq might lead veteran foreign jihadists to focus their efforts on external operations.”¹³¹ Implicit in this assessment is that non-Iraqi jihadists who are motivated to attack the United States are distracted from doing so by their activities in Iraq.

Contradictory evidence

“Measured by the number of terrorist incidents, the jihadist threat is more significant now than it was prior to September 11, 2001....Even when excluding attacks in Afghanistan, Iraq, and those related to the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, there are more attacks by jihadist groups on an annual basis than at the beginning of the Iraq war. This finding fundamentally undermines the Bush Administration’s claim that we are ‘fighting them there so we don’t have to fight them here.’”¹³² – American Security Project report, “Are We Winning?” September 2007.

“Although the Iraq war has attracted foreign jihadists, U.S. generals say that the Iraqi insurgency is mainly composed of Iraqis, few of whom are members of al Qaeda and very few of whom would be attacking us in the streets of New York and Washington if we weren’t in Iraq.”¹³³ – Michael Hirsh, *The Washington Post*, September 2005.

“[I]f we make a comparison with the Soviet-Afghan war of 1979-89, which was the baptismal font for al-Qaeda, what’s most striking is how few foreign holy warriors have gone to Mesopotamia since the U.S. invasion in 2003... [A]ccording to the CIA and the U.S. military, we are now seeing at most only dozens of Arab Sunni holy warriors entering [Iraq] each month. Even at the height of the insurgency in 2006-07, the figure might have been just a few hundred (and may have been much smaller).”¹³⁴ – Reuel Marc Gerecht, *The Washington Post*, February 2008.

“In the end, the relationship between jihadist activities in Iraq and in the United States is more complex than a simple either-or relationship would suggest.”¹³⁵ – “Exploring Terrorist Targeting Preferences,” RAND report, 2007.

- Despite ongoing operations against U.S. and coalition forces in Iraq, al-Qaeda has continued to carry out terrorist attacks in Europe and elsewhere around the globe.¹³⁶
- The number of jihadist operatives is not finite; the U.S. invasion of Iraq may have radicalized a greater number of Muslims into jihadism than would have existed

¹²⁹ “Al-Qaida in Iraq: 4,000 foreign fighters killed.” *Associated Press*, September 28, 2006.

¹³⁰ Michaels, Jim. “19,000 militant fatalities since ’03; Military discloses stats for first time.” *USA Today*, September 27, 2007.

¹³¹ Declassified Key Judgments of the National Intelligence Estimate, “Trends in Global Terrorism: Implications for the United States.” April 2006.

¹³² Finel, Bernard I. and Holly Crystal Gell. “Are We Winning?” American Security Project, September 2007.

¹³³ Hirsh, Michael. “9/11 – and Counting.” *The Washington Post*, September 11, 2005.

¹³⁴ Gerecht, Reuel Marc. “Iraq’s Jihad Myths.” *The Washington Post*, February 17, 2008.

¹³⁵ Libicki, et. al. “Exploring Terrorist Targeting Preferences.” RAND, 2007. pp. 93.

¹³⁶ Byman, Daniel. “Safer Than You Think.” *Slate.com*, August 2, 2004.

- had the United States not invaded and occupied Iraq. According to declassified key judgments of a 2006 NIE, “The Iraq conflict has become the ‘cause celebre’ for jihadists, breeding a deep resentment of U.S. involvement in the Muslim world and cultivating supporters for the global jihadist movement.”¹³⁷
- Substantial evidence suggests that relatively few non-Iraqi jihadists have emigrated to Iraq for the purpose of battling the Coalition or Iraqi government:
 - In a July 2006 Department of Defense news briefing, Colonel Sean B. MacFarland, Commander of the 1st Armored Division’s 1st Brigade Combat Team, noted that in Iraq, “You have the foreign fighter, al Qaeda guys. They’re very few in number.”¹³⁸
 - According to a September 2005 CSIS report on Saudi jihadist activity in Iraq, the Iraqi insurgency is overwhelmingly composed of Iraqi nationals, many of whom would presumably lack the motivation to engage in jihadist operations outside of Iraq absent the U.S. occupation. According to the report, “the vast majority of Saudi militants who have entered Iraq were not terrorist sympathizers before the war and were radicalized almost exclusively by the Coalition invasion.” The CSIS report further suggests that foreign fighters in Iraq constitute less than 10 percent of the insurgency.¹³⁹
 - Foreign fighters operating in Iraq would not necessarily have the motivation or the capability to conduct attacks in the United States if they were not occupied in Iraq. The ease of passage into Iraq from Syria, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Jordan and the presence of a regional terrorist infrastructure allows for more opportunistic migration of jihadists within the Middle East.
 - According to a publicly released 2007 NIE, “[al-Qaeda’s] association with AQI helps al-Qa’ida to energize the broader Sunni extremist community, raise resources, and to recruit and indoctrinate operatives, including for Homeland attacks.”¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ Declassified Key Judgments of the National Intelligence Estimate, “Trends in Global Terrorism: Implications for the United States.” April 2006.

¹³⁸ DoD News Briefing with the Commander of the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, Colonel Sean B. MacFarland, July 14, 2006.

¹³⁹ Obaid, Nawaf and Anthony Cordesman. “Saudi Militants in Iraq: Assessment and Kingdom’s Response.” CSIS, September 19, 2005.

¹⁴⁰ National Intelligence Estimate, “The Terrorist Threat to the U.S. Homeland.” July 17, 2007.

Hypothesis D) Reduced state support for terrorism since 9/11 has constrained terrorists' ability to conduct large-scale attacks on the U.S. homeland.

"Terrorist organizations cannot be effective in sustaining themselves over long periods of time to do large-scale operations if they don't have support from states."¹⁴¹ – Douglas Feith, former Undersecretary of Defense, February 2003.

"Without the direct aid of an Iran, Syria, and Lebanon, the secret support of rogue elements within the Saudi Arabian, Jordanian, and Pakistani governments, and millions on the Arab Street, the killer cadres simply could not carry out their next large attack."¹⁴² – Dr. Victor Davis Hanson, The Hoover Institution, July 2004.

Critical Assumptions

- Prior to 9/11, al-Qaeda enjoyed direct or indirect support from various foreign governments or sympathetic figures within them.
- Following 9/11, fear of U.S. and allied reprisal or aversion to international opprobrium has induced former state supporters of terrorism to withhold material aid to terrorist networks, crack down on terrorist activity among their citizens, or persuade al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups to redirect their operational focus away from the U.S. homeland.
- State support of a terrorist network can make the difference between a successful and an unsuccessful attack.

Supporting evidence

- Al-Qaeda is believed by some terrorism experts to have received limited state support during its formative years. In the 1990s, Iran's Ministry of Intelligence and Security Affairs and the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps reportedly trained al-Qaeda recruits in Sudan and Lebanon.¹⁴³ In 1993, Osama bin Laden allegedly met with Imad Mugnyiah, head of the Special Security Apparatus of Hezbollah, in Khartoum, Sudan.¹⁴⁴
- Alleged Iranian support for insurgents in Iraq has enhanced their operational sophistication and ability to inflict damage on Iraqi and coalition forces.
- Other terrorist organizations, e.g., Hezbollah and Hamas, have received considerable state support. Hezbollah's 2006 campaign against Israel drew heavily on arms and equipment supplied by Iran and Syria.

Contradictory evidence

"It does not appear that any government other than the Taliban financially supported al Qaeda before 9/11, although some governments may have contained al Qaeda sympathizers who turned a blind eye to al Qaeda's fundraising activities. Saudi Arabia has long been considered the primary source of al Qaeda funding, but we have found no evidence that the Saudi government as an institution or senior Saudi officials individually funded the organization."¹⁴⁵ – 9/11 Commission Report, July 2004.

¹⁴¹ Lemann, Nicholas. "After Iraq: The plan to remake the Middle East." *The New Yorker*, February 17, 2003.

¹⁴² Hanson, Victor Davis. "Another 9/11?" *National Review*, July 6, 2004.

¹⁴³ Gunaratna, Rohan. "The Rise and Decline of Al Qaeda." Third public hearing of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, July 9, 2003.

¹⁴⁴ Bergen, Peter L. *The Osama bin Laden I Know*. Free Press (2006). pp. 143.

¹⁴⁵ National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States. pp. 171.

“Afghanistan housed Al Qaeda, and thus it was crucial to attack the country. But that was less a case of a state’s sponsoring a terror group and more one of a terror group’s sponsoring a state.”¹⁴⁶
– Dr. Fareed Zakaria, *Newsweek*, April 2004.

“Well, all that’s left [of state sponsorship of terrorism] is Iran and to a lesser extent Syria, and it’s mostly directed against Israel. States have been getting out of the terror business since the late 1980s. We have kept many governments on the list of state sponsors for political reasons. The reality is that the terror we face is mostly unconnected to states.”¹⁴⁷ – Anonymous U.S. counterterrorism official quoted in *Newsweek*, April 2004.

- Terrorist attacks do not necessarily require extensive state support, as exemplified by the 9/11 attacks, as well as al-Qaeda’s earlier strikes on American targets, attacks by jihadist groups in Europe and Southeast Asia, suicide bombings in Israel, and continuing attacks by other non-jihadist groups.
- Large-scale attacks do not require vast financial support or operational guidance from established terrorist networks.
- Despite limited state assistance during the 1990s, direct state support (as opposed to the provision of safe havens such as in Sudan and Afghanistan) was not critical to al-Qaeda’s growth and operations prior to 9/11.

¹⁴⁶ Zakaria, Fareed. “Terrorists Don’t Need States.” *Newsweek*, April 5, 2004.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

Hypothesis E) Crackdowns on private financing of terrorism since 9/11 have constrained terrorists' ability to conduct large-scale attacks on the U.S. homeland.

"[In Egypt and Saudi Arabia], as elsewhere, the efforts of finance ministries – most especially the U.S. Department of the Treasury – have made life far more difficult for terrorists. Global organizations cannot thrive without being able to move money around. The more that terrorists' funds are tracked and targeted, the more they have to make do with small-scale and hastily improvised operations."¹⁴⁸ – Dr. Fareed Zakaria, *Newsweek*, July 2007.

"Enhanced cooperation between intelligence organizations around the world and increased security budgets have made it much harder for terrorists to move their funds across borders or to successfully organize and execute attacks."¹⁴⁹ – Jason Burke, *Foreign Policy*, May 2004.

"In our efforts to fight terrorist financing in the short and long term, we have developed international standards to fight terrorist financing, built greater global capacity, broadened and deepened our own regulatory system, built international systems to share information about suspect networks, frozen and seized terrorist-related assets, arrested and isolated key financial intermediaries and donors, and improved the international safeguards around the financial system."¹⁵⁰ – Juan Carlos Zarate, Assistant Treasury Secretary, September 2004.

"Saudi Arabia has also taken steps to deny the channeling of terrorist funding through the country. The monitoring of significant bank deposits and transfers is now far more comprehensive. Charitable giving, formerly a key means for transferring monies to armed groups, is much more closely circumscribed, with one notable organization eventually prevented from operating. The Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency is more efficient than a number of other Gulf Cooperation Council countries' central banks in following financial trails and in limiting the potential for monies to be transferred out of the country for nefarious purposes."¹⁵¹ – Bruce Riedel and Bilal Y. Saab, *The Washington Quarterly*, Spring 2008.

Critical Assumptions

- Sophisticated, large-scale terrorist attacks require substantial funding.
- Terrorists' criminal and entrepreneurial profit-generating enterprises are not sufficient sources of revenue to offset losses of capital that occurred in the post-9/11 financial crackdown.
- Al-Qaeda's failure to produce a subsequent large-scale attack on the U.S. homeland has resulted from a lack of financial resources and not from a deliberate shift in the network's targeting preference.
- The vast increase in al-Qaeda's visibility and, within some communities, popularity after the 9/11 attacks has not translated into financial contributions significant enough to offset the network's losses resulting from U.S. and allied financial efforts.

Supporting evidence

- A series of U.S. and international efforts have successfully constrained al-Qaeda's access to financial resources, including:¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ Zakaria, Fareed. "True or False: We Are Losing the War Against Radical Islam." *Newsweek*, July 2, 2007.

¹⁴⁹ Burke, Jason. "Think Again: Al Qaeda." *Foreign Policy*, May/June 2004.

¹⁵⁰ Zarate, Juan Carlos. Testimony before the House Financial Services Committee, September 30, 2004.

¹⁵¹ Riedel, Bruce and Bilal Y. Saab. "Al Qaeda's Third Front: Saudi Arabia." *The Washington Quarterly*, Spring 2008.

¹⁵² Lichtblau, Eric and James Risen. "Bank Data Is Sifted by U.S. in Secret to Block Terror." *The New York Times*, June 23, 2006.

- On October 15, 1999, the United Nations Security Council Committee passed Resolution 1267 to establish the “Al-Qaida and Taliban Sanctions Committee,” which was designed to freeze the organizations’ financial assets and thwart the supply of weapons to the groups. The sanctions have been strengthened by six additional Security Council resolutions.¹⁵³
- In September 2001, the Bush Administration issued Executive Order 13224 to block the financial assets of 27 terrorist organizations and affiliates; since its enactment, the list has grown to several thousand extremist organizations.¹⁵⁴
- A series of al-Qaeda attacks in Saudi Arabia between 2003 and 2004 are widely perceived to have added previously unseen urgency to Saudi counterterrorism efforts. Following the attacks, the Saudi government established a joint U.S.-Saudi task force to address extremist financing in the country, as well as closed a number of charitable entities with links to terrorism and forbade cash contributions to charities at mosques and shopping malls.^{155,156}
- According to the 2007 RAND Corporation report “Exploring Terrorist Targeting Preferences,” since the financial crackdown began in the 1990s, U.S. and allied nations have seized more than \$136 million in identifiable al-Qaeda financial assets.¹⁵⁷
- In the final report on the implementation of the 9/11 Commission’s 41 recommendations, only terrorist financing received an A-, the highest grade awarded.¹⁵⁸

Contradictory evidence

“[T]here seems to be a general consensus in the policy community that targeting jihadist financial networks has not been an effective way of targeting terrorists – there is simply too much porosity in modern financial infrastructures that depend on the rapid movement of capital and the preservation of wealth and liquidity in virtual form.”¹⁵⁹ – Shawn Brimley, CSIS, Summer 2006.

“Al Qaeda has built a significant base of Islamic charities in Saudi Arabia with international divisions that have not been scrutinized or controlled by the regime. As a result, Al Qaeda’s sophisticated financial network may be able to sustain international efforts to disrupt it.”¹⁶⁰ – Mark Basile, Tufts University, May 2004.

“Money, particularly bin Laden’s money, is often cited as a key to al-Qaeda’s success, and indeed several experts have argued that eliminating its money is the way to defeat it. This claim is at least overstated and probably wrong. While it is true that al-Qaeda is well funded...more important is the extent to which money matters at all...God and the prospect of martyrdom, not money, inspire al-Qaeda members...Their training is cheap and the operations cost relatively little.”¹⁶¹ – Daniel Byman, Georgetown University, October 2003.

¹⁵³ United Nations Security Council web site.

¹⁵⁴ Kiser, Steve. “Financing Terror: An Analysis and Simulation for Affecting Al Qaeda’s Financial Infrastructure.” Pardee RAND Graduate School dissertation, September 2004.

¹⁵⁵ Alfred Prados and Christopher Blanchard. “Saudi Arabia: Terrorist Financing Issues.” CRS, March 1, 2005.

¹⁵⁶ Zarate, Juan Carlos. Testimony before the House Financial Services Committee, September 30, 2004.

¹⁵⁷ Libicki, et. al. “Exploring Terrorist Targeting Preferences.” RAND, 2007. pp. 68.

¹⁵⁸ “Final Report on 9/11 Commission Recommendations.” December 5, 2005

¹⁵⁹ Brimley, Shawn. “Tentacles of Jihad: Targeting Transnational Support Networks.” *Parameters*, Summer 2006.

¹⁶⁰ Basile, Mark. “Going to the Source: Why Al-Qaeda’s Financial Network is Likely to Withstand the Current War on Terrorist Financing.” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*. May/June 2004.

¹⁶¹ Byman, Daniel L. “Al-Qaeda as an Adversary: Do We Understand Our Enemy?” *World Politics*. October 2003.

“Extremism and terrorism are not particularly expensive. They also can cloak their identity under a host of religious and charitable covers, or exploit ‘arm chair militantism’ throughout the Arab and Islamic worlds. No amount of Saudi, US, or international activity to limit funds transfers, or activities like money laundering, is going to halt a substantial flow of money and weapons to terrorist and extremist groups.”¹⁶² – Dr. Anthony H. Cordesman and Nawaf Obaid, CSIS, September 2005.

- Evidence exists that since the late 1990s, al-Qaeda operatives have transferred large sums of the network’s assets into non-traceable forms of wealth, including diamonds and other liquid commodities. The Washington Post reported in 2002 that al-Qaeda representatives operating in Liberia and Burkina Faso were involved in transactions involving tens of millions of dollars in diamonds.¹⁶³ These activities may have allowed al-Qaeda to minimize financial losses as a result of U.S. and allied efforts to seize the network’s wealth.
- Large-scale attacks do not necessarily require vast financial support or operational guidance:
 - According to the 9/11 Commission Report, the two-year preparations for the 9/11 attacks are estimated to have cost between \$400,000 and \$500,000.¹⁶⁴
 - The Madrid train bombings are estimated to have cost roughly \$50,000.¹⁶⁵
 - The London Underground bombings are estimated to have cost less than \$15,000.¹⁶⁶
- According to a May 2007 piece in the Los Angeles Times, U.S. intelligence officials have confirmed that al-Qaeda’s senior leadership in Pakistan has begun to receive considerable funding from its affiliate in Iraq, which generates revenue from private donations and for-profit terrorist activity.¹⁶⁷ If accurate, this cash stream could partially offset damage done to al-Qaeda’s traditional sources of funding by allied financial crackdowns.

¹⁶² Obaid, Nawaf and Anthony Cordesman. “Saudi Militants in Iraq: Assessment and Kingdom’s Response.” CSIS, September 19, 2005.

¹⁶³ Farah, Douglas. “Report Says Africans Harbored Al Qaeda.” *The Washington Post*, December 29, 2002.

¹⁶⁴ National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States. pp. 172.

¹⁶⁵ Benjamin, Daniel and Steven Simon. *The Next Attack*. 2005. pp. 13.

¹⁶⁶ “In Italy, investigators find links between seemingly innocent money transfers and terrorism.” *Associated Press*, September 6, 2007.

¹⁶⁷ Miller, Greg. “Iraq a ‘big moneymaker’ for al-Qaida, says CIA.” *The Los Angeles Times*, May 20, 2007.

Basket II: Lack of terrorist capabilities to attack the U.S. homeland.

Hypothesis F	The terrorist threat has been massively exaggerated.
Hypothesis G	Time is required to rebuild al-Qaeda's capabilities after the death or capture of most of its senior leaders and operatives.
Hypothesis H	Al-Qaeda is waiting to acquire a CBRN capability.
Hypothesis I	The assimilation of U.S. Muslims into mainstream American society has limited the pool of homegrown radicals who might conduct domestic attacks.
Hypothesis J	A lull is occurring between the disruption of al-Qaeda after 9/11 and the next generation of transnational terrorists that will rise from the Iraq war.
Hypothesis K	Non-Salafist terrorist groups such as Hezbollah have lacked the capability to attack the U.S. homeland.

Like the first bin of hypotheses, the second bin also assumes that al-Qaeda and possibly other international terrorist networks remain committed to attacking the U.S. homeland but are constrained in doing so by a lack of operational capabilities. In many cases these limitations result from independent factors over which neither U.S. and allied governments nor terrorists have much control. Quite different potential limitations are also put forward in the hypotheses that follow.

Perhaps most controversial is the argument that no repeat attack on the homeland has occurred simply because the al-Qaeda threat and the strength of Osama bin Laden's network has been massively exaggerated, whether in the statements of government officials, investigative media reports, and public and private terrorism analyses. A different but prominent subcategory within this bin concerns the belief that al-Qaeda is simply waiting for the right conditions to launch a follow-on attack. These preparations would likely include reconstituting the manpower, expertise and financial resources that have been sapped since the United States launched the Global War on Terror. A closely related hypothesis suggests that the lull in attacks reflects the time needed to transform the jihadist insurgency in Iraq into a transnational terrorist network resembling al-Qaeda following the war against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan.

Another hypothesis argues that al-Qaeda is waiting to achieve its long-held ambition of acquiring a CBRN capability, especially an improvised nuclear device (IND). Such a capability could allow the network to exceed the 9/11 death toll and satisfy al-Qaeda's speculated goal of producing ever more spectacular violence.

Finally, this explanatory bin addresses a key distinction between the United States and many European societies: the relative absence of large, radicalized subpopulations of Muslims in America. This difference is seen by many terrorism experts as limiting the emergence in the United States of self-activated terrorist cells of the sort that have terrorized Europe in recent years. It also significantly decreases the ability of al-Qaeda and its jihadist affiliates – if not for other Islamist terrorist groups – to link up with “homegrown” jihadist sympathizers.

Hypothesis F) The terrorist threat has been massively exaggerated.

“A fully credible explanation for the fact that the United States has suffered no terrorist attacks since 9/11 is that the threat posed by homegrown or imported terrorists...has been massively exaggerated.”¹⁶⁸ – Dr. John Mueller, Ohio State University, September 2006.

“The fact is most of the prosecutions that have been carried on since 9/11 have been against wannabes, against people who were inspired by what bin Laden had done...or even just talking about different kinds of operations. We have uncovered very little real operational activity directed by al-Qaida from abroad in the United States. Now that means one of two things, either it’s not here or we can’t find it.”¹⁶⁹ – Daniel Benjamin, Brookings Institution, December 2004.

“The four ‘examples of W.M.D. cases’ described in a June [2006] Justice Department report on counterterrorism efforts over five years include accounts of two Texas survivalists caught with hazardous chemicals, two Chinese-born American citizens who offered shoulder-fired missiles to an undercover F.B.I. agent, a Washington State engineer who wanted to use poisonous ricin to kill his wife, and an Arizona man whose attempt to make ricin failed but who wore the harmless powder he did make in a vial around his neck.”¹⁷⁰ – Scott Shane and Lowell Bergman, *The New York Times*, September 2006.

“In contrast to the truly terrifying [Mohammed] Atta...most Al Qaeda operatives look more like life’s losers, the kind who in a Western culture would join street gangs or become petty criminals... Like Richard Reid, who tried to set his shoelace on fire. Or Ahmed Ressam, who bolted in a panic from his car at the U.S. border during an alleged mission to bomb the L.A. airport. Or Iyman Faris, who comically believed he could bring down the Brooklyn Bridge with a blowtorch. Or the crazed Zacarias Moussaoui, who was disowned even by bin Laden. Then you’ve got the hapless Lackawanna Six, and, more recently, the Toronto 17, who were thinking about pulling off an Oklahoma City-style attack with ammonium nitrate – or perhaps just beheading the prime minister – but hadn’t quite gotten around to it.”¹⁷¹ – Michael Hirsh, *Newsweek*, October 2007.

“Al-Qaida managed the most spectacular attack, but clearly it is also being sustained by the way that we rather cavalierly stick the name al-Qaida on Iraq, Indonesia, the Philippines. There is a long tradition that if you divert all your resources to a threat, then you exaggerate it.”¹⁷² – Dr. Jonathan Eyal, Royal United Services Institute, October 2004.

“The first wave of al-Qaeda leaders, who joined Osama bin Laden in the 1980s, is down to a few dozen people on the run in the tribal areas of northwest Pakistan. The second wave of terrorists, who trained in al-Qaeda’s camps in Afghanistan during the 1990s, has also been devastated... These people are genuinely dangerous, says [*Leaderless Jihad* author Marc] Sageman, and they must be captured or killed. But they do not pose an existential threat to America, much less a ‘clash of civilizations.’”¹⁷³ – David Ignatius, *The Washington Post*, February 2008.

Critical Assumptions

- The 9/11 attack was an anomaly – a fortuitous terrorist success that might easily have been prevented and is not likely to be repeated.

¹⁶⁸ Mueller, John. “Is There Still a Terrorist Threat?” *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2006.

¹⁶⁹ “Bin Laden Challenge.” Online NewsHour, December 16, 2004.

¹⁷⁰ Shane, Scott and Lowell Bergman. “Contained? Adding Up the Ounces of Prevention.” *The New York Times*, September 10, 2006.

¹⁷¹ Hirsh, Michael. “The Myth of Al Qaeda.” *Newsweek*, October 16, 2007.

¹⁷² “The Making of the Terror Myth.” *The Guardian*, October 15, 2004.

¹⁷³ Ignatius, David. “The Fading Jihadists.” *The Washington Post*, February 28, 2008.

- Al-Qaeda’s ability to conduct large-scale attacks on the U.S. homeland is far less than U.S. homeland security, intelligence and military spending would suggest.
- America’s public leaders and security personnel have either misjudged the capabilities of al-Qaeda and other groups or have some ulterior motive in magnifying the true terrorist threat.
- Other non-al-Qaeda terrorist groups, as well as indigenous U.S. extremists, lack the means or motivation to attack the U.S. homeland. (See Hypotheses S, T, Y and CC below for further discussion of this assumption).

Supporting evidence

- In addition to the lack of large-scale terrorist attacks on the U.S. homeland, al-Qaeda has made no apparent effort to conduct even rudimentary attacks on “soft targets” in the United States such as shopping malls and subways using suicide bomb vests or small arms.
- According to an analysis by former CIA operative and author Marc Sageman, contemporary jihadists can be grouped into three categories: the first wave consisting of companions of Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan during the 1980s, the second wave consisting of operatives trained in Afghanistan during the 1990s through 9/11, and the third wave consisting of homegrown terrorist “wannabes” with no direct link or training to al-Qaeda. Sageman estimates the average age of these jihadists at the time of their matriculation into the ranks of jihadism to be 30-years-old, 25-years-old and 20-years-old, respectively. Corresponding to the decline in age, a decline in educational attainment is also between the first and third waves.¹⁷⁴ All told, the decline in the age, maturity and sophistication of today’s self-activated jihadists is likely reflected in their operational capabilities.
- In June 2002 while traveling in Russia, former Attorney General John Ashcroft made a live televised announcement of the arrest of U.S. citizen Jose Padilla for his role in “an unfolding terrorist plot to attack the United States by exploding a radioactive ‘dirty bomb.’”¹⁷⁵ A subsequent investigation revealed that Padilla’s plot to explode a radiological dispersal device had never progressed beyond the conceptual planning phase.¹⁷⁶
- The plots of several would-be domestic jihadists have been notably amateurish:
 - In August 2002, U.S. citizen James Ujaama was arrested for plotting to establish a terrorist training camp in rural Oregon. The charge against Ujaama was later dropped after he pled guilty to the more general charge of supporting the Taliban.¹⁷⁷
 - In March 2003 Afghan-born U.S. resident Sayed Abdul Malike was arrested after informing an undercover FBI agent of his interest in purchasing enough plastic explosives “to blow up a mountain.” Malike came under scrutiny when he asked a Miami tour boat captain how close a boat could get to local bridges and cruise ships and was promptly reported to the Coast Guard.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁴ Sageman, Marc. “Leaderless Jihad: Radicalization in the West.” Presentation at New America Foundation event, February 20, 2008.

¹⁷⁵ “Ashcroft statement on ‘dirty bomb’ suspect.” CNN.com, June 10, 2002.

¹⁷⁶ Rosen, Jeffrey. “John Ashcroft’s Permanent Campaign.” *The Atlantic Monthly*, April 2004.

¹⁷⁷ Arena, Kelli. “UK seeks Pakistani tied to Oregon case.” CNN.com, July 20, 2005.

¹⁷⁸ “N.Y. man arrested for allegedly trying to buy explosives.” CNN.com, May 22, 2003.

- In June 2003, 11 U.S. residents referred to as the “Virginia Jihad Network” were charged with terrorism-related offenses, including aiding the militant group Lashkar-i-Taiba, which seeks to remove Indian control over the dispute Kashmir region. Some members of the group had played paintball in rural Virginia between 2000 and 2001, an activity that prosecutors contended amounted to training for terrorist attacks. Of the 11 suspects, six ultimately entered guilty pleas, and three were convicted following trials. Two others were found not guilty.¹⁷⁹
- In August 2004, NYPD counterterrorism personnel arrested two men for conspiring to blow up the Herald Square subway station in New York City: 19-year-old high school dropout and schizophrenic James Elshafay and 23-year-old Pakistani immigrant Shahawar Matin Siraj.¹⁸⁰ Prior to his arrest, Siraj informed his co-conspirators that he would not plant explosives personally, citing his unwillingness to die. Both men’s sole terrorist contact was an undercover police informant.¹⁸¹
- In March 2006, Iranian-born Mohammed Reza Taheri-azar attempted to run over students at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill to “punish” the United States for its foreign policy. Six pedestrians were slightly injured; none were killed. Taheri-azar’s weapons consisted of a rented Jeep Grand Cherokee, two cans of Mace and a pocket knife.¹⁸²
- In June 2006 the FBI arrested seven Floridians led by Narseal Batiste, an adherent of the obscure Moorish Science Temple of America sect, who were accused of plotting to destroy Chicago’s Sears Tower. The group’s supposed al-Qaeda handler was an FBI informant.¹⁸³
- In May 2007 the FBI arrested six foreign-born U.S. residents for plotting to attack Fort Dix Army base in New Jersey. The plotters were brought to the attention of U.S. authorities after a store clerk viewed a weapons training video that the men had submitted for transfer to DVD.¹⁸⁴
- According to a report by NYU’s Center on Law and Security, by September 2006 only 158 individuals in the United States had been prosecuted on terrorism-related charges out of 510 criminal cases filed as related to terrorism.¹⁸⁵
- Al-Qaeda’s failure to rally domestic support for its 2003-2004 offensive in Saudi Arabia may underscore the organization’s weakness. If al-Qaeda cannot attract significant numbers of recruits or conduct more than small-scale attacks in a country where Islamist sympathies are strong and much of the population is incensed over the Iraq war, the group’s ability to strike the U.S. homeland may be even lower.¹⁸⁶

Contradictory evidence

“[T]he ‘war on terror’ is no mirage: radical jihadism...does indeed threaten the very existence of Western civilization, whose peace and prosperity depend on a complex infrastructure and

¹⁷⁹ Markon, Jerry. “Teacher Sentenced for Aiding Terrorists.” *The Washington Post*, August 26, 2006.

¹⁸⁰ Rashbaum, William K. “Staten Island Man Describes Shattered Life, Then a Plot to Bomb a Subway Station.” *The New York Times*, May 10, 2006.

¹⁸¹ Horowitz, Craig. “Anatomy of a Foiled Plot.” *New York*, December 6, 2004.

¹⁸² Gartenstein-Ross, Daveed. “The Problem of the Lone-Wolf Terrorist.” *Weekly Standard*, March 16, 2006.

¹⁸³ Simpson, Doug. “Father: Plot Suspect Not in ‘Right Mind.’” *Associated Press*, June 25, 2006.

¹⁸⁴ Russakoff, Dale and Dan Eggen. “Six Charged in Plot To Attack Fort Dix.” *The Washington Post*, May 9, 2007.

¹⁸⁵ “Terrorist Trial Report Card: U.S. Edition.” New York University School of Law, Center on Law and Security, September 2006.

¹⁸⁶ Whitlock, Craig. “Al Qaeda Shifts Its Strategy in Saudi Arabia.” *The Washington Post*, December 19, 2004.

communications system vulnerable to catastrophic disruption by small bands of ruthless saboteurs.”¹⁸⁷ – Camille Paglia, Salon.com, September 2007.

“The enemy we are facing, Osama bin Laden and the movement he heads, is much more dangerous than anyone gives him credit for. Much smarter, much more talented, and now increasingly recruiting a new generation that’s better educated, not just in school terms but in operational and especially technological ways. We defeated the swashbucklers. The Errol Flynn of the jihad are gone; they’re about to go on trial in Guantánamo. Now we have the gray-suited fellows who are quiet, don’t draw attention to themselves, but are tremendously savvy.”¹⁸⁸ – Dr. Michael Scheuer, former head of CIA’s Alec Station unit, February 2008.

“In the past 13, 14 months we’ve interdicted five attacks that were in the planning stages, targeting U.S. soil. That’s a pretty high tempo of activity on the part of the terrorists, and because we’ve stopped them, I don’t think we can be penalized in the discussion by saying because they haven’t succeeded they’re no longer a danger.”¹⁸⁹ – John Miller, Assistant FBI Director of Public Affairs, November 2006.

- Since 9/11, al-Qaeda and affiliated entities have carried out a series of highly damaging attacks overseas, including strikes against U.S. interests. According to the Rand-MIPT Terrorism Knowledge Base, al-Qaeda has conducted more than 30 operations in 12 countries since 9/11 and killed more than 400 people, excluding operations in Iraq.¹⁹⁰ A 2007 RAND report that also excludes attacks in Iraq places the figure at more than 900.¹⁹¹
- Terrorism experts generally agree that at least two post-9/11 al-Qaeda operations – the 2003 New York subway plot and the 2006 transatlantic airline plot – could possibly have produced casualties comparable to the 9/11 death toll.
- In April 2004, Jordanian authorities claim to have disrupted an al-Qaeda plot to attack the U.S. Embassy in Amman, as well as the Prime Minister’s office and the headquarters of the General Intelligence Department using a chemical bomb. While U.S. intelligence officials have reportedly debated whether the tons of seized chemicals were to have been used against Jordanian civilians, the death toll from the attack could potentially have rivaled that of the 9/11 attacks.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁷ Paglia, Camille. “How secure are you?” Salon.com, September 12, 2007.

¹⁸⁸ Barry, John. “Our Country Is in Trouble.” *Newsweek*, February 13, 2008.

¹⁸⁹ “President Bush Meets With Iraq Study Group; Threat of Terrorism in America Overblown?; President Bush 41 to the Rescue?” Paula Zahn Now, CNN. November 13, 2006.

¹⁹⁰ Rand-MIPT Terrorism Knowledge Base.

¹⁹¹ Libicki, et. al. “Exploring Terrorist Targeting Preferences.” RAND, 2007. pp. 88.

¹⁹² “Jordan says major al Qaeda plot disrupted.” CNN.com, April 26, 2004.

Hypothesis G) Time is required to rebuild al-Qaeda's capabilities after the death or capture of most of its senior leaders and operatives.

"Al Qaeda is a hydra-headed monster, and we've had success in lopping off the heads of some important leaders. Others will grow back, but the replacements won't have as much experience or the same level of trust that existed among the former close-knit leadership cadre at the top of Al Qaeda, who had all fought as mujahedeen against the Soviets in Afghanistan."¹⁹³ – James Phillips, The Heritage Foundation, February 2003.

"A high proportion of those who associated with bin Laden between 1996 and 2001 are now either dead or in prison. Bin Laden's own ability to commission and instigate terror attacks has been severely curtailed."¹⁹⁴ – Jason Burke, *Foreign Policy*, 2004.

"[T]he great terror university in Afghanistan is gone; they've relied on the Web since. They haven't had the hands-on instruction and the bonding of the camps. That's resulted in low-skill levels. Their tradecraft is really much poorer."¹⁹⁵ – Dr. John Arquilla, Naval Postgraduate School, August 2007.

"With midlevel leaders like [captured Qaeda operatives Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, Hambali, and Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri] out of commission, terrorist operations have been left to less capable local operatives. As a result, the Qaeda movement has been limited to only two successful operations in the West in the past five years, in Madrid and London."¹⁹⁶ – Michael A. Sheehan, former deputy commissioner for NYPD counterterrorism, September 2006.

"Al Qaeda will continue to rebuild, but it will take a lot of time to get new leadership with those sorts of skills and experience."¹⁹⁷ – Stanley Bedlington, former CIA counterterrorism analyst, July 2003.

"Bin Laden would have us believe that al-Qaeda is on the verge of striking inside the U.S. with another 9/11. His claim flies in the face of al-Qaeda's degraded military capabilities and the dwindling support for the global jihad in Muslim lands."¹⁹⁸ – Dr. Fawaz A. Gerges, Sarah Lawrence College, January 2006.

Critical Assumptions

- The number of terrorist operatives who possess the training, resources, and motivation to execute large-scale attacks against the U.S. homeland has been markedly reduced as a result of U.S. and allied counterterrorism operations since 9/11.
- The time period required to indoctrinate, train, and equip highly skilled terrorist operatives – especially those capable of conducting successful attacks against the U.S. homeland – is measured in years, not weeks or months.
- Large-scale attacks against the U.S. homeland are unlikely to be successful without highly-trained operatives and a well-financed organizational infrastructure.

¹⁹³ Kitfield, James. "Wounded, Not Crippled." *The National Journal*, February 22, 2003.

¹⁹⁴ Burke, Jason. "Think Again: Al Qaeda." *Foreign Policy*, May/June 2004.

¹⁹⁵ Thomas, Evan. "Into Thin Air." *Newsweek*, September 3, 2007.

¹⁹⁶ Sheehan, Michael A. "10 Ways to Avoid the Next 9/11: Walking the Terror Beat." *The New York Times*, September 10, 2006.

¹⁹⁷ Bowers, Faye. "Iran holds Al Qaeda's top leaders." *The Christian Science Monitor*, July 28, 2003.

¹⁹⁸ Gerges, Fawaz A. "Despite TV Appearances, Al Qaeda Is Not Winning the War." *YaleGlobal*, Jan 31, 2006.

Supporting evidence

- Several previous sophisticated al-Qaeda attacks (e.g., 9/11 and the U.S.S. Cole bombing) were first proposed to al-Qaeda's leadership and later coordinated by mid-level but nonetheless seasoned operatives (Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and Abd al Rahim al Nashiri, respectively).¹⁹⁹ The "bottom-up" nature of these plots – relying on the ingenuity of a small number of skilled tacticians, many of whom have been killed or captured – may suggest that both the planning and attack execution capabilities of the network have been severely constrained.
- Khalid Sheikh Mohammed's leadership role in various other al-Qaeda plots in addition to 9/11 suggests that operational expertise matching his own was not widespread throughout the organization.
- The amateurish nature of many U.S. terror plots – including the 2006 plot to destroy the Sears Tower and the 2007 plot to attack the Fort Dix Army base – suggests that experienced, effective al-Qaeda operatives are unavailable to provide direction and assistance to would-be self-activated cells.

Contradictory evidence

"To say that Al Qaeda was out of business simply because they have not attacked in the U.S. is whistling past the graveyard. Al Qaeda is still humming along, and with a new generation of leaders."²⁰⁰ – Dr. Michael Scheuer, former head of CIA's Alec Station unit, April 2007.

"Al-Qaida has consistently recovered from senior leadership losses. Despite the deaths and capture of key figures, mid-level operatives rise to advance plans and operations."²⁰¹ – Lt. Gen. Michael D. Maples, DIA Director, February 2008.

"Al Qaeda has suffered formidable losses since September 11, 2001. Over 3,200 leaders, members and key supporters of Al Qaeda has [sic] been killed or captured in 102 countries....Nonetheless, the robust Islamist milieu, in which Al Qaeda operates, has enabled the group to replenish its human losses – members captured and killed – and material wastage – assets seized and funds frozen. Furthermore, having imparted guerilla and terrorist training to several tens of thousands of Islamists from around the world in its camps in Afghanistan, Al Qaeda built sufficient strategic depth worldwide for the generation of support and recruits."²⁰² – Dr. Rohan Gunaratna, Institute for Defence and Strategic Studies, Singapore, July 2003.

"Today, al-Qaeda operates much the way it did before 2001. The network is governed by a shura, or leadership council, that meets regularly and reports to bin Laden, who continues to approve some major decisions, according to a senior U.S. intelligence official. About 200 people belong to the core group and many receive regular salaries, another senior U.S. intelligence official said."²⁰³ – Craig Whitlock, *The Washington Post*, September 9, 2007.

"Using the sanctuary in the border area of Pakistan, al-Qa'ida has been able to maintain a cadre of skilled lieutenants capable of directing the organization's operations around the world. It has lost many of its senior operational planners over the years, but the group's adaptable decisionmaking

¹⁹⁹ National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States. pp. 149, 152.

²⁰⁰ Mazzetti, Mark. "Qaeda Is Seen as Restoring Leadership." *The New York Times*, April 2, 2007.

²⁰¹ Maples, Michael D. Testimony before the Senate Committee on Armed Services, February 27, 2008.

²⁰² Gunaratna, Rohan. Testimony before the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, July 9, 2003.

²⁰³ Whitlock, Craig. "The New Al-Qaeda Central." *The Washington Post*, September 9, 2007.

process and bench of skilled operatives have enabled it to identify effective replacements.”²⁰⁴ – Michael McConnell, Director of National Intelligence, February 2008.

“They keep likening (al-Qaeda) to a snake, but it’s more like a deadly mold.”²⁰⁵ – Anonymous U.S. intelligence officer quoted in Time magazine, 2003.

- Counterterrorism experts have judged that the explosives that were to have been used in the 2006 transatlantic airline plot were technically sound, which suggests that al-Qaeda has retained seasoned terrorist operatives with technical skills.²⁰⁶
- Analysts estimate that between 20,000 and 100,000 jihadists attended al-Qaeda training facilities in Afghanistan prior to the 9/11 attacks.²⁰⁷ Only a fraction of these have been killed or captured in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq.
- Al-Qaeda continues to operate terrorist training camps in Pakistan’s Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), and possibly in Iraq, supplying fresh recruits to the global Salafist movement.²⁰⁸
- Turkish militant Fevzi Yitiz, a suspect in the November 2003 Istanbul bombings, confessed during interrogation that he had received bomb-making instruction in 1994 at an al-Qaeda training camp in Jalalabad, Afghanistan.²⁰⁹ The almost decade-long lull between Yitiz’s terrorist training and his construction of the Istanbul truck bombs suggests that al-Qaeda’s pool of seasoned operatives is extensive and that operatives can remain latent for years before activation.
- The Madrid train bombings demonstrated that large-scale attacks do not require vast financial support or operational guidance from an established terrorist network to be successful.
- A National Counterterrorism Center report entitled “Al-Qaida Better Positioned to Strike the West,” made public in July 2007, reported that al-Qaeda had “regrouped to an extent not seen since 2001,” according to a U.S. counterterrorism official quoted in related news articles.²¹⁰ This regrouping may suggest that whatever period of time was necessary to reconstitute the group’s capabilities after its post-9/11 setbacks has passed.
- In a 1999 RAND study, terrorism expert Bruce Hoffman suggests that the death and capture of seasoned terrorists can effectively increase the lethality of operatives who survive. Hoffman argues that “An almost Darwinian principle of natural selection thus seems to affect terrorist organizations, whereby every new terrorist generation learns from its predecessors – becoming smarter, tougher, and more difficult to capture or eliminate. Terrorists often analyze the mistakes made by former comrades who have been killed or apprehended.”²¹¹

²⁰⁴ McConnell, Michael. Testimony before the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, February 7, 2008.

²⁰⁵ Elliott, Michael. “Why the War on Terror Will Never End.” *Time*, May 18, 2003.

²⁰⁶ Whitelaw, Kevin. “A Resurgent Menace.” *U.S. News and World Report*, May 6, 2007.

²⁰⁷ Lacey, Jim. “Assessing al Qaeda: It’s not what you think.” *National Review*, August 25, 2004.

²⁰⁸ Mazzetti, Mark. “Qaeda Is Seen as Restoring Leadership.” *The New York Times*, April 2, 2007.

²⁰⁹ Hacaoglu, Selcan. “Turk Militants Crossed Up Osama,” CBSnews.com, December 17, 2003.

²¹⁰ Lee, Matthew and Katherine Shrader. “Al Qaeda at pre-9/11 strength, analysts say; officials to discuss report at White House today.” Associated Press, July 12, 2007.

²¹¹ Hoffman, Bruce. “Terrorism Trends and Prospects.” In *Countering the New Terrorism*, RAND Corporation, 1999. pp. 25.

“If terrorists pursued only fool-proof plans, they would have begun suicide bombing attacks on U.S. public transportation by now. But from a terrorist’s point of view, why pursue a course of action with a 95 percent chance of success, but at most forty victims, if you have a 10 percent chance at killing five-hundred thousand?”²¹² – Dr. Graham Allison, Kennedy School of Government, April 2007.

“One thing I take seriously is the manifesto found on a very senior Al Qaeda lieutenant which says retribution means killing 4 million Americans, including 2 million children. That’s the ultimate horror, and it doesn’t require logistics of any great moment – all they need is a nuclear suitcase bomb.”²¹³ – Dr. Irwin Redlener, Director of Columbia University’s National Center for Disaster Preparedness, December 2004.

“The Americans have still not tasted from our hands what we have tasted from theirs...We have not reached parity with them. We have the right to kill four million Americans – two million of them children – and to exile twice as many and wound and cripple hundreds of thousands. Furthermore, it is our right to fight them with chemical and biological weapons, so as to afflict them with the fatal maladies that have afflicted the Muslims because of the [Americans’] chemical and biological weapons.”²¹⁴ – Al-Qaeda spokesman Sulaiman Abu Ghaith, June 2002.

“At any given moment in the planning process, the terrorist has to decide whether the time is right to launch his attack. If he delays a little longer, there will be more time to improve the weapon effectiveness, so that the chance of achieving the mission objectives is slightly improved.”²¹⁵ – Dr. Gordon Woo, Risk Management Solutions, December 2002.

Critical Assumptions

- Al-Qaeda’s senior leaders believe that only an attack using chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear (CBRN) weapons on American soil is sufficiently provocative to produce desired changes in U.S. foreign policy or serve the group’s broader goals.
- Al-Qaeda’s leaders will refrain from other attacks on the U.S. homeland until they have acquired a nuclear weapon or suitably effective chemical, biological or radiological weapon.
- Al-Qaeda members and inspired cells have refrained from carrying out conventional terrorist attacks on the U.S. homeland in deference to the wishes of senior al-Qaeda leaders.

Supporting evidence

- Several Al-Qaeda attempts to acquire nuclear weapons or investigate the acquisition of nuclear materials have been verified:
 - Sultan Bashiruddin Mahmood, former chairman of the Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission, twice met with Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan

²¹² Allison, Graham. “How Likely is a Nuclear Terrorist Attack on the United States?” Council on Foreign Relations online discussion with Michael A. Levi, April 17, 2007.

²¹³ McDougall, Christopher. “Reasons They Haven’t Hit Us Again.” *New York*, December 6, 2004.

²¹⁴ Venzke, Ben. *The al-Qaeda Threat: An Analytical Guide to al-Qaeda’s Tactics and Targets*. Tempest Pub. January 2, 2003.

²¹⁵ Woo, Gordon. “The al-Qaeda War Game: Following the Path of Least Resistance.” *The Swiss Military Review*, December 2002.

prior to his arrest by Pakistani authorities in October 2001. Mahmood reportedly failed several polygraph examinations during questioning over his relationship with bin Laden.²¹⁶

- During Osama bin Laden's trial in absentia for the 1998 embassy bombings, al-Qaeda defector Jamal Ahmad al-Fadl testified that he had been assigned to acquire uranium for a nuclear device in Khartoum, Sudan.²¹⁷ In 1993 or 1994, al-Fadl met with a former Sudanese official who presented him with a 3-foot cylinder and requested \$1.5 million in payment. The cylinder was ultimately determined to be unsuitable for a nuclear device.²¹⁸
- In 2001, technical documents related to nuclear weapons design were discovered in an abandoned al-Qaeda facility in Kabul, Afghanistan.²¹⁹
- Considerable evidence has been accumulated that demonstrates al-Qaeda's interest in chemical and biological weapons.
 - Al-Qaeda documents discovered in Afghanistan following the fall of the Taliban contain numerous references to the group's chemical and biological weapons programs.²²⁰
 - Infamous footage unearthed from a former al-Qaeda camp in Darunta, Afghanistan, shows the group gassing dogs with what is believed to have been a nerve agent.²²¹
- In a 1998 interview, Osama bin Laden declared that acquiring weapons of mass destruction constituted a "religious duty" for Muslims. According to bin Laden, "It would be a sin for Muslims not to try to possess the weapons that would prevent the infidels from inflicting harm on Muslims."²²²
- In May 2003, Saudi cleric Sheik Nasir bin Hamid al Fahd issued a fatwa entitled, "A Treatise on the Legal Status of Using Weapons of Mass Destruction Against Infidels," which is believed to have been commissioned by Osama bin Laden to justify the use of nuclear weapons against American civilians. Fahd's treatise suggested that "If a bomb that killed ten million of them and burned as much of their land as they have burned Muslims' land were dropped on them, it would be permissible, with no need to mention any other argument. We might need other arguments if we wanted to annihilate more than this number of them."^{223,224}
- In September 2006, the leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, Abu Hamza al-Muhajir, also known as Abu Ayyub al-Masri, issued a call for individuals with expertise in "chemistry, physics, electronics, media and all other sciences – especially nuclear scientists and explosives experts" to join in the jihad against Americans: "The field of jihad can satisfy your scientific ambitions, and the large American bases

²¹⁶ Baker, Peter. "Pakistani Scientist Who Met Bin Laden Failed Polygraphs, Renewing Suspicions." *The Washington Post*, March 3, 2002.

²¹⁷ McCloud, Kimberly and Matthew Osborne. "WMD Terrorism and Usama bin Laden." Center for Nonproliferation Studies, November 20, 2001.

²¹⁸ Zimmerman, Peter D. and Jeffrey G. Lewis. "The Bomb in the Backyard." *Foreign Policy*, November/December 2006.

²¹⁹ Sanderson, Thomas and Mary Beth Nikitin. "International Cooperation." CSIS, 2006. pp. 37.

²²⁰ Cullison, Alan. "Inside Al-Qaeda's Hard Drive." *The Atlantic Monthly*, September 2004.

²²¹ "Disturbing scenes of death show capability with chemical gas." CNN.com, August 19, 2002.

²²² Yusufzai, Rahimullah. "Conversation With Terror." *Time*, January 11, 1999.

²²³ al Fahd, Nasir bin Hamid. "A Treatise on the Legal Status of Using Weapons of Mass Destruction against Infidels." May 21, 2003.

²²⁴ Scheuer, Michael. "Bin Laden Expert Steps Forward." Steve Kroft interview, *60 Minutes*, November 14, 2004.

[in Iraq] are good places to test your unconventional weapons, whether biological or dirty, as they call them.”²²⁵

Contradictory evidence

“[T]he September 11 attacks demonstrated that even al Qaeda, a terrorist organization with significant resources, both human and financial, chose to use a ‘conventional’ weapon albeit with innovative tactics (fully-fueled airliners) to strike a symbolic target and kill a large number of people rather than using CBRN weapons. Al Qaeda has demonstrated that it can have mass effects – a significant disruption of society, huge economic losses, strong reactions by governments – without the necessity of using an unconventional weapon – a so-called ‘weapon of mass destruction.’”²²⁶ – Advisory Panel to Assess Domestic Response Capabilities for Terrorism Involving Weapons of Mass Destruction, December 15, 2002.

- While evidence of al-Qaeda’s interest in unconventional weapons is abundant, there is a dearth of empirical evidence that specifically points to a decision to refrain from attacking the U.S. homeland until these weapons have been perfected.
- Pursuit of chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear weapons does not require that al-Qaeda or other terrorist groups suspend all other operations until they are acquired.
 - Disrupted al-Qaeda plots such as the 2006 plan to bomb U.S.-bound transatlantic flights using liquid explosives demonstrate that al-Qaeda is not waiting for an exotic attack capability, but rather is actively pursuing large-scale conventional attacks against American citizens.
- The 2003 al-Qaeda plot to attack the New York subway system using a “mubtakkar” device to disperse hydrogen cyanide gas – a plot reportedly considered highly feasible by CIA personnel at the time – suggests that al-Qaeda operatives have already achieved a rudimentary chemical capability and have chosen not to utilize it for unknown reasons.²²⁷ By contrast, the ineptitude of al-Qaeda’s previous attempts to produce WMD, including the plot by British militants to manufacture ricin and the primitive Darunta chemical weapons facility in Afghanistan, could suggest that CBRN production is far beyond the group’s capabilities.²²⁸
- Even while seeking to acquire nuclear weapons and other WMD in the late 1990s, al-Qaeda’s core leadership planned and conducted the 9/11 attacks, as well as other non-CBRN attacks overseas.
- The 9/11 attacks occurred eight years after al-Qaeda’s attempted purchase of uranium in Sudan; which may suggest that al-Qaeda’s leaders had abandoned their plan to acquire a nuclear weapon as too ambitious given the group’s capabilities.

²²⁵ “Al-Qaida in Iraq: 4,000 foreign fighters killed.” *Associated Press*, September 28, 2006.

²²⁶ Fourth Annual Report to the President and the Congress of the Advisory Panel to Assess Domestic Response Capabilities for Terrorism Involving Weapons of Mass Destruction. IV. Implementing the National Strategy, December 15, 2002. pp. 19.

²²⁷ Suskind, Ron. *The One Percent Doctrine*. pp. 194-198.

²²⁸ Burke, Jason. “Think Again: Al Qaeda.” *Foreign Policy*, May/June 2004.

Hypothesis I) The assimilation of U.S. Muslims into mainstream American society has limited the pool of homegrown radicals who might conduct or support attacks in the U.S. homeland.

“Six years after 9/11, many people ask me why the United States hasn’t been hit again. The FBI would tell you that its vigilance has prevented additional attacks; [DHS] would add that our borders are better protected and that terrorists are better tracked. To some extent, that’s true. But it’s also important to note that the relationship between U.S. law enforcement and the American Muslim community has improved significantly. They increasingly share information, which lets law enforcement get leads on homegrown terrorism suspects early on and stop plots before they get beyond the talking stage.”²²⁹ – Dina Temple-Raston, author of *The Jihad Next Door: The Lackawanna Six and Rough Justice in the Age of Terror*, September 2007.

“The United States, in contrast to many nations in Europe and Asia, does not have a strong, well-organized, radical Islamist presence on its shores. Although there are certainly jihadist sympathizers who might conduct attacks on their own or be used by foreign jihadists as local facilitators, the vast sea of disaffected young Muslim men that is present in Europe and elsewhere has no U.S. parallel.”²³⁰ – Dr. Daniel Byman, Georgetown University, August 2004.

“In general, we have found that it is more difficult for radicalized individuals in the United States to turn their ideologically-driven violent inclinations into successful terrorist attacks. We believe that in Europe there exist closer links between criminal and extremist social networks and that Europe’s larger pool of disaffected Muslims have more opportunity to connect with terrorist groups tied to al-Qa’ida globally.”²³¹ – Charles E. Allen, DHS Assistant Secretary for Intelligence and Analysis, March 2007.

“The arrest and prosecution by U.S. law enforcement of a small number of violent Islamic extremists inside the United States – who are becoming more connected ideologically, virtually, and/or in a physical sense to the global extremist movement – points to the possibility that others may become sufficiently radicalized that they will view the use of violence here as legitimate. We assess that this internal Muslim terrorist threat is not likely to be as severe as it is in Europe, however.”²³² – National Intelligence Estimate, July 2007.

Critical Assumptions

- Muslim populations within predominantly non-Muslim societies are largely monolithic: they are either assimilated and content or unassimilated and radicalized.
- Large-scale terrorist attacks within non-Muslim societies are more difficult without a support network among the Muslim community; radical cohorts within Muslim communities have been correlated with past large-scale attacks.
- The sense of persecution felt by many U.S. Muslims following the enactment of post-9/11 domestic intelligence and law enforcement policies has not produced significant radicalization.

Supporting evidence

- More than two-thirds of U.S. Muslim households earn more than \$50,000 per year, compared to a median U.S. household income of \$46,326. More than one

²²⁹ Temple-Raston, Dina. “Enemy Within? Not Quite.” *The Washington Post*, September 9, 2007.

²³⁰ Byman, Daniel. “Safer Than You Think.” *Slate.com*. August 2, 2004.

²³¹ Allen, Charles E. Testimony before the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, March 14, 2007.

²³² National Intelligence Estimate, “The Terrorist Threat to the U.S. Homeland.” July 17, 2007.

- third of U.S. Muslims possess advanced degrees, compared to less than 10 percent of the general population.^{233,234}
- According to a May 2007 Pew Research Center poll, 13 percent of U.S. Muslims believe that suicide bombings against civilians can be justified “to defend Islam.”²³⁵ By contrast, 24 percent of Muslims in Britain and 35 percent of Muslims in France believe such attacks can be justified.²³⁶
 - Following the FBI’s May 2007 arrest of six militants charged with plotting to attack the Fort Dix Army base, the Islamic Center of South Jersey, which four of the plotters attended, held an “emergency town hall meeting” that its trustees said was designed “to enable officials and members of the public to ask anything they want about the mosque or about Islam, and to publicize a ringing denunciation of terrorism and violence of any sort.”²³⁷
 - The FBI first became aware of the Lackawanna Six, a group of six Yemeni-Americans who were arrested in September 2002, from an anonymous tipster within the Arab American community who had learned of the group’s travel to Afghanistan. The six eventually pled guilty to providing material support to al-Qaeda.²³⁸
 - When Juma al-Dosari, the al-Qaeda operative believed to have recruited the Lackawanna Six (also known as the Buffalo Six), preached in a upstate New York mosque in April 2001, his anti-American rhetoric so incensed mosque-goers that he was asked never to return.²³⁹

Contradictory evidence

“[T]he real story of American Muslims is one of accelerating alienation from the mainstream of U.S. life, with Muslims in this country choosing their Islamic identity over their American one. A new generation of American Muslims – living in the shadow of the September 11, 2001, attacks – is becoming more religious. They are more likely to take comfort in their own communities, and less likely to embrace the nation’s fabled melting pot of shared values and common culture.”²⁴⁰ – Geneive Abdo, *The Washington Post*, August 2006.

“The absence of significant terrorist attacks or even advanced terrorist plots in the United States since 9/11...suggests America’s Muslim population may be less susceptible than Europe’s Muslim population, if not entirely immune to jihadist ideology....Conversely, it may merely indicate that the American Muslim population has not yet been exposed to the degree or variety of radicalization that its European counterparts have been exposed to, and it requires not majorities, but only handfuls to carry out terrorist attacks.”²⁴¹ – Brian Michael Jenkins, quoted in an NYPD Intelligence Division report, August 2007.

“I have been convinced by my own reporting that political violence inside the United States initiated by Muslims is more or less inevitable, someday. It should be expected because it has

²³³ Benjamin, Daniel and Steven Simon. “Muslims in America – and Europe.” *The Globalist*, February 22, 2006.

²³⁴ U.S. Census Bureau. “Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2005.” August 2006.

²³⁵ “Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream.” Pew Research Center, May 22, 2007.

²³⁶ “The Great Divide: How Westerners and Muslims View Each Other.” Pew Global Attitudes Project. June 22, 2006.

²³⁷ “Mosque where Fort Dix suspects struggles with suspicion in wake of plot.” *Associated Press*, May 15, 2007.

²³⁸ Hirschhorn, Phil. “Al Qaeda trainee gets 10-year sentence.” CNN.com, December 3, 2003.

²³⁹ Felch, Jason. “‘The Closer’: An Al Qaeda Recruiter in the United States.” *PBS Frontline*, October 16, 2003.

²⁴⁰ Abdo, Geneive. “America’s Muslims Aren’t as Assimilated as You Think.” *The Washington Post*, August 27, 2006.

²⁴¹ Silber, Mitchell D. and Arvin Bhatt. “Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat.” NYPD Intelligence Division, August 15, 2007. pp. 12.

happened elsewhere in the world and because America has endured political violence throughout its history...”²⁴² – James Fallows, *Foreign Affairs*, September 2006.

“The 9/11 disaster showed that skilled, self-possessed and highly determined attackers could do tremendous damage to the homeland without having to rely on a support network within the United States.”²⁴³ – Steven N. Simon, Council on Foreign Relations, September 2006.

- The 9/11 hijackers and 1993 World Trade Center bombers received only minimal assistance from U.S. Muslims. Although the 9/11 Commission Report identifies three individuals who provided assistance to the 9/11 hijackers in the United States – Modhar Abdullah, Fahad al-Thumairy, and Anway Aulaqi – none were formally charged with complicity in the plot. According to the 9/11 Commission Report, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed went so far as to advise the hijackers to avoid visiting mosques and establishing personal contacts within the Muslim American community.²⁴⁴
- Militant subpopulations may exist even within largely assimilated communities. Though small in number, radicalized U.S. Muslims presumably exist in sufficient numbers to execute attacks on the scale of the Madrid train bombings.
- Radicalized, homegrown Muslim terrorists in Europe have been involved in several relatively small-scale attacks but few large-scale plots.
- In addition to being of questionable saliency to the question of homeland attack frequency, some evidence contradicts the notion of U.S. Muslims as generally well-assimilated and religiously moderate. According to the May 2007 Pew Research Center poll:
 - Forty-seven percent of U.S. Muslims say they think of themselves as Muslims first rather than as Americans; for Muslim Americans under age 30, the percentage rises to 60 percent.
 - Twenty-six percent of U.S. Muslims under age 30 believe that suicide bombings can sometimes be justified (versus 9 percent in the over-30 cohort).
 - Twenty-eight percent of U.S. Muslims reject the notion that Arabs were responsible for the 9/11 attacks while 40 percent believe that Arabs were responsible.²⁴⁵
- The Al Haramain Islamic Foundation, a Saudi-based charity designated by the U.S. Department of the Treasury as an al-Qaeda-linked terrorist front, is alleged to have compiled a database of more than 15,000 U.S. Muslim inmates as part of its prison evangelism program.²⁴⁶

²⁴² Fallows, James. “Act As If Mueller Is Right – Responses to ‘Is There Still a Terrorist Threat?’” *Foreign Affairs*, September 7, 2006.

²⁴³ Simon, Steven N. Testimony before the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, September 12, 2006.

²⁴⁴ National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States. pp. 215.

²⁴⁵ “Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream.” Pew Research Center, May 22, 2007.

²⁴⁶ Gartenstein-Ross, Daveed. Testimony before the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, September 19, 2006.

Hypothesis J) A lull is occurring between the disruption of al-Qaeda after 9/11 and the next generation of transnational terrorists that will rise from the Iraq war.

“The al-Qa’ida membership that was distinguished by having trained in Afghanistan will gradually dissipate, to be replaced in part by the dispersion of the experienced survivors of the conflict in Iraq.”²⁴⁷ – National Intelligence Council report, “Mapping the Global Future,” December 2004.

“The first generation of Al Qaeda came through the [Afghan] camps. The second generation are those who’ve logged on [to Islamist Web sites]. The next generation will be those who have come through the crucible of Iraq. Eventually, their level of skill is going to be greater than the skill of the original generation.”²⁴⁸ – Dr. John Arquilla, Naval Postgraduate School, August 2007.

“Those jihadis fighting in the conflict in Iraq have been trained in vicious urban warfare against the most formidable army in history. They will return to their home countries and add their expertise to the new cells springing up in the Middle East, Central Asia, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, and many European nations.”²⁴⁹ – Lawrence Wright, *The New Yorker*, 2006.

“There is even, under the best scenario, over time, the likelihood that some of the jihadists who are not killed [in Iraq] will, in a sense, go home, wherever home is, and will therefore disperse to various other countries.”²⁵⁰ – David B. Low, January 2005.

“What we are going to see in Iraq is a whole generation of jihadists who got their campaign ribbon in Anbar province or in the streets of Baghdad and they’re going to go home, they’re going to be very proud of it, they’re going to be the big man on campus, and they’re going to indoctrinate another generation of jihadists, just as the Arab Afghans came back from Afghanistan and did it in the early 1990s.”²⁵¹ – Bruce Riedel, Saban Center for Middle East Policy, June 2007.

“Islamic extremists are exploiting the Iraqi conflict to recruit new anti-U.S. jihadists. These jihadists who survive will leave Iraq experienced and focused on acts of urban terrorism. They represent a potential pool of contacts to build transnational terrorist cells, groups and networks in Saudi Arabia, Jordan and other countries.”²⁵² – Porter Goss, former Director of Central Intelligence, February 2005.

“Of note, we assess that al-Qa’ida will probably seek to leverage the contacts and capabilities of al-Qa’ida in Iraq (AQI), its most visible and capable affiliate and the only one known to have expressed a desire to attack the Homeland.”²⁵³ – National Intelligence Estimate, July 2007.

Critical Assumptions

- U.S. and allied counterterrorism activities since 9/11, including killing or capturing key al-Qaeda operatives, shuttering training camps, and drying up funding sources, have significantly degraded the network’s ability to attack the United States.

²⁴⁷ “Mapping the Global Future.” Report of the NIC’s 2020 Project, December 2004.

²⁴⁸ Thomas, Evan. “Into Thin Air.” *Newsweek*, September 3, 2007.

²⁴⁹ Wright, Lawrence. “The Master Plan.” *The New Yorker*, September 11, 2006.

²⁵⁰ Priest, Dana. “Iraq New Terror Breeding Ground.” *The Washington Post*, January 14, 2005.

²⁵¹ “Al Qaeda Rising?” Council on Foreign Relations meeting, June 1, 2007.

²⁵² Priest, Dana and Josh White. “War Helps Recruit Terrorists, Hill Told.” *The Washington Post*, February 17, 2005.

²⁵³ National Intelligence Estimate, “The Terrorist Threat to the U.S. Homeland.” July 17, 2007.

- The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are currently occupying the attention of jihadists who might otherwise be engaged in planning and conducting attacks against the U.S. homeland.
- The dispersion of experienced jihadists from these theaters of combat will not begin until U.S. forces have largely withdrawn.
- Jihadists drawn to Iraq to resist the U.S. occupation of a Muslim country will persist in their desire to attack Americans after U.S. forces have left Iraq.

Supporting evidence

- When al-Qaeda was formed in 1988 by veterans of the Soviet-Afghan, its charter barely extended beyond Osama bin Laden's vague notion of creating a "rapid reaction force" to assist beleaguered Muslims.²⁵⁴ Only in 1991 did the deployment of U.S. forces to the Arabian Peninsula provide bin Laden's now familiar rallying cry. Still more time passed before Ramzi Yousef (only loosely linked to al-Qaeda) conducted the 1993 World Trade Center bombing.²⁵⁵ Osama bin Laden's "Declaration of War against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places" was released in 1996, followed by the more well-known, "Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders," signed in 1998 by various Islamist leaders.^{256,257} Though a number of al-Qaeda plots against U.S. targets – notably Oplan Bojinka – may have been thwarted in the 1990s, it was not until the 1998 bombings of the U.S. embassies in Tanzania and Kenya that al-Qaeda was able to strike a major blow against the United States. This 10-year timeline between the group's formation and its first major attack may be similar to the arc of terrorist groups emerging from the battlefields of Iraq.
- In May 2007, the Times of London reported that a Middle Eastern intelligence service had intercepted a letter between Ayman al-Zawahiri and al-Qaeda in Iraq leader Abu Hamza al-Muhajer. Zawahiri's letter reportedly urged Muhajer to extend al-Qaeda's jihad to other countries in the region and establish an Islamic "greater Syria."²⁵⁸
- There is little dispute among terrorism and Middle East experts that the Iraq war has inflamed anti-American sentiment within the Muslim ummah. As author Marc Sageman notes, "Since 2003, the war in Iraq has without question fueled the process of radicalization worldwide, including the U.S. The data are crystal clear."²⁵⁹

Contradictory evidence

"The flow of fighters is already going back and forth, and the fight will be everywhere until the United States is willing to cease and desist." ²⁶⁰ – Dr. Mohammad al-Massari, director of the pro-jihadist Tajdeed.net web site, May 2007.

²⁵⁴ Bergen, Peter L. *The Osama bin Laden I Know*. 2006.

²⁵⁵ "Hunt for Al-Qaida: Al-Qaida Timeline – Plots and Attacks" MSNBC.

²⁵⁶ "Bin Laden's Fatwa." Online NewHour. First published in *Al Quds Al Arabi*, London, August 1996.

²⁵⁷ "Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders." World Islamic Front Statement. , Federation of American Scientists, February 23 1998.

²⁵⁸ Mahnaimi, Uzi. "Al-Qaeda chief urges Iraqis to export jihad." *The Sunday Times*, May 27, 2007.

²⁵⁹ Ignatius, David. "The Fading Jihadists." *The Washington Post*, February 28, 2008.

²⁶⁰ Moss, Michael and Souad Mekhennet. "Militants Widen Reach as Terror Seeps Out of Iraq." *The New York Times*, May 29, 2007.

“Estimating the number of fighters leaving Iraq is at least as difficult as it has been to count foreign militants joining the insurgency. But early signs of an exodus are clear, and officials in the United States and the Middle East say the potential for veterans of the insurgency to spread far beyond Iraq is significant.”²⁶¹ – Michael Moss and Souad Mekhennet, *The New York Times*, May 2007.

“People are going from the Afghan-Pakistan border to Iraq to learn the tactics and then come back. Seems like the reverse of the way the war on terror was supposed to work.”²⁶² – Art Keller, CIA operative quoted in *The New Republic*, October 2007.

“[I]t is by no means certain that foreign jihadists would be diverted from Iraq [following a complete withdrawal of U.S. combat brigades]. AQI’s foreign recruits have largely been from the hardline Salafist-jihadist school, which is extremely anti-Shiite. Such recruits would likely still have a high interest in fighting a Shiite regime that would be perceived to them as a U.S. puppet even after American troops depart.”²⁶³ – Peter Bergen and Paul Cruickshank, October 2007.

“[The threat jihadists] pose beyond Iraq is not so certain. There will be plenty of fighting to keep them there for years.”²⁶⁴ – Dr. Bruce Hoffman, Georgetown University, October 2007.

- Several terrorist operations outside of Iraq by jihadist Iraq war veterans suggest that the “lull” is over and the export of terrorism from Iraq is already well underway:
 - In October 2005, Iraqi interior minister Bayan Jabr claimed that a letter addressed to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi had been found on the body of senior al-Qaeda operative Abu Azzam, who requested that Zarqawi begin exporting the expertise of his operatives outside Iraq: “We got hold of a letter from Abu Azzam [to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the leader of al-Qaida in Iraq] asking him to begin to move a number of Arab fighters to the countries they came from, to transfer their experience in car bombings in Iraq. So you will see insurgencies in other countries.”²⁶⁵
 - Various media reports have described al-Qaeda’s establishment of an “underground railroad” to ferry jihadists to Iraq, where they are given instruction in cutting-edge combat tactics that they can apply to insurgencies in their home countries. Taliban commander Hamza Sangari was quoted in *Newsweek* in September 2005 saying, “God heard and granted my request to see and learn from the Iraqi *mujahedin*.” Sangari claims to have traveled to Iraq in January 2005 and spent several weeks receiving advanced explosives training before returning to Afghanistan.²⁶⁶ Taliban commander Mohammed Daud, echoed Sangari’s experience: “I’m explaining to my fighters every day the lessons I learned and my experience in Iraq. I want to copy in Afghanistan the tactics and spirit of the glorious Iraqi resistance.”²⁶⁷
 - Experts have observed that improvised explosive device (IED) technology and tactics developed in Iraq have increasingly appeared in Afghanistan.²⁶⁸

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Bergen, Peter. “War of Error: How Osama bin Laden beat George W. Bush.” *The New Republic*, October 15, 2007.

²⁶³ Bergen, Peter and Paul Cruickshank. “Al Qaeda: Self-Fulfilling Prophecy.” *Mother Jones*, October 18, 2007.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Howard, Michael. “Foreign fighters leaving Iraq to export terror, warns minister.” *The Guardian*, October 3, 2005.

²⁶⁶ Yousafzai, Sami and Ron Moreau. “Unholy Allies.” *Newsweek*, September 26, 2005.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Foot, Richard. “IEDs ‘evolution’ of Taliban tactics.” *The Ottawa Citizen*, July 6, 2007.

- In January 2005, a series of firefights occurred between Kuwaiti security forces and jihadi fighters, a number of whom were determined to have been trained in Iraq.²⁶⁹
- In November 2005, al-Qaeda in Iraq claimed responsibility for three suicide bombings that struck hotels in Amman, Jordan. All three terrorists and an unsuccessful fourth bomber were Iraqi natives.²⁷⁰
- In May-June 2007, Lebanese troops battled militants from the group Fatah al-Islam in a Palestinian refugee camp in north Lebanon. The al-Qaeda-linked organization is reportedly made up of scores of foreign fighters who are veterans of the Iraq war.^{271,272}
- Director of National Intelligence Michael McConnell testified before the House Intelligence Committee in February 2008 that, “I am increasingly concerned that as we inflict significant damage on al-Qa’ida in Iraq, it may shift resources to mounting more attacks outside of Iraq. Although the ongoing conflict in Iraq will likely absorb most of AQI’s resources over the next year, AQI has leveraged its broad external networks – including some reaching into Europe – in support of external operations.”²⁷³

²⁶⁹ Ambah, Faiza Saleh. “Iraq: spinning off Arab terrorists?” *The Christian Science Monitor*, February 8, 2005.

²⁷⁰ “Bomber’s wife arrested in Jordan.” BBC News, November 13, 2005.

²⁷¹ Moss, Michael and Souad Mekhennet. “A new face of Al Qaeda emerges in Lebanon.” *The International Herald Tribune*, March 15, 2007.

²⁷² Siddiq, Nazih. “Lebanon army storms militant posts at camp, 18 die.” *Reuters*, June 1, 2007.

²⁷³ McConnell, Michael. Testimony before the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, February 7, 2008.

Hypothesis K) Non-Salafist terrorist groups such as Hezbollah have lacked the capability to attack the U.S. homeland.

“In the last few months, we have begun to reconsider the threat of terrorist attacks against the homeland emanating out of the Shiite groups, such as Hezbollah, which have to date...refrained from attacking the United States directly. We strongly suspect that these groups have the latent capacity to attack the United States directly and effectively.”²⁷⁴ – Richard A. Falkenrath, NYPD Deputy Commissioner for Counterterrorism, September 2006

“Many Americans may be surprised to learn that Hezbollah’s global reach includes significant activities on U.S. soil. The vast majority of this activity has been linked to fundraising, specifically to attempts to use Visa cards and MasterCards for fraudulent funds to support Hezbollah along with other criminal fundraising activities. We must be concerned that this existing network could be used, should Hezbollah, perhaps prodded by Iran, decide to strike inside our country.”²⁷⁵ – Rep. Edward R. Royce, House Committee on International Relations, September 2006.

“I would say, generally, we are not seeing Hezbollah operatives in the United States. What we are seeing is a lot of supporters and sympathizers who are funneling a lot of money back to Lebanon for the cause, for the suicide bombers and the terrorist operations that are occurring in the Middle East...What we do...working together with intelligence communities overseas and with our law enforcement here is try to target those that we know are Hezbollah members, who we know have the military training, and try to intercept them if we know they are trying to head to the country or are in the country. I think, to date, we have been very successful regarding that end of it.”²⁷⁶ – Mr. John G. Kavanagh, FBI Counterterrorism Division, September 2006.

“U.S. officials say [Hezbollah’s Charlotte, North Carolina-based financing cell’s] deftness at infiltrating this community illustrates Hezbollah’s potential to unleash coordinated attacks in the USA – if it ever chose to do so.”²⁷⁷ – Toni Locy, USA Today, May 2003.

Critical Assumptions

- Hezbollah’s development of sophisticated attack capabilities in the Middle East and limited capabilities overseas has not translated into the ability to conduct strikes against the U.S. homeland.
- Despite wide consensus concerning Hezbollah’s *latent* capability to strike the U.S. homeland, there is no evidence network of Hezbollah operatives in place to conduct attacks – including retaliation against any future attack on Iranian nuclear facilities – within the United States
- Various other regionally focused non-Salafist terrorist networks might possess the ideological motivation to attack the U.S. homeland but have not invested in “standing up” the capability to do so.

Supporting evidence

- Despite having uncovered Hezbollah fundraising operations in the United States, as well as identified open sympathizers of Hezbollah, Hamas and other terrorist

²⁷⁴ Falkenrath, Richard A. Testimony before the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, September 12, 2006.

²⁷⁵ Royce Edward R. Statement during House International Relations Subcommittee on International Terrorism and Nonproliferation, September 28, 2006, pp. 2.

²⁷⁶ Kavanagh, John G. Statement during House International Relations Subcommittee on International Terrorism and Nonproliferation, September 28, 2006, pp. 18-19, 31.

²⁷⁷ Locy, Toni. “U.S. looks at potential danger from Hezbollah.” *USA Today*, May 13, 2003.

groups, no evidence has been made public to suggest that non-Salafist “sleepers cells” are poised to commit violence within the U.S. homeland.

Contradictory evidence

“Hezbollah, as an organization with capability and worldwide presence, is [al-Qaeda’s] equal, if not a far more capable organization. I actually think they’re a notch above in many respects.”²⁷⁸ – George Tenet, former Director of Central Intelligence, February 2003.

“Apart from Al Qaeda, the only other foreign terrorist organization with the current capability, reason, and potential intent to commit a serious act of terrorism in the USA is Hizballah...”²⁷⁹ – Dr. Gordon Woo, Risk Management Solutions, January 2004.

“I would assess the overall terror threat from Hezbollah *in the U.S.* in the aftermath of [the 2006 war with Israel] to be unchanged at level [sic] between moderate and low. Breaking this assessment down further, I believe Hezbollah’s intentions to conduct a terror attack against the U.S. under the present circumstances to be low while its capabilities are from moderate to high...[R]elative to Hezbollah’s capabilities in the U.S., we must not...make the mistake of distinguishing between their fund raising and charity dispensing functions, on the one hand, and their terror apparatus on the other. These two wings—the so-called political and military wings—are one and the same and cannot be separated. As such, we must not lose sight of the fact that, notwithstanding all the good works these organizations do for the impoverished populations globally, their *raison d’etre* is violent terrorism and they remain a serious threat to the U.S.”²⁸⁰ – Christopher Hamilton, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, September 2006.

“Where there are cells of [Hamas and Hezbollah] supporters, with not too much additional energy applied by motivated recruiters or leaders, they can shift them into a more operational posture. In the United States up until recently we have not seen that shift from either Hamas or Hezbollah. But that doesn’t mean they are not able to do that. They are very able to do this.”²⁸¹ – Ken Piernick, former FBI counterterrorism agent, April, 2004.

“Before al-Qaeda’s September 11th attack, Hezbollah killed more Americans than any other terrorist groups. They are lethal, highly skilled, whether they are dug in in southern Lebanon or conducting operations overseas, where they have scored some pretty impressive strikes and operations. We know about them in Argentina, in Australia, recruitment in the Gulf of Guinea, West Africa dealing with the diamond trade, in North Carolina with the cigarette smuggling case. They are good, and they can do basically anything. Highly skilled.”²⁸² – Thomas Sanderson, CSIS, September 2006.

“I believe that if there’s a Hezbollah terrorist cell in Charlotte, which was proven beyond a reasonable doubt to the satisfaction of 12 jurors, then there are similar cells elsewhere.”²⁸³ – Robert Conrad, U.S. Attorney for the Western District of North Carolina, November 2002.

- The March 17, 1992, bombing of the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires, Argentina (29 dead) and the July 18, 1994, bombing of the Argentine Israelite Mutual Association, a Jewish cultural center in Buenos Aires (85 dead) – both presumed

²⁷⁸ Byman, Daniel. “Should Hezbollah Be Next?” *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2003.

²⁷⁹ Woo, Gordon. “Understanding Terrorism Risk.” Risk Management Solutions, *The Risk Report*, January 2004.

²⁸⁰ Hamilton, Christopher. Statement during House International Relations Subcommittee on International Terrorism and Nonproliferation, September 28, 2006, pp. 64.

²⁸¹ Lake, Eli. “ Hamas Agents Lurking in U.S., FBI Warns.” *The New York Sun*, April 29, 2004.

²⁸² Sanderson, Thomas. Testimony before the House International Relations Subcommittee on International Terrorism and Nonproliferation, September 7, 2006, pp. 33.

²⁸³ Conrad, Jr., Robert. Testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee, November 20, 2002.

- to have been the work of Hezbollah operatives – illustrate the organization’s global reach.²⁸⁴
- According to an April 2004 New York Sun report, in 2002 the FBI produced an internal assessment of Hamas’ and Hezbollah’s capabilities in the United States, which concluded that 50-100 operatives from the networks were already present in the country. According to the FBI report, while these operatives were principally engaged in fund-raising activities, they had received terrorist training and thus were capable of conducting attacks within the United States.^{285,286}
 - In April 2006, The Washington Post reported a “growing consensus” among U.S. counterterrorism experts that Iranian and Hezbollah operatives would attack civilians in the United States and Europe in response to any American-led strike on Iran’s nuclear facilities.²⁸⁷ This assumption suggests that Hezbollah already has a terrorist infrastructure in place in the United States or could constitute such a capability rapidly.
 - Hezbollah’s presence in the Tri-border region of Paraguay, Brazil and Argentina – where it conducts extensive fundraising and terrorist training activities – may provide a launching point for potential large-scale attacks against the U.S. homeland.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁴ Gato, Pablo and Robert Windrem. “Hezbollah builds a Western base.” NBC News, May 9, 2007.

²⁸⁵ Lake, Eli. “ Hamas Agents Lurking in U.S., FBI Warns.” *The New York Sun*, April 29, 2004.

²⁸⁶ Levitt, Matthew. “Could Hamas Target the West?” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, November 2007.

²⁸⁷ Priest, Dana. “Attacking Iran May Trigger Terrorism.” *The Washington Post*, April 2, 2006.

²⁸⁸ Goldberg, Jeffrey. “A Reporter at Large: In the Party of God (Part II).” *The New Yorker*, October 28, 2002.

Basket III: Limited terrorist motivations to attack the U.S. homeland due to concern that such an attack would be counter-productive or otherwise inopportune.

Hypothesis L	Al-Qaeda's next attack on the U.S. homeland must surpass 9/11.
Hypothesis M	9/11 was a strategic miscalculation that al-Qaeda does not wish to repeat.
Hypothesis N	Al-Qaeda has refrained from attacking the U.S. homeland again out of concern for preserving its sanctuary in Pakistan.
Hypothesis O	Terrorists believe that striking the U.S. homeland again could rally international support for America and weaken the radical Islamist movement.
Hypothesis P	Al-Qaeda has become more sensitive to possible Muslim backlash from the killing of American civilians.
Hypothesis Q	Al-Qaeda is undertaking a campaign to warn the United States of its intent to attack and give Americans the chance to convert to Islam.
Hypothesis R	Al-Qaeda needs success – and believes that failure is offensive to God and success is reflective of God's will – resulting in conservative planning.
Hypothesis S	9/11 gave terrorism a bad name – domestic right-wing and left-wing extremist organizations have lacked the motivation to conduct a large-scale attack.
Hypothesis T	"Lone Wolf" terrorists have lacked the motivation to conduct a large-scale attack.
Hypothesis U	Hezbollah has the motivation and capability to attack the United States, but has been restrained by Iran and Syria.

The third explanatory basket comprises hypotheses suggesting that while various terrorist organizations are capable of attacking the U.S. homeland, they have determined that another attack would be ill-advised – at least for the time being. As Independent Institute scholar Charles V. Peña notes, “Although we can and should take comfort in the fact that America has not been attacked again, that does not necessarily mean that all of the actions we have taken have prevented an attack. It could simply be that al-Qaeda has not chosen to attack. Unfortunately, we are at a loss to know the explanation.”²⁸⁹ The theories in this basket principally concern the effect that another large-scale domestic strike would have on the terrorist network that perpetrates the attack or, more indirectly, on the constituency or patron state whose support the organization seeks to gain or sustain. Different reasons are put forward to explain such concern about the adverse spillovers of another major attack on the American homeland.

The first hypothesis in this category emphasizes the belief that al-Qaeda seeks to conduct ever more grandiose attacks, each surpassing the previous operation in devastation. Given the extraordinary success of 9/11, considerable time and resources are therefore necessary to achieve an attack of comparable grandeur. Another hypothesis proposes that al-Qaeda's leadership has come to view the 9/11 attacks as a colossal strategic miscalculation that must not be repeated. Driven from Afghanistan, subjected to years of attack from the United States, and alienated from “mainstream” jihadist leaders who viewed the attacks as irresponsible, al-Qaeda has restrained itself from further attacks on the U.S. homeland. Other hypotheses contend that the global jihadist movement has responded to widespread public revulsion over indiscriminate attacks on civilians. Another explores the “civil war” within Islam between not only the Sunni and Shia sects, but also the competition within the radical Islamist community for the mantle of leadership of the jihadist movement.

²⁸⁹ Peña, Charles V. “More Security, But Are We Safer?” *The Star-Ledger*, October 21, 2004.

"A number of reasons account for terrorism's increased lethality. First, there appears to be a pattern that suggests that at least some terrorists have come to believe that attention is no longer as readily obtained as it once was. To their minds, both the public and media have become increasingly inured or desensitized to the continuing spiral of terrorist violence. Accordingly, these terrorists feel themselves pushed to undertake ever more dramatic or destructively lethal deeds today in order to achieve the same effect that a less ambitious or bloody action may have had in the past."²⁹⁰ – Dr. Bruce Hoffman, RAND Corporation, 1999.

"Part of the appeal of al Qaeda is its mystique. Superhuman feats, brilliant execution, masterful planning. That aura feeds its ideology of historical inevitability, that ultimately it will prevail over Western decadence, because the seemingly high-tech West lacks the diabolical and methodical will that Islamism brings to the war."²⁹¹ – Dr. Charles Krauthammer, *The Washington Post*, February 2004.

"Al Qaeda may not be interested in an attack on U.S. soil that is not of the scope of September 11. The group may reason that anything less would suggest a diminution of its power and capability, and lead to the perception among Muslims that the organization is on the wane. According to this line of thought, al Qaeda would rather forgo small operations within the U.S. homeland in favor of waiting – however long it might take – to generate an attack of dramatic size, scale, and impact."²⁹² – "Exploring Terrorist Targeting Preferences," RAND report, 2007.

"Al-Qaeda may be concerned that a CBRN attack that 'only' kills dozens of people would be perceived as a relative failure and demonstrate its weakened position relative to its pre-9/11 stature. The organization may prefer to wait until its CBRN capability has matured to the point where its chances of success are greater and its capability for destruction has increased."²⁹³ – Chris Quillen, CACI International, February 2007.

"That they would attack again soon after 9/11 was *our* expectation, not *their* expectation. If they wanted to send a guy into Wal-Mart with an AK-47, they could have a long time ago. But usually they wait until they can do something shocking, maybe three or four simultaneous attacks. You need time to do that."²⁹⁴ – Dr. Mia Bloom, University of Georgia, August 2005.

"Since 2001, jihadists in other parts of the world have attacked residences, restaurants, hotel lobbies, nightclubs, commuter trains, subways, churches, synagogues, and crowded city streets. The same targets are vulnerable in the United States....Jihadist planners might worry that smaller terrorist attacks will provoke even tighter security, making it more difficult for them to prepare another major assault."²⁹⁵ – Brian Michael Jenkins, RAND Corporation, 2006.

Critical Assumptions

- Al-Qaeda's leaders have made a calculated decision to withhold from small-scale attacks on the U.S. homeland and have effectively communicated such orders to obedient operatives around the world.

²⁹⁰ Hoffman, Bruce. "Terrorism Trends and Prospects." In *Countering the New Terrorism*, RAND Corporation, 1999. pp. 13.

²⁹¹ Krauthammer, Charles. "The Other Shoe." *The Washington Post*, February 13, 2004.

²⁹² Libicki, et. al. "Exploring Terrorist Targeting Preferences." RAND, 2007. pp. 13.

²⁹³ Quillen, Chris. "Three Explanations for al-Qaeda's Lack of a CBRN Attack." *Terrorism Monitor*, February 15, 2007.

²⁹⁴ Hampson, Rick. "Why Suicide Attackers Haven't Hit U.S. Again." *USA Today*, August 7, 2005.

²⁹⁵ Jenkins, Brian M. *Unconquerable Nation: Knowing Our Enemy Strengthening Ourselves*. RAND, 2006. pp. 32.

- Homegrown, al-Qaeda-inspired terrorist cells have withheld from carrying out small-scale attacks on the U.S. homeland in deference to the group's senior leaders.
- Al-Qaeda perceives that more limited attacks on the U.S. homeland akin to the London Underground bombings are insufficient to achieve al-Qaeda's policy objectives. Indeed, if al-Qaeda's leaders were presented with a highly achievable plot that would kill 1,000 Americans, they would rebuff the plot for its insufficient death toll.
- Al-Qaeda's leaders have not been influenced by the public condemnation of the 9/11 attacks, including statements by Islamist leaders and fatwas of Islamic clerics who denounced the attacks as "un-Islamic."

Supporting evidence

- Progressive escalation of violence has been observed across the spectrum of terrorist groups for decades.²⁹⁶
- Past spectacular attacks by al-Qaeda's core operatives demonstrated evolving levels of sophistication, from the simultaneous trucking bombings in 1998 of the U.S. embassies in Africa to the water-borne explosive attack on the U.S.S. Cole in 2000 to the simultaneous hijackings of 9/11.
- Al-Qaeda's use of multiple, highly coordinated bombings has come to be widely identified in both media and official government reports as a "trademark" or "hallmark" of the group, suggesting that the network disdains less-than-spectacular operations.²⁹⁷
- If successfully executed, the 2006 transatlantic airline plot – similar in scale to the planned 1995 Oplan Bojinka operation – would have produced casualties on a scale comparable to 9/11.
- U.S. counterterrorism operatives reportedly learned of a 2003 al-Qaeda plot to attack the New York City subway system using hydrogen cyanide that was allegedly aborted on orders from bin Laden's second-in-command Ayman al-Zawahiri, possibly because he deemed the attacks insufficiently grand to reprise the 9/11 attacks.^{298,299}

Contradictory evidence

"If Al Qaeda could hit the United States today, they would. They are not waiting."³⁰⁰ – Mary Habeck, Johns Hopkins University, February 2006.

"We didn't see anyone try to fly into Buckingham Palace or take down the [British Telecom] tower. It doesn't show that kind of need to top oneself that al Qaeda has shown in the past."³⁰¹ –

²⁹⁶ Jenkins, Brian Michael. "The New Age of Terrorism." Chapter 8: *The McGraw-Hill Homeland Security Handbook*, 2006. pp. 118.

²⁹⁷ This point was raised by a participant in the September 2007 "Homeland Attack Frequency" conference during Working Group 2. For further elaboration, see Rabasa, et. al. "Beyond al-Qaeda: The Global Jihadist Movement." RAND, 2006. pp. 66.

²⁹⁸ Hosenball, Mark. "Too Close for Comfort." *Newsweek*, June 18, 2006.

²⁹⁹ Suskind, Ron. *The One Percent Doctrine*. pp. 218-220.

³⁰⁰ Habeck, Mary. "Knowing the Enemy: Jihadist Ideology and the War on Terror." MIT Security Studies Program Seminar, February 15, 2006.

³⁰¹ Coll, Steve and Susan Glasser. "Attacks Bear Earmarks Of Evolving Al Qaeda." *The Washington Post*, July 8, 2005.

Daniel Benjamin, The Brookings Institution, remarking on the July 2005 London Underground bombings.

“The focus is on mid- to small-range targets in the region and not [to] go after big symbolic targets like the Twin Towers.”³⁰² – Dr. William McCants, Combating Terrorism Center, June 2006.

- U.S. authorities have thwarted several al-Qaeda plots of modest scale, such as Pakistani immigrant Majid Khan’s alleged plan to explode underground gasoline storage tanks in the United States.³⁰³ According to U.S. officials, Khan was dispatched directly by Khalid Sheik Mohammed, whose supervision of the plot suggests that al-Qaeda’s ambitions are not limited to grandiose attacks.
- The train bombings in Madrid, London and elsewhere suggest that, unless the order to withhold from all but the most spectacular attacks applies only to the U.S. homeland, al-Qaeda operatives have either not received this message or have chosen to disobey it.
 - In February 2005, DIA Director Vice Admiral Lowell Jacoby testified before the Senate Intelligence Committee that “Usama bin Ladin and his senior leadership no longer exercise centralized control and direction.”³⁰⁴
 - In a March 2008 piece in *Foreign Policy*, former CIA operative Marc Sageman writes that “At present, al Qaeda Central cannot impose discipline on these third-wave wannabes, mostly because it does not know who they are. Without this command and control, each disconnected network acts according to its own understanding and capability, but their collective actions do not amount to any unified long-term goal or strategy.”³⁰⁵
- During the September 2007 “Homeland Attack Frequency” conference, several participants asked rhetorically whether al-Qaeda would be satisfied if it could conduct an attack on the United States today that merely matched the destruction of 9/11. Suspecting that the answer was almost certainly in the affirmative, this logic was seen to undercut the power of the hypothesis.

³⁰² Sauer, Maddy. “Al Qaeda Strategic Vision: Engage the U.S. Overseas, Not at Home.” ABC News, June 27, 2006.

³⁰³ Rich, Eric and Dan Eggen. “From Baltimore Suburbs to a Secret CIA Prison.” *The Washington Post*, September 10, 2006.

³⁰⁴ Jacoby, Lowell E. Testimony before the Senate Intelligence Committee, February 16, 2005.

³⁰⁵ Sageman, Marc. “The Next Generation of Terror.” *Foreign Policy*, March/April 2008.

Hypothesis M) 9/11 was a strategic miscalculation that al-Qaeda does not wish to repeat.

“According to the binaries of [bin Laden’s] background script, if al-Qaeda was strong and pure, then Americans were soft and corrupt, their regime democratic only in the formal sense. Convinced of their weak motives, devious relations, and corrupt institutions, bin Laden believed that neither Americans nor their government would be able to respond politically, socially, or morally to his perfectly executed script. In fact, however, the effect of al-Qaeda’s performance was the very opposite from the one it had hoped to achieve. Rather than moral destabilization, there was revivification. Osama bin Laden’s terrorism was performed before a fragmented and polarized audience, and it produced a reading counter to those intended by the terrorist-actors themselves.”³⁰⁶ – Jeffrey C. Alexander, Yale University, March 2004.

“[O]ne of the major miscalculations made by bin Laden and Zawahiri was the expectation that in attacking America they could rally their estranged jihadi cohorts back into the fold as well as mobilize the *ummah* against pro-Western Muslim rulers and their superpower patron – the United States. They had anticipated a response similar to that which was prompted by the Russian invasion and occupation of Afghanistan in the late 1970s.”³⁰⁷ – Dr. Fawaz A. Gerges, Sarah Lawrence College, January 2006.

“[T]hey had fought the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, and they fondly remembered that war as a galvanizing experience, an event that roused the indifferent of the Arab world to fight and win against a technologically superior Western infidel. The *jihadis* expected the United States, like the Soviet Union, to be a clumsy opponent. Afghanistan would again become a slowly filling graveyard for the imperial ambitions of a superpower.”³⁰⁸ – Alan Cullison, *The Atlantic Monthly*, September 2004.

“[T]he dominant response by jihadis to September 11 is an explicit rejection of Al Qaeda and total opposition to the internationalization of jihad, rather than heeding its call and taking up arms against the camp of unbelief. Privately, former jihadis confide that they are furious with Al Qaeda, whose actions appear ‘senseless and ‘self-destructive,’ supplying ammunition to their tormentors – Muslim rulers – to strike harder against the Islamist movement.”³⁰⁹ – Dr. Fawaz A. Gerges, Sarah Lawrence College, January 2006.

Critical Assumptions

- The 9/11 attacks were intended less to cause economic damage and civilian casualties for their own sake than to provoke a U.S. military response. This response was meant to have bogged the United States down in a protracted conflict on Muslim soil and rallied jihadists from around the world against a common enemy.
- U.S. and allied responses to 9/11, which have included al-Qaeda’s ejection its Afghanistan sanctuary, the occupations of two Muslim countries, increased U.S. aid to al-Qaeda-targeted Middle East regimes, and the deaths of thousands of Muslims in U.S.-led wars, can be viewed as objective setbacks for al-Qaeda.³¹⁰
- Al-Qaeda wishes to avoid further policy setbacks that would likely accompany another large-scale attack on the U.S. homeland.

³⁰⁶ Jeffrey C. Alexander. “From the Depths of Despair: Performance, Counterperformance, and ‘September 11.’” *Sociological Theory*, Theories of Terrorism: A Symposium, March 2004, pp. 102-103.

³⁰⁷ Gerges, Fawaz A. “Assessing al-Qaeda Performance and Threat.” *Strategic, Political and Social Perspectives on Radical Ideologies*, June 26, 2006.

³⁰⁸ Cullison, Alan. “Inside Al-Qaeda’s Hard Drive.” *The Atlantic Monthly*, September 2004.

³⁰⁹ Gerges, Fawaz A. *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global*. (2007). pp. 228.

³¹⁰ Abrahms, Max. “Why Terrorism Does Not Work.” *International Security*, Fall 2006.

Supporting evidence

- U.S. withdrawals from Lebanon in 1983 and Somalia in 1994 reportedly convinced al-Qaeda's leaders that the United States would not be prepared to accept battlefield casualties in Afghanistan. In an October 2001 Al-Jazeera interview, Osama Bin Laden remarked, "We experienced the Americans through our brothers who went into combat against them in Somalia, for example. We found they had no power worthy of mention. There was a huge aura over America...that terrified people even before they entered combat. Our brothers who were here in Afghanistan tested them, and together with some of the mujahedeen in Somalia, God granted them victory. America exited dragging its tails in failure, defeat, and ruin, caring for nothing."³¹¹
- In a manuscript entitled, "The Story of the Afghan-Arabs: From the Entry to Afghanistan to the Final Exodus with Taliban," an anonymous author believed to have been a member of al-Qaeda's Shura (consultative) Council and an "Afghan Arab" veteran of the war against the Soviets wrote that, "Bin Laden used to think that America was weaker than what many of the hawks around him thought. He mentioned that in many meetings attended by a wider circle of followers, by citing the Beirut incident of 1983 when an attack against the Marines prompted the Americans to flee the country and a similar attack in Somalia that caused the Americans to leave in a 'shameful disarray and indecorous haste.'" The author also offered a damning portrait of al-Qaeda's final period in Afghanistan before the 9/11 attacks: "It was a tragic example of an Islamic movement under a catastrophic leadership. Despite their knowledge that [Osama bin Laden] was taking them to the abyss, everyone was succumbing to his will and taking his orders with suicidal submission."³¹²
- Al-Qaeda's assassination of Northern Alliance commander Ahmad Shah Massoud two days before 9/11 has been interpreted as bin Laden's attempt to curry favor with the Taliban or to neutralize an irreplaceable enemy leader before the U.S. assault on Afghanistan began.³¹³ Both explanations point to bin Laden's expectation that Afghanistan would become a battleground between al-Qaeda fighters and U.S. military personnel. However, the influx of large numbers of Muslim volunteers that Osama bin Laden expected to travel to Afghanistan to fight the United States did not materialize.
- The regional focus of many Islamist terrorist operations since 2001 suggests that the 9/11 attacks failed to coalesce disparate jihadist groups around the central goal of attacking the U.S. homeland. A number of highly regarded radical Islamist figures openly criticized bin Laden and Zawahiri for endangering the Islamist movement with a reckless attack on the United States.³¹⁴
- Montasser al-Zayyat, a spokesman for the Egyptian terrorist organization Gama'a al-Islamiyya and a former associate of al-Qaeda second-in-command Ayman al Zawahiri, authored a biography of his one-time colleague entitled, *The Road to Al-Qaeda: The Story of bin Laden's Right-Hand Man*. In his work, al-Zayyat wrote that "Islamists across the globe were adversely affected by the September 11 attacks....Even Islamic movements that did not target the United States are

³¹¹ "Transcript of Bin Laden's October interview." CNN.com, February 5, 2002.

³¹² "The Story of the Afghan-Arabs: From the Entry to Afghanistan to the Final Exodus with Taliban." *Asharq Al-Awsat*, June 29, 2005.

³¹³ Martin, Susan Taylor. "The man who would have led Afghanistan." *St. Petersburg Times*, September 9, 2002.

³¹⁴ Gerges, Fawaz A.. "Assessing al-Qaeda Performance and Threat." *Strategic, Political and Social Perspectives on Radical Ideologies*, June 26, 2006.

- paying the price for this folly....Bin Laden's desire to take revenge heedless of the American and international response, and its effect on the future of the Islamic movements in the world, has given the Americans and other governments the power to destroy the Islamists before our eyes."³¹⁵
- A June 2002 letter written from al-Qaeda operative Abd-Al-Halim Adl to Khalid Sheikh Mohammed suggests that, as a result of the setbacks suffered since 9/11, the network should halt terrorist attacks until its footing in the post-9/11 era is secured: "Today we are experiencing one setback after another and have gone from misfortune to disaster. I say today we must completely halt all external actions until we sit down and consider the disaster we caused [on 9/11]....My beloved brother, stop all foreign actions, stop sending people to captivity, stop devising new operations..."^{316,317}

Contradictory evidence

"One suspects...that if bin Laden had been told on [9/11] that in a mere 48 months he would behold a world in which the United States, 'the idol of the age,' was bogged down in an endless guerrilla war fighting in a major Muslim country; a world in which its all-powerful army, with few allies and little sympathy, found itself overstretched and exhausted; in which its dispirited people were starting to demand from their increasingly unpopular leader a withdrawal without victory – one suspects that such a prophecy would have pleased him."³¹⁸ – Mark Danner, *The New York Times Magazine*, September 2005.

"By God's grace, al-Qaeda's incitement has met with wondrous success; Western polls show that hundreds of millions of Muslims now believe that U.S. foreign policy aims to undermine or destroy Islam."³¹⁹ – Michael Scheuer, in fictitious "State of the Jihad," *The Washington Post*, February 2008.

"It is not merely that bin Laden has not been captured or killed and that videotapes keep coming out of his hideout like taunts, it is rather that his initial strategy has borne fruit. It was always his intention to draw America into Afghanistan where, as had been done to the Soviets, they could be mauled by the fierce mujaheddin....[H]e succeeded beyond his wildest expectations when the U.S. responded to the Sept. 11 attacks by invading Afghanistan and, in a beat, then going to war in Iraq. It remains mired in both countries to this day."³²⁰ – Richard Cohen, *The Washington Post*, September 2006.

"What we had wished for actually happened. It was crowned by the announcement of Bush Jr. of his crusade against Islam and Muslims everywhere."³²¹ – Saif al-Adel, al-Qaeda military chief, May 2005.

- Far from a calamity, numerous international developments triggered by or related to 9/11 can be viewed as highly favorable to al-Qaeda, including:
 - Thousands of U.S. battlefield casualties in Iraq and Afghanistan;
 - Global public opinion – both Muslim and non-Muslim – increasingly against the United States;

³¹⁵ al-Zayyat, Montasser. *The Road to al-Qaeda: The Story of bin Laden's Right-Hand Man*. London: Pluto Press (2004), pp. 96.

³¹⁶ Bergen, Peter. "War of Error: How Osama bin Laden beat George W. Bush." *The New Republic*, October 15, 2007.

³¹⁷ Bergen, Peter. "Could it Happen Again?" *The National Interest*, September/October 2006.

³¹⁸ Danner, Mark. "Taking Stock of the Forever War." *The New York Times*, September 11, 2005.

³¹⁹ Scheuer, Michael. "The State of the Jihad, As He Might See It." *The Washington Post*, February 17, 2008.

³²⁰ Cohen, Richard. "Thanks to Bush's Incompetence, bin Laden Won." *The Washington Post*, September 12, 2006.

³²¹ Blanchard, Christopher M. "Al Qaeda: Statements and Evolving Ideology." CRS report, July 9, 2007.

- Rising strength of the global radical Islamist movement.
- Al-Qaeda may view the deaths of Muslim civilians during the U.S. military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan as valuable propaganda victories, reflected in polls that show substantial increases in Muslim hostility to the United States since 9/11.
- Osama bin Laden's own writings cast doubt on his intention to replicate the mujahideen victory over the Soviets. In his 1996 declaration he states that "due to the imbalance of power between our armed forces and the enemy forces, a suitable means of fighting must be adopted – that is, using fast-moving light forces that work under complete secrecy. In other words to initiate a guerrilla war, where the sons of the nation, and not the military forces, take part in it. And as you know, it is wise, in the present circumstances, for the armed military forces not to be engaged in a conventional fight with the forces of the crusader enemy."³²²
- During the September 2007 "Homeland Attack Frequency" conference, several participants suggested that terrorist groups that remain idle for too long risk losing support from their more action-oriented constituency. This logic was seen to detract from the explanatory power of this hypothesis, especially given the widespread recognition of al-Qaeda's image sensitivity. However, in light of the network's increased global activity since 9/11 – especially in Iraq – it should not be assumed that the non-occurrence of attacks against the U.S. homeland is perceived by al-Qaeda's base of support as indicative of the group's idleness.

³²² "Bin Laden's Fatwa." Online NewHour. First published in *Al Quds Al Arabi*, London, August 1996.

Hypothesis N) Al-Qaeda has refrained from attacking the U.S. homeland again out of concern for preserving its sanctuary in Pakistan.

“Al-Qaeda is heavily dependent on its safe haven in the tribal areas of Pakistan. This dependency may have driven al-Qaeda to compromise its immediate desire to launch CBRN attacks against the United States for the longer-term goal of establishing their authority in a Muslim land as a stepping stone to future attacks and ultimate victory. In particular, al-Qaeda may assess that a significant CBRN attack against the West (or, for that matter, another major attack on the U.S. homeland) would invite a U.S. invasion of the tribal areas. The Pakistani government...may have even warned al-Qaeda’s leadership that such an attack will lead to U.S. troops on Pakistani soil...and the subsequent end of al-Qaeda’s safe haven.”³²³ – Chris Quillen, CACI International, February 2007.

“Iraq has, of course, been an undeniable boon for al Qaeda, both as a battleground and a rallying cause. But when it comes to exporting terrorism, U.S. intelligence is more worried today about the badlands of western Pakistan. That’s where bin Laden has succeeded in reconstituting a safe haven after several years on the run.”³²⁴ – Kevin Whitelaw, U.S. News & World Report, May 2007.

“[Al-Qaeda’s leaders] seem to be fairly well-settled into the safe haven and the ungoverned spaces of Pakistan. We see more training, we see more money and we see more communications. So we see that activity rising.”³²⁵ – Dr. John Kringen, CIA Deputy Director for Intelligence, July 2007.

“Like enemy leadership, enemy safe havens have great strategic importance. Safe haven allows the enemy to recruit, organize, plan, train, coalesce, rest, and claim turf as a symbol of legitimacy. This is why al-Qaeda and its affiliates place so much emphasis on safe haven.”³²⁶ – Hank Crumpton, former CIA operative, June 2006.

“In my opinion, the jihadi threat from Pakistan is the biggest emerging threat we are facing in Europe. Pakistan is an ideological and training hotbed for jihadists, and they are being exported here.”³²⁷ – Judge Baltasar Garzón, Spanish antiterrorism magistrate, February 2008.

Critical Assumptions

- The senior leadership of the al-Qaeda network is, in fact, based in Pakistan.
- The United States possesses the capability to invade and occupy Pakistan’s tribal areas, or at the very least significantly degrade al-Qaeda’s freedom of movement and operation within Pakistan using U.S. military force. Osama bin Laden in turn believes that the loss of its Pakistan sanctuary would be a significant setback to his organization.
- Al-Qaeda’s core leadership still possesses the capability to plan, order and conduct an attack on the U.S. homeland.
- Al-Qaeda’s Pakistani-based leadership retains communications with and operational control over an increasingly decentralized jihadist movement; a high-level decision to withhold from attacks against the U.S. homeland would be able to be transmitted to operatives and would be obeyed.

³²³ Quillen, Chris. “Three Explanations for al-Qaeda’s Lack of a CBRN Attack.” *Terrorism Monitor*, February 15, 2007.

³²⁴ Whitelaw, Kevin. “A Resurgent Menace.” *U.S. News and World Report*, May 6, 2007.

³²⁵ Kelly, Mary Louis. “Top Analyst: Surge Hasn’t Cut Into Iraqi Violence.” *All Things Considered*, July 11, 2007.

³²⁶ Crumpton Henry A. Testimony before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, June 13, 2006.

³²⁷ Sciolino, Elaine. “Terror Threat From Pakistan Said to Expand.” *The New York Times*, February 10, 2008.

Supporting evidence

- Many U.S. counterterrorism analysts judge Pakistan as the most likely location of Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri, and other core al-Qaeda leaders.³²⁸
- Afghanistan provided a critical staging point for the 9/11 attacks as a place for operatives to train, share information, and further ideological conditioning.
- The importance of al-Qaeda's Pakistan sanctuary is evidenced by the following:
 - Al-Qaeda is known to have re-established terrorist training camps in Pakistan's tribal areas that were shuttered following the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan.³²⁹
 - According to press coverage of a leaked July 2007 National Counterterrorism Center threat assessment entitled, "Al-Qaida Better Positioned to Strike the West," the governments of Great Britain, Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands maintain special arrangements with Pakistan's government to facilitate their citizens' travel between Europe and Pakistan.³³⁰ Many of these citizens are also permitted to enter the United States under the Visa Waiver Program, which allows residents of 27 mostly European countries to visit the United States without a visa.³³¹
 - Maintaining a base of operations in Pakistan provides al-Qaeda with close access to U.S. and European Muslims who return to their homeland each year.³³² More than 400,000 British residents travel to Pakistan annually.³³³
 - Of the 14 individuals arrested by Spanish authorities in January 2008 for plotting "Qaeda-style attacks" across Europe, nine members of the accused were Pakistani nationals.³³⁴
- In September 2006, Pakistan signed a peace agreement with tribal leaders in the North Waziristan region in which the government pledged a reduced troop presence in the tribal areas in exchange for the expulsion of foreign fighters who engaged in terrorism and a refrain from cross-border attacks into Afghanistan. The deal was widely interpreted as a capitulation to pro-Taliban and pro-Qaeda tribal leaders.³³⁵ According to an anonymous U.S. counterterrorism official quoted in the media following the peace agreement, "There are indications that, due in large part to the truce, al Qaeda operatives can operate with a higher degree of impunity."³³⁶
- During media coverage of the peace agreement, Pakistani Major General Shaukat Sultan Khan was quoted saying that Pakistani authorities would not take Osama bin Laden into custody as long as he behaved as a "peaceful citizen."³³⁷

³²⁸ McConnell, Michael. Testimony before the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. February 7, 2008.

³²⁹ Mazzetti, Mark. "Qaeda Is Seen as Restoring Leadership." *The New York Times*, April 2, 2007.

³³⁰ Lee, Matthew and Katherine Shrader. "Al Qaeda at pre-9/11 strength, analysts say; officials to discuss report at White House today." *Associated Press*, July 12, 2007.

³³¹ Harnden, Toby. "Britain 'could stage another September 11.'" *The Daily Telegraph*, April 7, 2007.

³³² "Waiting for al-Qaeda's Next bomb." *The Economist*, May 3, 2007.

³³³ Yousafzai, et. al. "The Regathering Storm." *Newsweek*, December 25, 2006.

³³⁴ Goodman, Al. "Extremists plotted attacks across Europe, Spanish paper says." CNN.com, January 28, 2008.

³³⁵ Bright, Arthur. "Pakistan signs peace deal with pro-Taliban militants." *The Christian Science Monitor*, September 6, 2006.

³³⁶ Whitelaw, Kevin. "A Resurgent Menace." *U.S. News and World Report*, May 6, 2007.

³³⁷ Ross, Brian. "Pakistan Gives Bin Laden Free Pass." ABCnews.com, September 6, 2006.

- Several recent terror plots in the United States and Europe featured a Pakistani connection between conspirators and al-Qaeda, including the 2004 plot to bomb London nightclubs with fertilizer bombs, the 2005 London Underground bombings (in which two of the four suicide bombers had received terrorist training in Pakistan), and the 2006 plot to attack U.S.-bound commercial airliners.^{338,339}
- In November 2006, the director general of Britain's MI5 announced that authorities were monitoring roughly 200 terrorist cells in Britain, including a number of networks being directed by al-Qaeda in Pakistan.³⁴⁰

Contradictory evidence

"Al Qaeda was not originally intended to exist as a territorial base, but the victory of the Taliban in Afghanistan unexpectedly offered that opportunity. Al Qaeda took advantage of that opportunity, but controlling those lands was neither intended nor absolutely necessary. The same applies now to the wild areas of Pakistan that Al Qaeda uses for refuge and training – they are important but not vital."³⁴¹ – Michael Radu, Foreign Policy Research Institute, July 31, 2007.

"My belief is the attack [against the United States] most likely would be planned and come out of the leadership in Pakistan. However, that said, there are al Qaeda elements, as you know, in Iraq and in Syria and other places, and even in Europe. And our information tells us they also are planning. Many would think of this as a command and control global net controlled from Pakistan. It isn't. There is some central planning and control and funding and so on, but individual, home-grown elements that are inspired by that vision are also a big problem for us."³⁴² – Michael McConnell, Director of National Intelligence, February 2007.

- U.S. counterterrorism officials have repeatedly indicated that al-Qaeda leaders in Pakistan are actively planning and coordinating attacks against Western targets, suggesting that any concern they may have about the loss of the country as a safe haven has little effect on their operations. During testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee in February 2008, DIA Director Lt. Gen. Michael D. Maples noted that "During 2007, al-Qaida...continued to plan, support and direct transnational attacks against the West from its safe-haven inside Pakistan's ungoverned regions..."³⁴³
- The July 2007 National Intelligence Estimate lists al-Qaeda's establishment of a safe haven in Pakistan's tribal areas as one of the "key elements of its Homeland attack capability."³⁴⁴ Unless preserving the safety of al-Qaeda's core leaders is itself a key objective, the reestablishment of a safe haven in Pakistan may increase rather than decrease the likelihood of a large-scale attack against the U.S. homeland.
- Osama bin Laden may judge that a U.S. incursion into Pakistan could spark a popular revolt against President Pervez Musharraf and his replacement with a radical Islamist regime. The prospect of a nuclear-armed Islamist government in

³³⁸ Yousafzai, et. al. "The Regathering Storm." *Newsweek*, December 25, 2006.

³³⁹ Whitelaw, Kevin. "A Resurgent Menace." *U.S. News and World Report*, May 6, 2007.

³⁴⁰ Riedel, Bruce. "Al Qaeda Strikes Back." *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2007.

³⁴¹ Radu, Michael. "Al Qaeda Confusion: How to Think About Jihad." Foreign Policy Research Institute, July 31, 2007.

³⁴² McConnell, Michael. Testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee. February 27, 2007.

³⁴³ Maples, Michael D. Testimony before the Senate Committee on Armed Services, February 27, 2008.

³⁴⁴ National Intelligence Estimate, "The Terrorist Threat to the U.S. Homeland." July 17, 2007.

- Islamabad may be sufficiently tantalizing to al-Qaeda's leaders to override any concern they have for their own personal safety.
- Al-Qaeda's solidifying its safe haven in Pakistan, and consequently threatening the country's elected government, undoubtedly concerns U.S. policymakers, thereby increasing the threat to al-Qaeda. Maples' February 2008 Senate testimony noted that in addition to al-Qaeda's expansion of operations outside of Pakistan, the network was "also expanding the threat it poses to Pakistan itself."³⁴⁵
 - The precautions that al-Qaeda's leaders employ to avoid U.S. eavesdropping on their communications likely constrain their ability to transmit orders to dispersed operatives, especially a sweeping instruction to refrain from conducting attacks on the United States.
 - Al-Qaeda's Pakistan-based leaders continue to direct and fund terrorist attacks against U.S. forces in Iraq; some links have been established between al-Qaeda in Pakistan and the July 2006 transatlantic airline plot. Both suggest that fear of U.S. retaliation does not dissuade Al-Qaeda's Pakistan-based leaders.
 - Centralized terrorist training facilities are not necessary to indoctrinate and train jihadist operatives. Extremist Internet sites provide bomb-making guidance and other skills previously available at terrorist training camps. Additionally, terrorism experts have noted that many terrorists have arrived at training camps already radicalized and committed to martyrdom operations.³⁴⁶
 - In his 2001 memoir *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*, Ayman al-Zawahiri wrote that achieving al-Qaeda's strategic policy objectives "cannot be achieved unless the infantry occupies territory." While this passage would support the notion of Pakistan's importance as a safe haven, Zawahiri added a potentially significant stipulation: "Likewise, victory for Islamic movements against the world alliance cannot be attained unless these movements possess an Islamic base in the heart of the Arab region."³⁴⁷ Pakistan is a non-Arab nation, and some tension has existed between ethnic Pashtuns and the Arabs who have traveled to the region to fight first the Soviet Union and later the United States.

³⁴⁵ Maples, Michael D. Testimony before the Senate Committee on Armed Services, February 27, 2008.

³⁴⁶ Jenkins, Brian M. "Building an Army of Believers: Jihadist Radicalization and Recruitment." April 5, 2007. pp. 2.

³⁴⁷ Bergen, Peter and Paul Cruickshank. "Al Qaeda: Self-Fulfilling Prophecy." *Mother Jones*, October 18, 2007.

Hypothesis O) Terrorists believe that striking the U.S. homeland again could rally international support for America and weaken support for the radical Islamist movement.

“Al-Qaida's goal, they would say, is encapsulated simply into two phrases: One, lead [the United States] into bankruptcy and two, spread out their forces. Clearly they have accomplished both of those things. As long as things are going to go their way, an attack would be superfluous, and it would also rally people to the government.”³⁴⁸ – Dr. Michael Scheuer, former head of the CIA's Alec Station unit, July 2007.

“Gone are the days, two years ago, when 200,000 Germans marched in Berlin to show solidarity with their American allies, or when *Le Monde*, the most prestigious French newspaper, could publish a large headline, ‘We Are All Americans.’”³⁴⁹ – Richard Bernstein, *The New York Times*, September 2003.

“The jihadists understand that they are fighting a war of ideas. According to ‘The Management of Savagery,’ a Qaeda manual, the success of the movement will ultimately depend on the jihadists’ ability to damage America’s prestige throughout the globe, sow discord between America and its allies and expose the hollowness of American values.”³⁵⁰ – Dr. Jessica Stern, John F. Kennedy School of Government, September 2006.

“The sympathy and support for the United States that surged worldwide in the aftermath of the 2001 attacks began to ebb as soon as U.S. bombs began falling on Afghanistan. Supportive sentiments continued to recede through 2004, driven increasingly by the Iraq war and eventually settling at levels unseen since the early 1980s.”³⁵¹ – Carl Conetta, Project on Defense Alternatives, September 14, 2006.

“Terrorist strikes on the U.S. homeland will only undermine the terrorists’ message that their purpose is to alter unpopular U.S. policies in the Muslim world.”³⁵² – Dr. Max Abrahms, UCLA, Fall 2006.

Critical Assumptions

- Another attack on the U.S. homeland could renew the international sympathy that the United States enjoyed following 9/11, which has largely evaporated since the invasion of Iraq.
- Terrorists are sensitive to the level of international support for the United States; they favor an isolated, unpopular America to a strong, respected America and adjust their operations accordingly.
- Terrorists are likewise sensitive to the level of international support for the radical Islamist movement, especially within the Muslim ummah.

Supporting evidence

- In a propaganda video commemorating the sixth anniversary of 9/11, Osama bin Laden makes clear his satisfaction with the trajectory of the United States following the attacks: “Since the 11th, many of America’s policies have come under

³⁴⁸ Eberhart, Dave. “CIA Bin Laden Chief: Next Attack ‘Bigger Than 9/11’” *NewsMax*, July 25, 2007.

³⁴⁹ Bernstein, Richard. “Foreign Views of U.S. Darken Since Sept. 11.” *The New York Times*, September 11, 2003.

³⁵⁰ Stern, Jessica. “10 Ways to Avoid the Next 9/11: Keep American Muslims on Our Side.” *The New York Times*, September 10, 2006.

³⁵¹ Conetta, Carl. “Losing Hearts and Minds: World Public Opinion and post-9/11 US Security Policy.” Project on Defense Alternatives Briefing Memo #37, September 14, 2006.

³⁵² Abrahms, Max. “Why Terrorism Does Not Work.” *International Security*, Fall 2006.

the influence of the Mujahideen, and that is by the grace of Allah, the Most High. And as a result, the people discovered the truth about it, its reputation worsened, its prestige was broken globally and it was bled dry economically....And before concluding, I tell you: there has been an increase in the thinkers who study events and happenings, and on the basis of their study, they have declared the approach of the collapse of the American Empire.”³⁵³ Bin Laden may judge that another attack could derail what he perceives as America’s inevitable downward spiral since 9/11.

- Al-Qaeda’s leadership – including Osama bin Laden – initially denied involvement in the 9/11 attacks, suggesting a sensitivity to global public opinion.
- Writings and statements by al-Qaeda’s leadership and other jihadist spokesmen take pains to justify mass killings on Islamic and other grounds, thereby suggesting concern about how the wider Muslim audience would react to terrorist violence against the U.S. homeland or elsewhere.
- A significant percentage of public opinion within the Muslim world opposes attacks that kill innocent civilians, including attacks against Americans.³⁵⁴
- Public opinion in many Western countries has turned against the United States leading up to and continuing through the war in Iraq.³⁵⁵

Contradictory evidence

“[T]he lack of an attack against the U.S. homeland since 9/11 has not been the result of a calculated decision by bin Laden and the core al Qaeda leadership. Far too many plots have been disrupted for that to be the case. Many of those foiled and failed attacks, such as the 2006 foiled plot to destroy airliners flying from London to the United States, the Library Tower Plot, Richard Reid’s failed attempt to take down American Airlines flight 63 in December 2001 and Jose Padilla’s activities – bear connection to the core al Qaeda leadership.”³⁵⁶ – Fred Burton and Scott Stewart, Stratfor, October 2007.

- In December 2001, just three months after 9/11, British-born “shoe bomber” Richard Reid attempted to down American Airlines Flight 63 using hidden explosives. Reid had allegedly been dispatched by 9/11 mastermind Khalid Shaikh Mohammed. In 2003, Columbus, Ohio truck driver Iyman Faris pleaded guilty to conspiracy and providing material support to al-Qaeda for his role in a 2002 plot to cut the Brooklyn Bridge bridge’s suspension cables using acetylene torches. Faris was also reported to have been acting on orders from Mohammed.³⁵⁷ Plotting to bring down additional aircraft and destroy the Brooklyn Bridge so shortly after 9/11 – when sympathy for the United States remained high – suggest that al-Qaeda was not influenced by concerns about rallying international support for the United States.
- Al-Qaeda-linked elements have continued to attempt major attacks against Americans or United States interests abroad that, if successful, would likely have rallied public support for the United States.

³⁵³ “The Solution.” SITE Intelligence Group, September 2007.

³⁵⁴ “Muslim Public Opinion on U.S. Policy, Attacks on Civilians and al Qaeda.” WorldPublicOpinion.org. The Program on International Policy Attitudes, University of Maryland. April 24, 2007.

³⁵⁵ “Global Unease With Major World Powers.” Pew Global Attitudes Project, June 27, 2007.

³⁵⁶ Burton, Fred and Scott Stewart. “Summer 2007: The Attack that Never Occurred.” Stratfor *Terrorism Intelligence Report*, October 17, 2007.

³⁵⁷ Isikoff, et. al. “Terrorists in Our Midst.” *Newsweek*, June 19, 2003.

Hypothesis P) Al-Qaeda has become more sensitive to possible Muslim backlash from the killing of American civilians.

“I had no knowledge of these attacks, nor do I consider the killing of innocent women, children and other humans as an appreciable act. Islam strictly forbids causing harm to innocent women, children and other people. Such a practice is forbidden even in the course of a battle.”³⁵⁸ – Osama bin Laden in an interview with the Pakistani newspaper *Ummat*, 2001.

“[L]aunching another 9/11-type attack or targeting certain classes of people is a decision best left to the High Command – targeting the wrong people at the wrong time would turn the masses against the movement.”³⁵⁹ – Al-Qaeda ideologue Abu Bakr Naji, *The Management of Savagery*, 2004.

“Bin Laden’s statement directly admitting responsibility for the 9/11 attacks shook many potential supporters, who had been convinced by conspiracy theories and the lies of terrorist supporters that they had been unjustly framed for the attacks. Bin Laden’s own words have undermined him.”³⁶⁰ – Hank Crumpton, former CIA operative, June 2006.

“The brutal attacks against Muslim civilians unleashed by [al-Qaeda in Iraq] and [al-Qaeda in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb] and the conflicting demands of the various extremist agendas are tarnishing al-Qa’ida’s self-styled image as the extremist vanguard. Over the past year, a number of religious leaders and fellow extremists who once had significant influence with al-Qa’ida have publicly criticized it and its affiliates for the use of violent tactics.”³⁶¹ – Michael McConnell, Director of National Intelligence, February 2008.

“Even many people who agreed with Bin Laden’s worldview were clearly so repelled by the mass slaughter of innocents [on 9/11] that they were unable to ‘own’ the event, preferring instead to blame it on the Mossad.”³⁶² – Tony Karon, *Time Magazine*, August 2006.

“As each generation attempts to define itself in contrast to its predecessor, what appeals to the present generation of young, would-be radicals may not appeal to the next...And new hotheads in the movement will always push the envelope to make a name for themselves and cause ever escalating atrocities. The magnitude of these horrors will, in turn, likely alienate potential recruits.”³⁶³ – Marc Sageman, March 2008.

Critical Assumptions

- The Muslim community largely accepts as fact that members of al-Qaeda were responsible for carrying out the 9/11 attacks.
- Opposition to the killing of civilians, even Americans and Europeans, is sufficiently high among Muslims to concern al-Qaeda about popular revulsion stemming from another large-scale attack on the U.S. homeland.
- The killing of Muslims during U.S. military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan has not diminished Muslims’ opposition to attacks on American civilians.
- The al-Qaeda and broader jihadist leadership believes that its long-term goal of rallying the Muslim ummah to its cause would be adversely affected by killing

³⁵⁸ “Bin-Ladin Denies Involvement in the 9/11 Attacks.” *Ummat*, September 28 2001.

³⁵⁹ Brachman, Jarrett M. and William F. McCants. “Stealing Al-Qa’ida’s Playbook.” Combating Terrorism Center, U.S. Military Academy, February 2006.

³⁶⁰ Crumpton, Henry A. Testimony before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, June 13, 2006.

³⁶¹ McConnell, Michael. Testimony before the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. February 7, 2008.

³⁶² Karon, Tony. “How the Plot Underscores al-Qaeda’s Weakness.” *Time*, August 10, 2006.

³⁶³ Sageman, Marc. “The Next Generation of Terror.” *Foreign Policy*, March/April 2008.

American civilians in large numbers, and this concern is sufficient to shape its courses of action.

Supporting evidence

- On September 14, 2001, the leaders of 46 Islamic movements, including the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, Pakistani Jamaat-e-Islami, and Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas), issued a joint statement disavowing the 9/11 attacks: “The undersigned, leaders of Islamic movements, are horrified by the events of Tuesday 11 September 2001 in the United States....We express our deepest sympathies and sorrow. We condemn, in the strongest terms, the incidents, which are against all human and Islamic norms.”³⁶⁴ Leaders of Hezbollah, Gama’a Islamiya and Al Jihad also condemned the 9/11 attacks.³⁶⁵
- Numerous influential Islamic scholars issued condemnations of the 9/11 attacks, including Abdulaziz bin Abdullah al-Ashaykh, the mufti of Saudi Arabia, Muhammed Sayyid al-Tantawi, the rector of al-Azhar University in Cairo, and Shaikh Yussuf al-Qaradawi, the host of a popular Al Jazeera religious talk show.³⁶⁶
- Islamist ideologue and Al-Jama’a al-Islamiyya leader Mohammed Essam Derbala’s book *Al-Qaeda’s Strategy: Mistakes and Dangers* condemned al-Qaeda’s killing of civilians as violations of Islamic law and rejected the notion of an inevitable clash between Islam and the West.^{367,368}
- Numerous public statements and intercepted communications of al-Qaeda or al-Qaeda-linked leaders have suggested a growing aversion to civilian deaths:
 - In an intercepted July 2005 letter, Ayman al-Zawahiri admonished al-Qaeda in Iraq leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, to be mindful of public perception in his operations within Iraq: “Among the things which the feelings of the Muslim populace who love and support you will never find palatable are the scenes of slaughtering hostages....I say to you: that we are in a battle, and that more than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media. And that we are in a media battle in a race for the hearts and minds of our Umma.”^{369,370}
 - The influential Islamist theorist Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, whom the USMA Combating Terrorism Center identifies as “the key contemporary ideologue in the jihadi intellectual universe” has condemned al-Qaeda’s killing of civilians. Following Abu Musab al-Zarqawi’s 2004 beheading of American Nicholas Berg, Maqdisi published an Internet article stating that “the pure hands of jihad fighters must not be stained by shedding inviolable blood. There is no point in vengeful acts that terrify people,

³⁶⁴ Wiktorowicz, Quintan and John Kaltner. “Killing in the Name of Islam: Al-Qaeda’s Justification for September 11.” *Middle East Policy*, Summer 2003.

³⁶⁵ Wright, Lawrence. “The Master Plan.” *The New Yorker*, September 11, 2006.

³⁶⁶ Wiktorowicz, Quintan and John Kaltner. “Killing in the Name of Islam: Al-Qaeda’s Justification for September 11.” *Middle East Policy*, Summer 2003.

³⁶⁷ Gerges, Fawaz A. “Assessing al-Qaeda Performance and Threat.” Strategic, Political and Social Perspectives on Radical Ideologies, June 26, 2006.

³⁶⁸ Zambelis, Chris. “Egyptian Gama’a al-Islamiyya’s Public Relations Campaign.” *Terrorism Focus*, Sept. 12, 2006.

³⁶⁹ Office of the DNI. “Letter from al-Zawahiri to al-Zarqawi.” October 11, 2005.

³⁷⁰ Scheuer, Michael. “Al-Qaeda in Iraq: Has al-Zawahiri Reined in al-Zarqawi?” *Terrorism Focus*, April 11, 2006.

- provoke the entire world against mujahideen, and prompt the world to fight them.”^{371,372}
- In a December 2005 letter to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, Al-Qaeda leader Atiyah Abd al-Rahman offered instructions from Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri concerning unnecessary bloodshed: “The community needs good words from us, and needs to be convinced that we have empathy with it and mercy towards it, and not feel that we are oppressors or haughty or violent! So, if the collective voice of the community were to say to us, ‘what you want is to be a tyrant on the earth and you don’t want to be among the peacemakers,’ then this harms us and sours the hearts of the people towards us....Let us not merely be people of killing, slaughter, blood, cursing, insult, and harshness; but rather, people of this, who are unopposed to mercy and gentleness.”³⁷³
 - During the military tribunal of alleged 9/11 architect Khalid Sheikh Muhammad in March 2007, Muhammad was reported to have said, “When I said I’m not happy that three thousand been killed in America. I feel sorry even. I don’t like to kill children and the kids. Never Islam are, give me green light to kill peoples. Killing, as in the Christianity, Jews, and Islam, are prohibited. But there are exception of rule when you are killing people in Iraq....I mean the language of the war is victims. I don’t like to kill people. I feel very sorry they been killed kids in 9/11.”³⁷⁴
 - Following his capture in June 2007, Abu Dujana, the military chief of the al-Qaeda-linked terrorist network Jemaah Islamiyah, was reported to have said, “I would like to see Jemaah Islamiyah choose their targets more carefully to limit civilian casualties, especially those who don’t necessarily attack Islam.”³⁷⁵
 - A survey conducted by the Program on International Policy Attitudes between December 2006 and February 2007 in Morocco, Egypt, Pakistan, and Indonesia concerning Muslim views on al-Qaeda, attacks against civilians and U.S. foreign policy found the following:³⁷⁶
 - Majorities of respondents in each of the countries surveyed opposed attacks against American civilians – Morocco (78 percent “strongly” disapprove), Egypt (91 percent), Pakistan (67 percent), and Indonesia (75 percent).
 - Majorities of respondents in each of the countries surveyed opposed attacks against civilians as un-Islamic – Morocco (76 percent believe such attacks are “weakly justified” or “not justified at all”), Egypt (83 percent), Pakistan (89 percent), and Indonesia (91 percent).
 - Respondents in three of the four countries surveyed agreed with the notion that organizations that commit violence against civilians, such as al-Qaeda, violate Islamic tenets in doing so – Morocco (66 percent agreed), Egypt (88 percent), Pakistan (30 percent), and Indonesia (65 percent).

³⁷¹ McCants, William. “Militant Ideology Atlas.” Executive Report, November 2006. Combating Terrorism Center, U.S. Military Academy.

³⁷² Wright, Lawrence. “The Master Plan.” *The New Yorker*, September 11, 2006.

³⁷³ “Letter Exposes New Leader in Al-Qaeda High Command.” Combating Terrorism Center, U.S. Military Academy, September 25, 2006.

³⁷⁴ Verbatim Transcript of Combatant Status Review Tribunal Hearing for ISN 10024.

³⁷⁵ Rivers, Dan. “Accused Asian terror leader warns more blood will be shed.” CNN.com. June 25, 2007.

³⁷⁶ “Muslim Public Opinion on U.S. Policy, Attacks on Civilians and al Qaeda.” WorldPublicOpinion.org, The Program on International Policy Attitudes, University of Maryland. April 24, 2007.

- Respondents in three of the four countries surveyed opposed the tactic of suicide bombings by Muslims – Morocco (53 percent believe such attacks are “rarely justified” or “never justified”), Egypt (36 percent), Pakistan (73 percent), and Indonesia (81 percent). Only in Egypt did a plurality of respondents (41 percent) indicate that such attacks were “often justified.”
- Various other polls conducted after 9/11 also revealed opposition in the Muslim world to terrorist attacks against civilians:
 - December 2001-January 2002 Gallup poll conducted in nine predominantly Muslim countries found that 67 percent of those surveyed considered the 9/11 attacks to be “morally unjustified.”³⁷⁷
 - July 2005 Pew Research Center poll conducted in 17 Muslim countries found that “in most majority-Muslim countries surveyed, support for suicide bombings and other acts of violence in defense of Islam has declined significantly” since similar Pew polls in 2002 and 2004.³⁷⁸

Contradictory evidence

“Amateur terrorists are dangerous in other ways as well. The absence of a central command authority may result in fewer constraints on the terrorists’ operations and targets and—especially when combined with a religious fervor—fewer inhibitions about indiscriminate casualties.”³⁷⁹ – Dr. Bruce Hoffman, RAND Corporation, 1999.

“There is little disincentive to launch mass-casualty WMD attacks against either the U.S. government or its civilian population. In dealing with an audience it perceives as only respecting the power to kill and destroy, more casualties will cause a greater psychological impact on that audience and result in greater influence for Al Qaeda.”³⁸⁰ – Andre DeMarce, Matt Kovner and Ned Moran, Terrorism Research Center, February 2007.

- In response to the condemnation of the 9/11 attacks by Hamas founder Ahmad Yassin, Hezbollah spiritual leader Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah and other Islamist leaders, al-Qaeda issued a religious justification for killing civilians, asserting, “What is permissible regarding the right of the occupying enemy to the land of Palestine permits the right of anything like it, which is then backed and supported. If you are surprised by this, you will truly be surprised by those who rule that the martyrdom operations in Palestine in which civilians fall victim are among the highest forms of jihad, and then rule that the martyrdom operations in America are wrong because of civilian deaths. This inconsistency is very strange!”^{381,382}
- The document also cites a hadith anecdote concerning Muhammed’s catapult siege of Taif, an event frequently cited by jihadists to justify civilian deaths. Saudi

³⁷⁷ “Poll: Muslims call U.S. ‘ruthless, arrogant.’” CNN.com, February 26, 2002.

³⁷⁸ “Islamic Extremism: Common Concern for Muslim and Western Publics.” Pew Global Attitudes Project, July 14, 2005.

³⁷⁹ Hoffman, Bruce. “Terrorism Trends and Prospects.” In *Countering the New Terrorism*, RAND Corporation, 1999. pp. 21.

³⁸⁰ DeMarce, Andre, Matt Kovner and Ned Moran. “The Current and Future Landscapes of Non-state Actors With the Possible Intentions to Use Weapons of Mass Destruction.” February 1, 2007.

³⁸¹ “A Statement from Qaidat al-Jihad Regarding the Mandates of the Heroes and the Legality of the Operations in New York and Washington.” April 24, 2002.

³⁸² Al-Qaeda statements insisting on the permissibility of killing civilians can arguably be considered evidence that supports rather than contradicts the hypothesis. That is, these statements indicate that al-Qaeda’s leaders are concerned about Muslim public opinion and thus are trying to convince the ummah of the righteousness of their actions. However, this concern does not cause them to refrain from conducting such attacks.

- cleric Sheikh Abd Al-'Aziz bin Saleh Al-Jarbu's 2001 book, *Basing the Religious Legitimacy of Destroying America*, also references this attack: "Anyone who says that it is completely forbidden to kill innocents accuses the Messenger, His companions, and the generation immediately following of murdering innocent people, because the Messenger built a catapult in his war with Taif, and the nature of the catapult is not to distinguish."³⁸³
- Bin Laden's 1998 treatise entitled "Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders" urges that "the ruling to kill the Americans and their allies – civilians and military – is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it..."³⁸⁴ This document was released just three months after the November 1997 Luxor massacre, in which members of the Egyptian terrorist group Gama'a al-Islamiyya killed 58 mostly European tourists. The resulting outrage among the Egyptian public appears not to have affected bin Laden.^{385,386}
 - Bin Laden has obtained numerous fatwas from Islamic clerics to justify the killing of civilians.³⁸⁷ Saudi cleric Sheik Nasir bin Hamid al Fahd issued a 2003 edict entitled, "A Treatise on the Legal Status of Using Weapons of Mass Destruction Against Infidels," which states that "If [civilians] are killed collaterally, as in the case of a night attack or invasion when one cannot distinguish them, there is nothing wrong with it. Jihad is not to be halted because of the presence of infidel women and children." Referring specifically to Muslim victims, al Fahd notes, "Killing a Muslim is forbidden and not permitted; but if those engaged in jihad are forced to kill him because they cannot repel the infidels or fight them otherwise, it is permitted..."³⁸⁸
 - The attempted July 2006 aircraft bombings would have resulted in mass civilian deaths. This also suggests that while al-Qaeda's leaders may believe it necessary to counter concerns and questions among their Muslim audience about the justifiability of mass killings, those leaders are not prepared to defer to those concerns.
 - The 2004 Madrid train bombings, which occurred 30 months after 9/11 and were designed to cause mass civilian casualties, suggest that even if al-Qaeda's senior leaders have chosen to eschew civilian attacks, self-activated jihadists may be unaware of their order or have simply chosen to disobey it.
 - Following the November 2003 Istanbul bombings by al-Qaeda-trained jihadists, suspect Fevzi Yitiz confessed to interrogators that he learned from his accomplice Habib Aktas that al-Qaeda "considered the bombings as a failure because it mostly killed Muslim Turks." Bin Laden had allegedly approved the attacks on the condition that they target U.S. personnel and not Turkish civilians.³⁸⁹
 - Speculation about a Muslim backlash against al-Qaeda's killing of civilians on 9/11 is predicated on the assumption that Muslims accept al-Qaeda's responsibility for the attacks. Substantial evidence contradicts this assumption:
 - A 2006 Pew Global Attitudes survey conducted in 13 countries found that, by considerable margins, Muslims living in Muslim countries do not

³⁸³ "Contemporary Islamist Ideology Authorizing Genocidal Murder." The Middle East Media Research Institute, Special Report No. 25, January 27, 2004.

³⁸⁴ "Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders." World Islamic Front Statement. Federation of American Scientists, February 23 1998.

³⁸⁵ Plett, Barbara. "Bin Laden 'behind Luxor massacre.'" BBC News, May 13, 1999.

³⁸⁶ Rodenbeck, Max. "Is Islamism Losing its Thunder?" *The Washington Quarterly*, Spring 1998.

³⁸⁷ Uphoff, Kelly. "Osama bin Laden's Mandate for Nuclear Terror." *JINSA Online*, December 10, 2004.

³⁸⁸ al Fahd, Nasir bin Hamid. "A Treatise on the Legal Status of Using WMD against Infidels." May 21, 2003.

³⁸⁹ Hacaoglu, Selcan. "Turk Militants Crossed Up Osama." CBSnews.com, December 17, 2003.

believe that Arabs carried out the 9/11 attacks: Jordan (53 percent disbelieve Arab responsibility), Egypt (59 percent), Indonesia (65 percent), Turkey (59 percent), and Pakistan (41 percent). Many European Muslims share this skepticism: France (46 percent disbelieve Arab responsibility), Germany (44 percent), Spain (35 percent), and Britain (56 percent).³⁹⁰

- A 2006-2007 Program on International Policy Attitudes survey found that in Morocco, Egypt, Pakistan, and Indonesia, large majorities were “not at all confident” about who committed the 9/11 attacks or declined to answer the question – Morocco (52 percent), Egypt (55 percent), Pakistan (78 percent) and Indonesia (64 percent).³⁹¹

³⁹⁰ “The Great Divide: How Westerners and Muslims View Each Other.” Pew Global Attitudes Project. June 22, 2006.

³⁹¹ “Muslim Public Opinion on U.S. Policy, Attacks on Civilians and al Qaeda.” WorldPublicOpinion.org, The Program on International Policy Attitudes, University of Maryland. April 24, 2007.

Hypothesis Q) Al-Qaeda is undertaking a prolonged campaign to warn the U.S. of its intent to attack and give Americans the chance to convert to Islam.

“To conclude, I invite you to embrace Islam, for the greatest mistake one can make in this world and one which is uncorrectable is to die while not surrendering to Allah, the Most High, in all aspects of one's life – i.e., to die outside of Islam.”³⁹² – Osama bin Laden, addressing the American people in a video commemorating the 9/11 attacks, September 2007.

“The September 2 [2006] video is...part of an al-Qaeda effort that began early in 2002 in which bin Laden and al-Zawahiri have more than adequately fulfilled the Prophet Muhammad's requirements for actions that must be taken vis-à-vis an enemy before attacking him militarily. There are three such actions: multiple, clear warnings of an intention to attack; offers of a truce; and public calls on the foe to convert to Islam....Azzam talks directly to his fellow citizens and offers what seems to be something of a final warning before al-Qaeda again attacks inside the United States.”³⁹³ – Dr. Michael Scheuer, analyzing American al-Qaeda spokesman Adam Gadahn's September 2006 video.

“The [January 2006 bin Laden ‘truce’ tape] also answers Muslim critics who faulted him for violating Islam's fundamental rule of war: Americans were not thoroughly warned before the September 11 attacks – for that matter, neither were Africans, Iraqis, Indonesians, Jordanians, and others.”³⁹⁴ – Dr. Fawaz A. Gerges, Sarah Lawrence College, January 2006.

Critical Assumptions

- Despite past actions that may be viewed as transgressions of Koranic proscriptions concerning “just war,” Osama bin Laden is determined to follow the “warning” requirement scrupulously in future operations against the United States.
- No attacks have occurred in the United States since 9/11 because al-Qaeda's campaign to issue adequate warning is still ongoing; alternatively, the warning campaign has ceased but preparations for the next attack have not yet reached fruition.
- Osama bin Laden believes that the damage done to al-Qaeda's reputation by the 9/11 attacks in orthodox Islamic circles can be repaired by strict adherence to Islamic rules of warfare in the future.

Supporting evidence

- Koranic verse includes explicit emphasis on warning an adversary before taking military action.
- Osama bin Laden and his associates have issued multiple “warnings” and pleas to convert to Islam since 9/11:
 - In an October 2002 audio tape broadcast on Al Jazeera, bin Laden implores the American people to convert to Islam: “I urge you to seek the joy of life and the afterlife, and to rid yourself of your dry, miserable, and spiritless materialistic life. I urge you to become Muslims, for Islam calls

³⁹² “The Solution.” SITE Intelligence Group, September 2007.

³⁹³ Scheuer, Michael. “The Western Media's Misreading of al-Qaeda's Latest Videotape.” *Terrorism Focus*, September 6, 2006.

³⁹⁴ Gerges, Fawaz A.. “Despite TV Appearances, Al Qaeda Is Not Winning the War.” *YaleGlobal*, January 31, 2006.

- for the principle of ‘There is no God but Allah’ and for justice and forbids injustice and criminality.”³⁹⁵
- On September 2, 2006, a video entitled “Invitation to Islam” appeared on several al-Qaeda web sites featuring Ayman al-Zawahiri and California-native-turned-terrorist-spokesman Adam Gadahn, who has since been indicted on charges of treason. In a 44-minute sermon, Gadahn beseeched the American people to convert to Islam or suffer the consequences. Al-Qaeda’s second-in-command Ayman al-Zawahiri also appeared in the video and called on the American people to convert to Islam: “To the American people and the people of the West in general...God sent his Prophet Muhammad with guidance and the religion of truth...and sent him as a herald.”³⁹⁶ During the September 2007 “Homeland Attack Frequency” conference, one participant suggested that al-Qaeda’s deliberate use of a native English speaker to communicate warnings to the American people adds strength to this hypothesis.
 - In April 2004, bin Laden offered European countries “a reconciliation initiative” offering al-Qaeda’s “commitment to stopping operations against every country that commits itself to not attacking Muslims or interfering in their affairs – including the US conspiracy on the greater Muslim world.”³⁹⁷ Shortly after the July 2005 London Underground bombings, Ayman al-Zawahiri made reference to the “truce” offer: “To the people of the crusader coalition...our blessed Sheikh Osama has offered you a truce so that you leave Muslim land...Our message to you is clear, strong and final: There will be no salvation until you withdraw from our land, stop stealing our oil and resources and end support for infidel [Arab] rulers.”³⁹⁸ Zawahiri’s reference led some terrorism experts to speculate about a link between bin Laden’s statement and the London attacks:³⁹⁹

Contradictory evidence

- If a “grace period” of some duration was in effect following 9/11, evidence suggests that it is now over; the July 2006 transatlantic airline plot demonstrated al-Qaeda’s clear intention to inflict large-scale loss of life on American citizens.
- Al-Qaeda’s leaders have encouraged sympathetic Muslim clerics to issue religious rulings that employ liberal interpretations of the Koran to endorse the group’s tactics, including killing civilians.
- Osama bin Laden issued multiple public declarations of war against the United States in the years before 9/11, possibly obviating the need to continue such a campaign even after the 9/11 attacks made clear al-Qaeda’s intentions.

³⁹⁵ Gunaratna, Rohan. *Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror*. May 2002. pp. xviii.

³⁹⁶ “Al Qaeda No. 2 Releases Tape Inviting Americans to Convert to Islam.” Associated Press, September 3, 2006.

³⁹⁷ “Full text: ‘Bin Laden tape’” BBC News, April 15, 2004.

³⁹⁸ Murphy, Dan. “Al Qaeda to West: It’s About Policies.” *The Christian Science Monitor*, August 05, 2005.

³⁹⁹ Solomon, Jay and Neil King Jr. “Bin Laden’s threat, offer of truce draw disparate interpretations.” *The Wall Street Journal*, January 20, 2006.

Hypothesis R) Al-Qaeda needs success – and believes that failure is offensive to God and success is reflective of God’s will – resulting in conservative planning.

“Showmanship in carrying out spectacular attacks demonstrates prowess. Operations therefore must be successful....Ambitious operations must be weighed against risks of failure, since failure brings humiliation to the attackers and embarrasses the enterprise. Even more seriously, jihadists believe that God’s will is expressed in success and failure....Failure signals God’s disapproval. As a consequence, jihadist planners are conservative.”⁴⁰⁰ – Brian Michael Jenkins, RAND Corporation, 2006.

“Consequently, [al-Qaeda’s] selection of targets and modes of attack will be designed to inspire Muslims outside its organizational framework to engage in jihad against the West. In general, attacks spectacular in size, nature, or consequence serve this purpose best, emphasizing the group’s power, underscoring its operational credibility, and ‘proving’ that Allah is on its side....Experts agreed that, in order to encourage potential followers, al Qaeda must, therefore, foster the impression that victory is not only plausible but also inevitable. Projecting an image of strength and destructiveness is critical to this objective—”⁴⁰¹ – “Exploring Terrorist Targeting Preferences,” RAND report, 2007.

“In the world of radical Islam, displays of strength attract recruits and supporters more so than any other form of propaganda. The September 11th attacks and the instant worldwide notoriety which resulted allowed al-Qaeda to transform itself into a global movement. In the Shia branch of Jihad, Hizballah’s shows of strength against the Israelis both during the Israeli occupation of Lebanon culminating in 2000 and during the summer of 2006 led to a surge of support among both Sunni and Shia Muslims in the region for that organization. Conversely, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula suffered a severe falling off of support and recruits once Saudi forces began effectively curtailing their activities and the group failed in three consecutive attack attempts. The al-Qaeda core is therefore under pressure to manufacture an image of strength in order to continue to attract recruits to the movement it has started.”⁴⁰² – Rebecca Givner-Forbes and Matt Kovner, Terrorism Research Center, February 2007.

Critical Assumptions

- The goal of the leadership of al-Qaeda and the wider Salafist movement is to influence and assume leadership of the global Muslim ummah rather than simply to kill Americans or to inflict damage on the United States.
- The al-Qaeda-jihadist leadership determines the targeting and attack priorities of the wider movement; lower level operatives are able to receive orders from above and generally obey them.
- Failures in conducting attacks against U.S. and other Western targets would adversely affect the jihadist movement’s ability to gain widespread popular support and to recruit operatives, as opposed to the possibility that the attacks themselves – whether successful or unsuccessful – are themselves valuable in rallying supporters.
- A new attack on the United States would be a complex, difficult, and potentially risk-prone undertaking whose success is perceived by al-Qaeda’s senior leaders to be highly uncertain.

⁴⁰⁰ Jenkins, Brian M. *Unconquerable Nation: Knowing Our Enemy Strengthening Ourselves*. RAND, 2006. pp. 81.

⁴⁰¹ Libicki, et. al. “Exploring Terrorist Targeting Preferences.” RAND, 2007. Pgs. 12, 63.

⁴⁰² Givner-Forbes, Rebecca and Matt Kovner. “To Discipline the Savage Cowboys: An Analysis of Weapons of Mass Destruction in Jihadist Primary Documents.” February 1, 2007.

Supporting evidence

- Al-Qaeda has been quite conservative in its target selection and modes of attack, repeating proven tactics. Osama bin Laden personally scaled back the scope of the original 9/11 plot, which involved as many as 10 hijacked jetliners on both the East and West coasts, out of concern that the plot was overly ambitious and thus risked being uncovered.⁴⁰³
- Visible improvements in U.S. and allied counter-terrorism efforts have increased the difficulty of attacking the United States, or at the very least influenced the perception of the difficulty among would-be attackers.
- Al-Qaeda's pattern also has been to make methodical preparations for attacks, often extended over many years.
- The al-Qaeda-jihadist leadership, as discussed in detail in Hypothesis P, has consistently sought to justify its actions by reference to the Koran.
- Bin Laden and many other jihadist leaders are regarded by many experts to be genuinely devout adherents of their brand of radical Islam.

Contradictory evidence

- A number of spectacular al-Qaeda attacks have entailed a significant risk of failure, including the attack on the U.S.S. Cole and the 9/11 hijackings. The successful Cole bombing followed a previous unsuccessful plot against the U.S.S. The Sullivans.⁴⁰⁴ Further, the successful 9/11 attack followed the failed 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center.
- Despite repeated losses of key personnel and tactical defeats, al-Qaeda in Iraq has continued to be a rallying point for extremist Muslims in other countries.
- There are numerous low-risk but high-impact modes of attacking the United States that al-Qaeda and other jihadists do not appear to have pursued, including suicide bombings in American commercial centers and civilian transportation systems.

⁴⁰³ National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States hearing, June 16, 2004.

⁴⁰⁴ Lipton, Eric and Benjamin Weiser. "Qaeda Strategy Is Called Cause for New Alarm." *The New York Times*, August 5, 2004.

Hypothesis S) 9/11 gave terrorism a bad name – domestic right-wing and left-wing extremist organizations have lacked the motivation to conduct a large-scale attack.

“The militia movement suffered from an aggressive federal crackdown in the wake of Oklahoma City. Americans in this day and age are not at all keen on the idea of being recruited into violent revolutionary organizations whose mission is to assassinate public officials. It is not a very sellable idea in a post-9/11 world.”⁴⁰⁵ – Daniel Levitas, *The New York Times*, September 2004.

“The central theme of the militia movement had been that the government had been stolen by secret elites and needed to be cleaned up. But a lot of these folks come out of a military background, and I think there was a conflicting set of loyalties after 9/11. For some militia leaders, this attack on U.S. soil so horrified them that they shifted.”⁴⁰⁶ – Chip Berlet, *Political Research Associates*, July 2002.

“The Animal and Earth Liberation Fronts are among the most active extremist groups in the USA, but their ultimate objective is to free animals and save the planet, so their attacks are planned to cause only moderate loss. The most destructive practice of these special interest groups is the use of improvised incendiary devices to commit arson.”⁴⁰⁷ – Dr. Gordon Woo, *Risk Management Solutions*, January 2004.

“Except in insurgencies and civil wars, groups with nationalist or social-revolutionary objectives, such as the [IRA], the [PLO], or the [FARC], calculate that indiscriminate violence would undercut their claims to legitimacy and alienate potential sympathizers. They rely instead on limited attacks to discredit political authorities, expose the impotence or brutality of their security forces, and draw international attention.”⁴⁰⁸ – Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon, *Survival*, 2001.

“In today’s world, people striving for social change through the mediums that I have chosen are lumped together with the kinds of people who do fly airplanes into buildings.”⁴⁰⁹ – Rod Coronado, *Earth Liberation Front* spokesman and convicted arsonist, on how the post-9/11 change in Americans’ patience for violence and sabotage affected radical environmentalists’ tactics, September 2007.

“We assess that other, non-Muslim terrorist groups – often referred to as ‘single-issue’ groups by the FBI – probably will conduct attacks over the next three years given their violent histories, but we assess this violence is likely to be on a small scale.”⁴¹⁰ – *National Intelligence Estimate*, July 2007.

Critical Assumptions

- The 1995 Oklahoma City bombing was largely anomalous; far-right “Patriot” organizations and armed militias generally do not aspire to inflict mass civilian casualties in furtherance of extremist political objectives. The 9/11 attacks increased the unacceptability of civilian-oriented violence among these groups, possibly by redirecting their anger from the U.S. government to foreign institutions and governments.
- Left-wing environmental extremists’ goals would not be served by civilian casualties since their target is corporations and their audience is the wider public.

⁴⁰⁵ Kershaw, Sarah. “A Voice of Hatred Is Gone, but Not Its Echo.” *The New York Times*, September 12, 2004.

⁴⁰⁶ Laidman, Dan. “A kinder, gentler militia?” *Salon*, July 4, 2002.

⁴⁰⁷ Woo, Gordon. “Understanding Terrorism Risk.” *Risk Management Solutions, The Risk Report*, January 2004.

⁴⁰⁸ Benjamin, Daniel and Steven Simon. “The Terror.” 2001, *Survival*, 43 (4):5-18.

⁴⁰⁹ Hoffman, Allison. “Radical environmentalist goes to trial under terror law.” *Associated Press*. September 10, 2007.

⁴¹⁰ *National Intelligence Estimate*. “The Terrorist Threat to the U.S. Homeland.” July 17, 2007.

Supporting evidence

- Even before 9/11, public revulsion stemming from the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing had considerably diminished popular support for the right-wing militia movement. According to data compiled by the Southern Poverty Law Center, 858 antigovernment “Patriot” groups were active in the United States in 1996, when the movement was considered at its zenith; by 2001 only 158 such groups were still active.⁴¹¹
- Eco-terrorist groups such as the Earth Liberation Front (ELF) and the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) have traditionally exercised great caution to avoid inflicting civilian casualties when conducting acts of vandalism and other attacks.

Contradictory evidence

“Some of the bigger, old-line militias have shifted their focus since the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. They’re focused more on battling terrorism, and less on warring with their own government. But they still harbor deep suspicion for the United Nations, the U.S. government and various suspected agents of the New World Order – suspicions compounded by the new intelligence-gathering powers given to the FBI and CIA.”⁴¹² – Dan Laidman, *Salon*, July 2002.

“The triborder region of South America has become the world’s new Libya, a place where terrorists with widely disparate ideologies – Marxist Colombian rebels, American white supremacists, Hamas, Hezbollah, and others – meet to swap tradecraft. Authorities now worry that the more sophisticated groups will invite the American radicals to help them.”⁴¹³ – Dr. Jessica Stern, John F. Kennedy School of Government, July 2003.

“The notion of radical Islamists from abroad actually getting together with American neo-Nazis I think is an absolutely frightening one. It’s just that so far we really have no evidence at all to suggest this is any kind of real collaboration.”⁴¹⁴ – Mark Potok, Southern Poverty Law Center, March 2005.

- Some terrorism analysts have expressed concern that radical Islamist networks may collaborate with domestic American militia groups and white supremacists given their shared anti-Semitism and hostility toward the U.S. government. According to media reports, in March 2005, the white supremacist Aryan Nation leader August Kreis offered to form an alliance with al-Qaeda. In a CNN interview, Kreis remarked, “You say they’re terrorists, I say they’re freedom fighters. And I want to instill the same jihadist feeling in our peoples’ heart, in the Aryan race, that they have for their father, who they call Allah.”⁴¹⁵
- Acrimony has risen in recent years at either end of the ideological spectrum concerning emotive political issues – e.g., illegal immigration among right-wing groups and environmental degradation among left-wing groups. Large-scale attacks by fringe elements, undertaken as a means of galvanizing the public around a narrow political objective, are not totally implausible in the near future.

⁴¹¹ “‘Patriot’ Free Fall.” Southern Poverty Law Center *Intelligence Report*, Summer 2002.

⁴¹² Laidman, Dan. “A kinder, gentler militia?” *Salon*, July 4, 2002.

⁴¹³ Stern, Jessica. “The Protean Enemy.” *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2003.

⁴¹⁴ Schuster, Henry. “An unholy alliance: Aryan Nation leader reaches out to al Qaeda.” CNN.com, March 29, 2005.

⁴¹⁵ Baysinger, Timothy G. “Right-Wing Group Characteristics and Ideology.” *Homeland Security Affairs*, Volume II, Issue 2: July 2006.

Hypothesis T) “Lone Wolf” terrorists have lacked the motivation to conduct a large-scale attack.

“We tend to overlook the lone operator in assessing the terrorist threat since many definitions of terrorism require that an act of violence be committed by two or more people with a political, social or religious objective. Yet in terms of the effect that a violent act committed by a single individual can have upon society and government, there is sometimes little difference between the actions of the lone operator and those of organized terrorist groups.”⁴¹⁶ – Jeffrey D. Simon, Political Risk Assessment Co., February 2007.

“As increasingly powerful weapons become more and more available, lone wolves, who face few political constraints, will become more of a threat, whatever their primary motivation.”⁴¹⁷ – Dr. Jessica Stern, John F. Kennedy School of Government, July 2003.

“The lone wolf, when influenced by day-to-day events, is harder to stop, harder to know about, much more difficult to defend against.”⁴¹⁸ – Special Agent Tim Herlocker, FBI New York counterterrorism division, August 2005.

Critical Assumptions

- Some indeterminate number of U.S. residents possesses the requisite military training or other expertise to conduct mass-casualty or mass-disruption terrorist attacks but have chosen not to do so since 9/11.
- Since the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, these individuals have not sought to carry out large-scale attacks within the U.S. homeland.

Supporting evidence

- Several high-profile arrests of individuals and small groups that possessed significant attack capabilities suggest that motivation, rather than capability, has factored more heavily in the absence of large-scale “lone wolf” attacks:
 - In April 2003, police raids on storage units rented by Texas residents William Krar and Judith Bruey uncovered an arsenal of weapons, including roughly two pounds of sodium cyanide, machine guns and 500,000 rounds of ammunition, and scores of pipe bombs, as well as anti-government literature and materials describing the production of chemical weapons.⁴¹⁹ In November 2003, Krar pleaded guilty to one count of possessing a dangerous chemical weapon.⁴²⁰
 - In October 2004, the FBI arrested Tennessee resident Demetrius “Van” Crocker on charges of seeking chemical weapons and explosives. He had also researched the possibility of obtaining radioactive materials.⁴²¹ Crocker was convicted in federal court in April 2006.⁴²²

⁴¹⁶ Simon, Jeffrey D. “The WMD Terrorist Threat: Some Givens, Some Changes, and Some Uncertainties.” Next Generation WMD and WME Terrorism workshop, SAIC, February 14-15, 2007.

⁴¹⁷ Stern, Jessica. “The Protean Enemy.” *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2003.

⁴¹⁸ “Potential ‘lone wolf’ attackers concern police.” *Associated Press*, August 9, 2005.

⁴¹⁹ “Cyanide, arsenal stirs domestic terror fear.” *Associated Press*, January 30, 2004.

⁴²⁰ “Smith County Man Admits Possessing Chemical Weapons.” United States Attorney’s Office, Eastern District of Texas, November 13, 2003.

⁴²¹ Copeland, Larry. “Domestic terrorism: New trouble at home.” *USA Today*, November 14, 2004.

⁴²² “Anti-government white supremacist guilty.” *Associated Press*, April 13, 2006.

- With the exception of Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh, domestic “lone wolf” terrorist attacks have traditionally resulted in few casualties:^{423,424}
 - Muharem Kurbegovic (1974 “Alphabet bomber”): 3 dead, 8 injured.
 - Theodore Kaczynski (“Unabomber”): 3 dead, 29 injured.
 - Mir Aimal Kansi (1993 CIA headquarters shooting): 2 dead, 3 injured.
 - Eric Rudolph (1996 Olympic Park bomber): 3 dead, 150 injured.
 - Buford Furrow (1999 Jewish Community Center attack): 1 dead, 5 injured.
 - Unknown 2001 anthrax mailer: 5 dead, 17 injured.
 - Hesham Mohamed Hadayet (2002 Los Angeles Airport shooting): 2 dead.
 - John Allen Muhammad (2002 Beltway sniper attacks): 10 dead, 3 injured.
 - Mohammed Reza Taheri-azar (2006 UNC vehicle attack): 9 injured.
 - Naveed Afzal Haq (2006 Seattle Jewish Federation shooting): 1 dead, 4 injured.

Contradictory evidence

- Convicted Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh, a lone individual with a modest educational background and neither advanced explosives training nor organizational support, had both the capability and the motivation to inflict large-scale civilian casualties in the United States.
- Several potentially damaging but poorly conceived “lone wolf” attacks have been disrupted before they could move far along:
 - In March 2003, U.S. resident Sayed Abdul Malike came to the attention of federal authorities after repeatedly making indiscreet statements to strangers suggesting his plans to conduct terrorist attacks.⁴²⁵
 - In August 2004, NYPD officers arrested 19-year-old schizophrenic James Elshafay and 23-year-old Pakistani immigrant Shahawar Matin Siraj for conspiring to bomb the New York City subway system.⁴²⁶ Prior to his arrest, Siraj informed his co-conspirators that he would not plant explosives personally, citing his unwillingness to die. Both men’s sole terrorist contact was an undercover police informant.⁴²⁷
- The 1995 Oklahoma City bombing came as a major surprise to U.S. law enforcement and intelligence personnel, one which suggests that our understanding of the motivations of individual extremists is limited.

⁴²³ Wikipedia.org: “Lone wolf (terrorism).”

⁴²⁴ Simon Jeffrey D. “The WMD Terrorist Threat: Some Givens, Some Changes, and Some Uncertainties.” Next Generation WMD and WME Terrorism workshop, SAIC, February 14-15, 2007.

⁴²⁵ “N.Y. man arrested for allegedly trying to buy explosives.” CNN.com, May 22, 2003.

⁴²⁶ Rashbaum, William K. “Staten Island Man Describes Shattered Life, Then a Plot to Bomb a Subway Station.” *The New York Times*, May 10, 2006.

⁴²⁷ Horowitz, Craig. “Anatomy Of a Foiled Plot.” *New York*, December 6, 2004.

Hypothesis U) Hezbollah has the motivation and capability to attack the United States, but has been restrained by Iran and Syria.

“Iran and Syria use Hezbollah operations to further their foreign policy objectives, but their close ties to the group make them responsible for its trespasses.”⁴²⁸ – Dr. Daniel Byman, Georgetown University, November 2003.

“We assess Lebanese Hizballah, which has conducted anti-U.S. attacks outside the United States in the past, may be more likely to consider attacking the Homeland over the next three years if it perceives the United States as posing a direct threat to the group or Iran.”⁴²⁹ – National Intelligence Estimate, July 2007.

“‘Death to America’ was, is and will stay our slogan.”⁴³⁰ – Hezbollah leader Sheik Hassan Nasrallah, in a speech prior to the U.S. invasion of Iraq, March 2003.

Critical Assumptions

- Hezbollah has not attacked the United States because its Syrian and Iranian sponsors fear U.S. retribution for attacks on American citizens or interests.⁴³¹ However, following a U.S.-led strike on Iranian nuclear facilities – or an Israeli strike perceived as tacitly supported by the United States – Tehran may no longer restrain Hezbollah.

Supporting evidence

- Iran and Syria maintain close ties with and considerable influence over the actions of Hezbollah. As Ilan Berman of the American Foreign Policy Council notes, “Iran has played a central role not only in establishing Hezbollah but in sustaining it ever since. Hezbollah is, and continues to be, made in Iran, essentially, and its future remains intimately tied to that of the Iranian regime.”⁴³²
- According to Dr. Col. Eitan Azani, Senior Researcher at the Institute for Counter-Terrorism at the Interdisciplinary Center, Herzliya, Israel, in an interview with the Iranian newspaper “Al-Sharq,” Hezbollah co-founder and former Iranian Interior Minister Ali Akbar Mohtashemi asserted that “Hezbollah is part of the Iranian rulership; Hezbollah is a central component of the Iranian military and security establishment; the ties between Iran and Hezbollah are far greater than those between a revolutionary regime with a revolutionary party or organization outside its borders.”⁴³³
- Hezbollah, with alleged support from Iran, is widely believed to have been responsible for the 1983 bombing of the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut, Lebanon, which killed 241 U.S. service members – until 9/11 the single greatest loss of American lives to a terrorist attack.

⁴²⁸ Byman, Daniel. “Should Hezbollah Be Next?” *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2003.

⁴²⁹ National Intelligence Estimate. “The Terrorist Threat to the U.S. Homeland.” July 17, 2007.

⁴³⁰ Meyer, Josh. “Hezbollah Vows Anew to Target Americans.” *The Los Angeles Times*, April 17, 2003.

⁴³¹ Byman, Daniel. “Should Hezbollah Be Next?” *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2003.

⁴³² Berman, Ilan, Statement before the House International Relations Subcommittee on International Terrorism and Nonproliferation. September 28, 2006. pp. 67.

⁴³³ Azani, Eitan Statement before the House International Relations Subcommittee on International Terrorism and Nonproliferation. September 28, 2006. pp. 48.

- Iran has used Hezbollah on other occasions to attack U.S. and other countries' personnel and interests:
 - Iran, using Saudi Hezbollah operatives, is strongly suspected of having masterminded the 1996 Khobar Towers bombing in Saudi Arabia, which killed 19 U.S. service members. In December 2006 a U.S. District Judge ruled that "the totality of the evidence at trial...firmly establishes that the Khobar Towers bombing was planned, funded, and sponsored by senior leadership in the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran."⁴³⁴
 - Iran is believed to have supplied weapons and, through the use of Hezbollah operatives, explosives training to Ayman al-Zawahiri's Islamic Jihad during its 1990s campaign against the Egyptian government.⁴³⁵
 - Iran has been implicated in the 1994 suicide bombing of the Argentine Israelite Mutual Association in Buenos Aires, Argentina, widely believed to have been carried out by Hezbollah.⁴³⁶
- According to Senate testimony delivered by NYPD Deputy Commissioner for Counterterrorism Richard A. Falkenrath, on three occasions since 2002 security personnel from Iran's Mission to the United Nations have been observed filming "sensitive locations" in New York City and were subsequently expelled from the United States.⁴³⁷

Contradictory evidence

"Hizballah today does not operate at the command of the Iranian government...Although Hizballah does have considerable financial resources of its own, the loss of Iranian funding would significantly constrain the organization's range of activities, especially its anti-Israeli guerrilla campaigns, even if the loss would not bring it to its knees. That strong Iranian influence, however, does not remotely mean that Hizballah is taking orders from Iran."⁴³⁸ – Graham E. Fuller, former vice chair of the National Intelligence Council, winter 2006.

"One key point that should be mentioned more in passing than as a lesson...is that no serving Israeli official, intelligence officer, or other military officer felt that the Hezbollah acted under the direction of Iran or Syria [in precipitating the 2006 summer war]. Israelis felt [Hezbollah leader Hasan] Nasrallah had initiated the Sheeba farms raid on his own and that Iran and Syria were forced to support him once Israel massively escalated. Israeli officials did not endorse the theory that Iran forced the Hezbollah to act to distract attention from its nuclear efforts."⁴³⁹ – Dr. Anthony H. Cordesman, CSIS, August 2006.

- Despite close ties to Iran and Syria, Hezbollah remains a nominally independent actor; its involvement in Khobar Towers arguably served its own interests in disrupting the American presence in the Middle East.
- In contrast to the Iranian-backed 1983 Marine barracks bombing in Beirut – which served the clear policy objective of driving U.S. forces from Iran's Lebanon satellite – the Khobar Towers bombing suggests a more strategic desire to attack U.S. interests wherever they may be found.

⁴³⁴ Leonnig, Carol D. "Iran Held Liable In Khobar Attack." *The Washington Post*, December 23, 2006.

⁴³⁵ Wright, Lawrence. "The Man Behind Bin Laden." *The New Yorker*, September 16, 2002.

⁴³⁶ Wilcox, Philip Jr. Testimony before the House Committee on International Relations, September 28, 1995.

⁴³⁷ Falkenrath, Richard A. Testimony before Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, September 12, 2006.

⁴³⁸ Fuller, Graham E. "The Hizballah-Iran Connection: Model for Sunni Resistance." *The Washington Quarterly*, Winter 2006-2007.

⁴³⁹ Cordesman, Anthony H. "Preliminary 'Lessons' of the Israeli-Hezbollah War." CSIS report, August 17, 2006.

Basket IV: Limited terrorist motivations to attack the U.S. homeland due to other attack priorities.

Hypothesis V	Opportunities to attack Americans in Iraq have diverted jihadist resources that otherwise might be used to attack the U.S. homeland.
Hypothesis W	Al-Qaeda has shifted its focus from the U.S. homeland to attacking U.S. allies, especially in Europe.
Hypothesis X	Al-Qaeda's focus has returned to toppling "apostate" Middle Eastern regimes.
Hypothesis Y	Self-activated terrorist cells and regional Salafist groups are exercising their own prerogative in target selection and are not motivated to attack the U.S. homeland.
Hypothesis Z	Al-Qaeda's priority after 9/11 has been to "bleed" the United States dry economically but believes this goal is best achieved by conducting attacks outside the homeland.
Hypothesis AA	9/11 was meant to be a one-time attack that would catapult al-Qaeda to the front of the radical Islamist movement.
Hypothesis BB	Al-Qaeda is focused on preventing Shia ascendancy in the Middle East.
Hypothesis CC	Non-Salafist terrorist groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas have lacked the motivation to attack the U.S. homeland.

The final explanatory basket contains a number of hypotheses that challenge the widely held assumption that terrorists remain committed to killing Americans in large numbers on U.S. soil. This category of theories suggests that al-Qaeda and other international terrorist networks have either shifted their attack priorities away from the U.S. homeland to other targets, including in Europe, Iraq, and various Middle Eastern countries, or continue to be preoccupied with regional objectives that would not be advanced by another large-scale attack against the United States.

Chief among these hypotheses is the notion that jihadists of every stripe have been drawn to Iraq from across the Middle East and Europe to inflict the same wound on the United States that they perceive the mujahideen as having inflicted on the Soviet Union in Afghanistan in the 1980s. This theory differs slightly from the previously discussed Hypothesis C, which posits that luring terrorists to Iraq has been part of a deliberate U.S. counterterrorism strategy.

Additionally, the succession of terrorist attacks in the United Kingdom and Spain and the sharp up-tick in jihadist activity across the European continent is offered as evidence of al-Qaeda's decision to shift its attack focus away from the United States. Another theory holds that jihadist groups remain committed above all to their campaign to topple the secular U.S.-supported "apostate" regimes of the Middle East, of which 9/11 was merely a tactical sortie, and eventually accomplish the broader aim of establishing a pan-Islamic caliphate. Yet another hypothesis addresses the post-9/11 decentralization of al-Qaeda. According to this theory, the network has evolved from a close-knit hierarchical organization to an international movement of largely autonomous groups and cells inspired by the Salafist ideology. These groups, in turn, have exercised their own prerogative in selecting targets and have eschewed attacks on the U.S. homeland. Other hypotheses focus on the motivations of groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas, which share neither al-Qaeda's Salafist inspiration nor its transnational strategic objectives.

Hypothesis V) Opportunities to attack Americans in Iraq have diverted jihadist resources that otherwise might be used to attack the U.S. homeland.

“Those who believe that al Qaeda has become distracted in Iraq believe it has done so because it sees more opportunity there – not only is it easier to transport, field, and support forces closer to home, but inducing casualties in this theater provides unambiguous argument that the U.S. government presence in this part of the world is costly.”⁴⁴⁰ – “Exploring Terrorist Targeting Preferences,” RAND report, 2007.

“Al Qaeda wants the United States to stay in Iraq as long as possible. It gets tremendous benefits from having American troops close at hand to kill – Iraq is the primary source of its propaganda and recruitment, and an integral part of its global strategy. They really want to turn Iraq into a base for exporting global jihad.”⁴⁴¹ – Dr. Marc Lynch, George Washington University, May 2007.

“[I]f you look at what al Qaeda leaders – bin Laden, Ayman Zawahiri and others – say, and they say it constantly now, their objective is to drag the United States into what they call bleeding wars, quagmires, in the Middle East, in the Muslim world, and to whittle down our strength and our resolve.”⁴⁴² – Bruce Riedel, Saban Center for Middle East Policy, June 2007.

“By targeting the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and, apparently, the White House, bin Laden wasn’t trying to terrorize the United States into granting concessions; he was striking at our ability to lead and finance an army. The jihadists see themselves as holy warriors confronting us at the heart of the fight. And right now, the fight is in Iraq.”⁴⁴³ – Christopher McDougall, *New York*, December 2004.

“The most important thing is that you continue in your jihad in Iraq, and that you be patient and forbearing, even in weakness, and even with fewer operations...The most important thing is that the jihad continues with steadfastness and firm rooting, and that it grows in terms of supporters, strength, clarity of justification, and visible proof each day. Indeed, prolonging the war is in our interest, with God’s permission.”⁴⁴⁴ – Atiyah Abd al-Rahman, senior al-Qaeda operative, December 2005.

Critical Assumptions

- Simultaneous campaigns against domestic targets in the United States and American military personnel serving in Iraq are largely mutually exclusive.
- Many foreign fighters in Iraq are chiefly motivated by their desire to kill Americans and Europeans and weaken the United States and its allies, as opposed to the less overtly religious/political motivation of resisting the occupation of a Muslim country by “infidel” soldiers.
- Some jihadists presently operating in Iraq would possess the means and motivation to conduct attacks on the U.S. homeland or other targets in the West if they were not engaged in combat there.

⁴⁴⁰ Libicki, et. al. “Exploring Terrorist Targeting Preferences.” RAND, 2007. pp. 92.

⁴⁴¹ Lynch, Marc. “Six Questions for Marc Lynch on Iraq, the ‘Surge,’ and Al Qaeda.” *Harper’s Magazine*, May 17, 2007.

⁴⁴² “Al Qaeda Rising?” Council on Foreign Relations meeting, June 1, 2007.

⁴⁴³ McDougall, Christopher. “Reasons They Haven’t Hit Us Again.” *New York*, December 6, 2004.

⁴⁴⁴ “Letter Exposes New Leader in Al-Qa’ida High Command.” Combating Terrorism Center, USMA, September 25, 2006.

Supporting evidence

- According to many terrorism experts, while Osama bin Laden miscalculated al-Qaeda's prospects against the U.S. military in Afghanistan, the opening of the Iraq theater allowed al-Qaeda to shift to another battleground and accomplish the goal of drawing the United States into a bloody quagmire on "Muslim soil." Shortly before the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, Osama bin Laden released an audiotape calling on Muslims around the world to resist the invasion, including with the use of "martyrdom operations."^{445, 446}
- In his 2001 memoir *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*, Ayman al-Zawahiri wrote that achieving al-Qaeda's strategic policy objectives requires "a Muslim authority, established on a Muslim land that raises the banner of jihad and rallies the Muslims around it. Without achieving this goal our actions will mean nothing more than mere and repeated disturbances." This passage, coupled with the re-branding of al-Qaeda in Iraq as the Islamic State of Iraq, may suggest that al-Qaeda is more interested in building a Taliban-like state in Iraq than continuing its attacks against the U.S. homeland⁴⁴⁷
- In November 2004, 26 Saudi clerics issued a fatwa addressed to the Iraqi people informing them of their religious duty to resist the U.S. occupation of Iraq.⁴⁴⁸ Twenty-one of the signers were reported to be government officials.⁴⁴⁹ In response to the fatwa, Saudi columnist Prince Amr Al-Faisal suggested that the edict was superfluous, as ample motivation already existed for radicalized Saudis to venture to Iraq: "To claim that the publication of this fatwa will encourage hundreds of young Saudi men to volunteer to fight U.S. soldiers in Iraq is nonsense. To be perfectly frank, they don't need this fatwa to encourage them to go; all they need is the U.S.' own behavior in Iraq and other Muslim countries."⁴⁵⁰
- In 2005, Fouad Hussein, a Jordanian journalist with links to al-Qaeda's senior leadership, authored "Al-Zarqawi: The Second Generation of Al-Qaeda," which author Lawrence Wright describes as "perhaps the most definitive outline of Al-Qaeda's master plan." Hussein's work identifies a series of stages in al-Qaeda's long-term goal of restoring a greater Middle Eastern caliphate. Of these, he predicted that the second – the "Eye-Opening" stage – would witness Iraq's transformation into a training laboratory for young Muslims keen to fight the United States.⁴⁵¹
- In a July 2005 letter to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, Ayman al-Zawahiri outlined a multi-stage strategy to achieve al-Qaeda's long-term objective of establishing a pan-Islamic caliphate. Following the expulsion of U.S. forces from Iraq and the establishment of an Iraqi Islamic emirate, Zawahiri envisioned a third stage in which al-Qaeda would "extend the jihad wave to the secular countries neighboring Iraq."⁴⁵² Iraq clearly figures as the epicenter of the jihadist struggle against the West.

⁴⁴⁵ "Purported bin Laden message on war against infidels." CNN.com, February 12, 2003.

⁴⁴⁶ Riedel, Bruce. "Al Qaeda Strikes Back." *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2007.

⁴⁴⁷ Bergen, Peter. "Fight Al Qaeda." *Democracy*, Fall 2007.

⁴⁴⁸ Whitlock, Craig. "Al Qaeda Shifts Its Strategy in Saudi Arabia." *The Washington Post*, December 19, 2004.

⁴⁴⁹ Mainen, Matthew. "When a 'friend' of the U.S. also comforts our enemies." *The San Francisco Chronicle*, July 17, 2007.

⁴⁵⁰ Al-Faisal, Amr. "The Fatwa of the 26 and Resistance by Iraqis." *Arab News*, December 6, 2004.

⁴⁵¹ Wright, Lawrence. "The Master Plan." *The New Yorker*, September 11, 2006.

⁴⁵² Office of the DNI. "Letter from al-Zawahiri to al-Zarqawi." October 11, 2005.

- Following the 2006 U.S. elections, Abu Hamza al-Muhajir, the successor of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi as leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, released an audiotape claiming that he commanded 12,000 fighters in the country who have “vowed to die for God’s sake.” Al-Muhajir also encouraged U.S. leaders to maintain a troop presence in Iraq, taunting, “We haven’t had enough of your blood yet.”⁴⁵³
- A survey conducted by the Program on International Policy Attitudes between December 2006 and February 2007 in Morocco, Egypt, Pakistan, and Indonesia, which addressed Muslim views on al-Qaeda, attacks against civilians, and U.S. foreign policy, found that large majorities of respondents in Morocco (68 percent) and Egypt (91 percent) approved of attacks on U.S. personnel in Iraq; support was less strong in Pakistan (35 percent) and Indonesia (19 percent).⁴⁵⁴

Contradictory evidence

“Nor are we, in the jargon of movie Westerns, heading the outlaws off at the pass. Iraq is not a front line through which terrorists must pass on their way to somewhere else. Moreover, fighting in Iraq is not so distracting to jihadists elsewhere that they are unable to prepare and carry out operations. The pace of terrorist operations has not slowed a bit since the invasion of Iraq.”⁴⁵⁵ – Brian Michael Jenkins, RAND Corporation, 2006.

“It is also sometimes suggested that the terrorists are now too busy killing Americans and others in Iraq to devote the time, manpower, or energy necessary to pull off similar deeds in the United States. But terrorists with al-Qaeda sympathies or sensibilities have managed to carry out attacks in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere in the past three years; not every single potential bomb thrower has joined the fray in Iraq.”⁴⁵⁶ – Dr. John Mueller, Ohio State University, September 2006.

- According to a September 2007 report by the bipartisan American Security Project, “Even when excluding attacks in Afghanistan, Iraq, and those related to the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, there are more attacks by jihadist groups on an annual basis than at the beginning of the Iraq war.”⁴⁵⁷
- Foreign fighters in Iraq would not necessarily have the motivation or the capability to conduct attacks in the United States if they were not occupied in Iraq. The ease of passage into Iraq from Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Jordan and the presence of a regional terrorist infrastructure allows for more opportunistic migration of “low-skilled” terrorists.
- In March 2005, the Department of Homeland Security issued a bulletin warning that “credible but nonspecific threat information” had been obtained that confirmed al-Qaeda’s continued interest in conducting attacks on the U.S. homeland. The information reportedly came from an intercepted message between Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda in Iraq leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.⁴⁵⁸
- Al-Qaeda’s senior leadership has sought to carry out attacks against American interests overseas while the Iraq war has been ongoing in addition to carrying out or supporting other terrorist attacks overseas.

⁴⁵³ Bodeen, Christopher. “Al-Qaida in Iraq Claims It’s Winning War.” *Associated Press*, November 10, 2006.

⁴⁵⁴ “Muslim Public Opinion on U.S. Policy, Attacks on Civilians and al-Qaeda.” WorldPublicOpinion.org, Program on International Policy Attitudes, University of Maryland, April 24, 2007.

⁴⁵⁵ Jenkins, Brian M. *Unconquerable Nation: Knowing Our Enemy Strengthening Ourselves*. RAND, 2006. pp. 43.

⁴⁵⁶ Mueller, John. “Is There Still a Terrorist Threat?” *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2006.

⁴⁵⁷ Finel, Bernard I. with Holly Crystal Gell. “Are We Winning? Measuring Progress in the Struggle Against Violent Jihadism.” American Security Project, September 2007.

⁴⁵⁸ Meserve, Jeanne. “Officials: Bin Laden message to al-Zarqawi intercepted.” CNN.com, March 1, 2005.

Hypothesis W) Al-Qaeda has shifted its focus from the U.S. homeland to attacking U.S. allies, especially in Europe.

“No more 9/11, but lots of 3/11 or 7/7, especially in Europe.”⁴⁵⁹ – Briefing by former CIA operative Marc Sageman, March 2006.

“First they hit the Italians, car-bombing their base in Nasiriyah in November 2003, killing 28. Then they struck the Spanish, bombing commuter trains in Madrid on March 11, 2004, killing 191. Finally they struck the British, bombing three London Underground trains and a double-decker bus this July, killing 56. It is as if the insurgents, with cold and patient precision, were severing one by one the fragile lines that connected the American effort in Iraq to the rest of the world.”⁴⁶⁰ – Mark Danner, *The New York Times Magazine*, September 2005.

“When [the Islamic terrorists] attacked Madrid, it mobilized that country to withdraw from Iraq and to some extent the war on terrorism in general. So I wonder, has the terrorist decided that the way to use terrorism most effectively is to attack Europeans and/or flights between the United States and Europe on the theory that – by picking off our allies one at a time, that that will be an effectively strategy, and/or have they determined that attacks on American soil are counterproductive to their efforts?”⁴⁶¹ – Rep. Brad Sherman, House Committee on International Relations, September 2006.

“The United States is so difficult to crack, they have to have established operatives living inside the country to be effective. To date, they haven’t shown themselves. The truth is, while it’s not the al Qaida Great Satan, Europe is a much easier place to move around.”⁴⁶² – Dr. Magnus Ranstorp, Swedish Defense College, July 2007.

“We had 20 terrorists show up in Spain that had been trained in Pakistan that were going to be suicide bombers, fanning out over Europe.”⁴⁶³ – Michael McConnell, Director of National Intelligence, February 2008.

“[The Madrid bombing campaign] is a response to your collaboration with the criminal Bush and his allies. You love life and we love death, which gives an example of what the Prophet Muhammad said. If you don’t stop your injustices, more and more blood will flow.”⁴⁶⁴ – Abu Dujan al-Afghani, self-described military spokesman for Al Qaeda in Europe. March 2004

“We change and destroy countries...We even influence the international economy, and this is God’s blessing to us.”⁴⁶⁵ – Spokesman for the al-Qaeda affiliate the Abu Hafs al-Masri Brigades, which claimed responsibility for the Madrid train bombings, March 2004.

Critical Assumptions

- Simultaneous terrorist campaigns against domestic American targets and U.S. allies overseas are mutually exclusive.
- Terrorist attacks and other jihadist activity in Europe after 9/11 reflects a deliberate shift in the targeting preference of al-Qaeda’s leaders, possibly as punishment for several European countries’ participation in the invasion of Iraq

⁴⁵⁹ Sageman, Marc. “Global Salafi Terrorism.” PowerPoint presentation, Unrestricted Warfare Symposium, March 14-15, 2006.

⁴⁶⁰ Danner, Mark. “Taking Stock of the Forever War.” *The New York Times*, September 11, 2005.

⁴⁶¹ Sherman Brad. Statement during House International Relations Subcommittee on International Terrorism and Nonproliferation hearing, September 7, 2006. pp. 17.

⁴⁶² Schofield, Matthew. “Why do terrorists attack Britain time and again?” *McClatchy Newspapers*, July 6, 2007.

⁴⁶³ Sciolino, Elaine. “Terror Threat From Pakistan Said to Expand.” *The New York Times*, February 10, 2008.

⁴⁶⁴ Wright, Lawrence. “The Terror Web.” *The New Yorker*, August 2, 2004.

⁴⁶⁵ “4 New Arrests In Madrid Bombings.” CBS News, March 18, 2004.

and Afghanistan, rather than the result of hardening U.S. domestic targets from external attack, or “threat-shifting.”

- The 2004 Madrid and 2005 London bombings were directed and/or supported by al-Qaeda operatives rather than conceptualized and financed by independent, self-activated jihadists.

Supporting evidence

- Repeated terrorist attacks have taken place in Europe since 9/11, including the Madrid train bombings and the London Underground bombings.
- A 42-page al-Qaeda strategic document entitled, “Jihadi Iraq: Hopes and Dangers,” posted on an al-Qaeda Internet message board in December 2003, suggests that al-Qaeda should shift its attacks away from U.S. territory and concentrate on punishing America’s allies for their commitment of armed forces in Iraq: “In order to force the Spanish government to withdraw from Iraq, the resistance should deal painful blows to its forces....We think that the Spanish government could not tolerate more than two, maximum three blows, after which it will have to withdraw [from Iraq] as a result of popular pressure. If its troops still remain in Iraq after these blows, the victory of the Socialist Party is almost secured, and the withdrawal of the Spanish forces will be on its electoral program.”^{466,467}
- In November 2005, Australian authorities arrested 18 Muslims on charges of plotting to attack the Lucas Heights nuclear reactor.⁴⁶⁸
- In September 2007, investigators in Denmark arrested two men suspected of having links to al-Qaeda. A Danish police official claimed that as a result of the arrests, “We have prevented a terror attack.”⁴⁶⁹
- In April 2007, following an investigation known as “Operation Crevice” by Britain’s MI5 domestic intelligence service, five British Muslims were sentenced to life in prison for plotting to conduct a bombing in the United Kingdom. The terrorist cell had amassed 600 kilograms of ammonium nitrate fertilizer to be used as the ingredient in one or more explosive devices.⁴⁷⁰
- In January 2008 Spanish authorities arrested 14 individuals accused of planning “Qaeda-style attacks” in Spain, Germany, France, Britain and Portugal, including suicide bombings of public transportation systems.⁴⁷¹

Contradictory evidence

“My guess is that [the jihadist] movement is sufficiently inchoate that there’s probably not any direct command-and-control that is saying, ‘Let’s attack now’ or ‘Let’s not attack now’ or ‘Let’s attack them or not attack the others.’”⁴⁷² – Frank J. Gaffney, Jr., Center for Security Policy, September 2006.

⁴⁶⁶ “Conversations with History: Conversation with Robert A. Pape.” Institute of International Studies, UC Berkeley, 2006.

⁴⁶⁷ Wright, Lawrence. “The Terror Web.” *The New Yorker*, August 2, 2004.

⁴⁶⁸ Squires, Nick. “Plot to blow up Sydney nuclear plant.” *The Telegraph*, November 15, 2005.

⁴⁶⁹ “Denmark arrests ‘bomb’ suspects.” BBC News, September 5, 2007.

⁴⁷⁰ “Waiting for al-Qaeda’s Next bomb.” *The Economist*, May 3, 2007.

⁴⁷¹ Sciolino, Elaine. “Terror Threat From Pakistan Said to Expand.” *The New York Times*, February 10, 2008.

⁴⁷² Gaffney, Frank J. Jr. Testimony before the House International Relations Subcommittee on International Terrorism and Nonproliferation. September 7, 2006. pp. 17.

- Some terrorism experts suggest that the increase in terrorist activity in Europe since 9/11 is not necessarily evidence of a deliberate shift in terrorists' targeting preference but rather a reflection of the increased difficulty that jihadists face in entering the United States as well as the greater convenience of European militants' conducting attacks close to home.⁴⁷³
 - The disrupted September 2007 plot to attack U.S. interests in Germany involved two German Muslim converts and a Turkish resident of Germany.⁴⁷⁴
 - Both the London Underground bombings and the Madrid train bombings were carried out by either native-born or longtime residents of the respective countries rather than foreign operatives dispatched from abroad to carry out missions on European soil.
- Spanish authorities have disrupted terrorist plots in Madrid even after the withdrawal of Spain's forces from Iraq, suggesting that terrorists have not responded to the government's Iraq policy change.⁴⁷⁵
- In November 2003, al-Qaeda-linked suicide bombers, reportedly operating with Osama bin Laden's blessing, attacked the Beth Israel and Neve Shalom synagogues in Istanbul, followed by attacks against the London-based HSBC Bank and the British Consulate. Most of the 62 bomb victims were Muslims.⁴⁷⁶ Given the Turkish Parliament's March 2003 rejection of the use of its bases for the Iraq invasion, al-Qaeda does not appear to have made targeting decisions based on a government's Iraq war stance.⁴⁷⁷
- The 2006 transatlantic airline plot and other unsuccessful attacks that have occurred since suggest that al-Qaeda remains committed to inflicting damage on the U.S. commercial aviation industry.

⁴⁷³ Woo, Gordon. Comments during SAIC conference, September 2007.

⁴⁷⁴ Whitlock, Craig. "Germany Says It Foiled Bomb Plot." *The Washington Post*, September 6, 2007.

⁴⁷⁵ Roy, Olivier. "Why Do They Hate Us? Not Because of Iraq." *The New York Times*, July 22, 2005.

⁴⁷⁶ Hacaoglu, Selcan. "Turk Militants Crossed Up Osama." CBSnews.com, December 17, 2003.

⁴⁷⁷ "Turkey rejects U.S. troop proposal." CNN.com, March 1, 2003.

Hypothesis X) Al-Qaeda's focus has returned to toppling "apostate" Middle Eastern regimes.

"In the aftermath of September 11, informed American opinion concluded that Osama bin Laden had attacked 'the far enemy' – the United States – in order to foment revolution against 'the near enemy' – the Saudi regime."⁴⁷⁸ – Dr. Michael Scott Doran, Princeton University, January 2004.

"The primary goal of the modern jihadist movement is and always has been the destruction of the secular political and social order in the activists' home countries and its replacement with authentic Islamic states."⁴⁷⁹ – Dr. Fawaz A. Gerges, Sarah Lawrence College, September 2006.

"What followed [after al-Qaeda's May 2003 attack on Western housing compounds in Riyadh] would be the longest and most violent sustained internal struggle against the Saudi monarchy and establishment since the founding of the modern Saudi state in the early years of the twentieth century. Not even the uprising in the Grand Mosque in Mecca in 1979 was as serious of a threat to the House of Saud as the al Qaeda challenge....Gun battles between Saudi security forces and bands of al Qaeda operatives became almost daily incidents in the next few months. Clashes occurred in Jeddah, Khobar, Mecca, Riyadh, Taif, Yanbu, and other cities and towns across the country....Occasional episodes of relative calm, when it appeared the security forces had defeated al Qaeda, were followed by new eruptions of violence. Terrorists assassinated senior officers of the Ministry of Interior (MOI), and even the MOI's inverted pyramid headquarters in Riyadh was targeted for attack."⁴⁸⁰ – Bruce Riedel and Bilal Y. Saab, *The Washington Quarterly*, Spring 2008.

"These collaborator tyrannical ruling families in the region today that suppress every reform movement, and impose policies on their people that are contrary to their religion and their world, are the same families that supported the crusaders against Muslims a century ago."⁴⁸¹ – Osama bin Laden, audio message, December 2004.

Critical Assumptions

- Simultaneous campaigns against domestic American targets and Middle Eastern regimes are mutually exclusive.
- Rather than an opening salvo in a prolonged campaign against the U.S. homeland or the West more broadly, the 9/11 attacks represented a one-time tactical strike in a conflict that remains centered in the Middle East.

Supporting evidence

- Considerable speculation has surrounded al-Qaeda's selection of 15 Saudis to take part in the 9/11 hijackings. A number of terrorism commentators have suggested that the nationality of the hijackers was an intentional effort by Osama bin Laden to generate anti-Saudi sentiment among the American people and within the U.S. government, thus undermining support for the House of Saud. (Others, however, have theorized that Saudi hijackers were selected due to their greater ability to secure entry visas into the United States.)⁴⁸² While of less value in assessing al-Qaeda's decision-making after 9/11, this data point may nonetheless offer insight into the network's most overarching objectives.

⁴⁷⁸ Doran, Michael Scott. "The Saudi Paradox." *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2004.

⁴⁷⁹ Gerges, Fawaz A. "A Nuisance, Not a Strategic Threat." *Foreign Affairs*, September 7, 2006.

⁴⁸⁰ Riedel, Bruce and Bilal Y. Saab. "Al Qaeda's Third Front: Saudi Arabia." *The Washington Quarterly*, Spring 2008.

⁴⁸¹ "Excerpts of Bin Laden message." BBC News, December 16, 2004.

⁴⁸² Sennott, Charles M. "Why bin Laden plot relied on Saudi hijackers." *The Boston Globe*, March 3, 2002.

- In May 2002 then CIA Director George Tenet is reported to have personally delivered to Saudi Ambassador Bandar bin Sultan the contents of an intercepted communiqué from a deputy of Osama bin Laden's known as "Swift Sword." The message claimed that al-Qaeda would henceforth redirect its focus from attacking the U.S. homeland to toppling the Saudi royal family.^{483,484}
- Al-Qaeda's statement of responsibility for the October 2002 attack on the French oil tanker *Limburg* in the Gulf of Aden denounced the "regime of treason and treachery in Yemen," suggesting that the attack was meant to retaliate for the U.S.-Yemeni alliance in combating terrorism.⁴⁸⁵
- In April 2004, Jordanian authorities claim to have disrupted an al-Qaeda plot to attack the U.S. Embassy, the prime minister's office and the headquarters of the General Intelligence Department in Amman using a chemical bomb.⁴⁸⁶
- In February 2006, operatives of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula launched an attack against Saudi Arabia's Aramco oil facility in Abqaiq.⁴⁸⁷ In December 2004 Osama bin Laden had called on jihadists to target Saudi oil facilities.⁴⁸⁸
- In September 2007, following the siege of Islamabad's Red Mosque by Pakistani security forces, Osama bin Laden declared in a propaganda audio tape that the assault "demonstrated [Pakistani President Pervez] Musharraf's insistence on continuing his loyalty, submissiveness and aid to America against the Muslims" and called on Pakistanis to depose Musharraf: "It is obligatory on the Muslims in Pakistan to carry out jihad and fighting to remove Pervez, his government, his army and those who help him."⁴⁸⁹
- Various regional attacks since 2001 may be interpreted as attempts to purge Westerners from the Middle East by attacking the tourism industry, on which the Egyptian government is especially reliant:
 - In October 2004 three bombings targeting tourists at Egyptian Red Sea resorts killed 34 civilians.⁴⁹⁰
 - In July 2005 a series of bombings in the Egyptian resort city of Sharm al-Sheikh killed 88 civilians.⁴⁹¹

Contradictory evidence

"The masters in Washington and Tel Aviv are using the [Muslim] regimes to protect their interest and to fight the battle against the Muslims on their behalf. If the shrapnel from the battle reaches their homes and their bodies, they will trade accusations with their agents about who is responsible for this...Therefore, we must move the battle to the enemy's grounds to burn the hands of those who ignite fire in our countries."⁴⁹² – Ayman al-Zawahiri, *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*, 2001.

⁴⁸³ Suskind, Ron. "Al-Qaeda Cell Planned to Attack Subway With Poison Gas, Says New Book." *Time*, June 18, 2006.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁵ Watkins, Eric. "Landscape of Shifting Alliances." *Terrorism Monitor*, April 08, 2004.

⁴⁸⁶ "Jordan says major al Qaeda plot disrupted." CNN.com, April 26, 2004.

⁴⁸⁷ Henderson, Simon. "Al-Qaeda Attack on Abqaiq: The Vulnerability of Saudi Oil." *Policy Watch*, February 28, 2006.

⁴⁸⁸ Daly, John C.K. "Saudi Oil Facilities: Al-Qaeda's Next Target?" *Terrorism Monitor*, Volume 4, Issue 4, February 23, 2006.

⁴⁸⁹ Keath, Lee. "Bin Laden Urges Pakistani Rebellion." *Time*, September 7, 2007.

⁴⁹⁰ "Death toll rises in Egypt blasts." BBC News, October 9, 2004.

⁴⁹¹ Riedel, Bruce. "Al Qaeda Strikes Back." *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2007.

⁴⁹² Sageman, Marc. *Understanding Terror Networks*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004. p. 22.

- Al-Qaeda materials and its senior leaders' rhetoric often singles out Middle Eastern governments that are closely allied to the United States as "apostates" that should be overthrown – including Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Egypt – while largely ignoring the similarly secular regimes of Syria, Libya and Iraq during the reign of Saddam Hussein. This selectivity in condemning states for their insufficient piety may suggest that the United States is the network's real enemy.⁴⁹³
- In an audio tape broadcast on Al-Jazeera television shortly before the U.S. invasion of Iraq, Osama bin Laden denounced Saddam Hussein's government of "infidels," but sanctioned cooperation between Muslim insurgents and the Baath Party. This pragmatism may suggest al-Qaeda's greater priority of fighting the United States than against Middle East regimes of which the terrorist organization disapproves.⁴⁹⁴
- In November 2003 the Islamist web message board Al-Qal'a (The Fortress) posted an interview with senior al-Qaeda figure and close bin Laden associate Abu Salma Al-Hijazi, who claimed that al-Qaeda members had been directed to direct their operations against American targets and not the "apostates" regimes of the Middle East. Al-Hijazi warned that "We are patient [and] our patience will only end with the collapse of America and its agents."⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁹³ Libicki, et. al. "Exploring Terrorist Targeting Preferences." RAND, 2007.

⁴⁹⁴ "Bin Laden tape: Text." BBC News, February, 2003.

⁴⁹⁵ "Al-Qa'ida Commander in Iraq: 'A Terror Attack Against the U.S. with 100,000 Deaths Is Imminent; We Ordered the Riyadh Bombing.'" The Middle East Media Research Institute, November 2003.

Hypothesis Y) Self-activated terrorist cells and regional Salafist groups are exercising their own prerogative in target selection and are not motivated to attack the U.S. homeland.

“The shift from a coherent Al-Qaeda Central to a global proliferation of ‘self-starter’ terrorist groups – those inspired by bin Laden’s movement but not coordinated by it – has obviously not eliminated the danger of attacks....But the shift to these successor groups has made it significantly harder for terrorists of any provenance to achieve what all of them would like: a ‘second 9/11’...”⁴⁹⁶ – James Fallows, *The Atlantic*, September 2006.

“Now more a brand than a tight-knit group, al Qaeda has responded to four years of intense pressure from the United States and its allies by dispersing its surviving operatives, distributing its ideology and techniques for mass-casualty attacks to a wide audience on the Internet, and encouraging new adherents to act spontaneously in its name.”⁴⁹⁷ – Steve Coll and Susan B. Glasser, *The Washington Post*, July 2005.

“Al Qaeda has tended to pursue the longterm goals of expelling U.S. and Western forces from the Muslim world...Local militant jihadists, by contrast, typically pursue objectives that reflect the turbulent politics of their respective regions and immediate environments. Moreover, these groups are more likely to be tactically opportunistic and not disposed to regard any one country as the sole source of opposition against their goals.”⁴⁹⁸ – “Exploring Terrorist Targeting Preferences,” RAND report, 2007.

“The United States and its allies in the war on terrorism must defuse the widespread image of Al Qaeda as a ubiquitous, super-organized terror network and call it as it is: a loose collection of groups and individuals that doesn’t even refer to itself as ‘Al-Qaeda.’ Most of the affiliated groups have distinct goals within their own countries or regions, and pose little direct threat to the United States.”⁴⁹⁹ – Kimberly A. McCloud and Adam Dolnik, Center for Nonproliferation Studies, May 2002.

“These attacks are not being directed by Al Qaeda. They are being inspired by it. I’m not even sure it makes sense to speak of Al Qaeda because it conveys the image of a single, if decentralized, group. In fact, these are all different, local groups that have in common only ideology and enemies.”⁵⁰⁰ – Anonymous U.S. counterterrorism official, *Newsweek*, April 2004.

“[Madrid] underscores that this kind of terrorism is not the exclusive province of the membership of al Qaeda and its affiliated groups, that it requires no special al Qaeda training, equipment, indoctrination or experience. All that is necessary are the most portable, least detectable tools of the terrorist trade: ideas.”⁵⁰¹ – Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon, *The Next Attack*, 2005.

Critical Assumptions

- Regionally-focused, self-activated terrorist cells have greater autonomy to conduct attacks without authorization from al-Qaeda’s central leadership.
- Terrorist groups such as Jemaah Islamiyah and Jaish-e-Mohammed are more interested in regional operations than attacking the U.S. homeland, which they may perceive as inviting U.S. retaliation that sets back their parochial ambitions.

⁴⁹⁶ Fallows, James. “Declaring Victory.” *The Atlantic Monthly*, September 2006.

⁴⁹⁷ Coll, Steve and Susan B. Glasser. “Attacks Bear Earmarks of Evolving Al Qaeda.” *The Washington Post*, July 8, 2005.

⁴⁹⁸ Libicki, et. al. “Exploring Terrorist Targeting Preferences.” RAND, 2007. pp. 16.

⁴⁹⁹ McCloud, Kimberly and Adam Dolnik. “Debunk the myth of Al Qaeda.” *Christian Science Monitor*, May 23, 2002.

⁵⁰⁰ Zakaria, Fareed. “Terrorists Don’t Need States.” *Newsweek*, April 5, 2004.

⁵⁰¹ Benjamin, Daniel and Steven Simon. *The Next Attack*. 2005.

- The devolution of al-Qaeda's command structure means that capabilities have thinned at the edges: smaller, regionally-focused groups equal reduced ability to conduct large-scale, overseas attacks.

Supporting evidence

- A significant number of regional attacks by al-Qaeda affiliates have occurred since 9/11, including in Istanbul, Casablanca, Algiers, London, Madrid, Taba, Mombasa, Mumbai, and Bali. According to a 2007 RAND report, "With the possible exception of the attack on the Taba Hilton in October 2004, every terrorist attack since late 2002 associated with al Qaeda has been either by a 'franchised' or 'unaffiliated' group."⁵⁰²
- No close coordination between the Madrid and London train bombers and al-Qaeda operatives has ever been conclusively established; while limited contact between these groups may have occurred, both attacks appear to have been independently inspired and financed.^{503,504,505}
- When Osama bin Laden endorsed Abu Musab al-Zarqawi as the leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, bin Laden instructed al-Qaeda members that, "The brothers in the group there should heed his orders and obey him in all that which is good."⁵⁰⁶ This explicit delegation of authority to the Jordanian may suggest bin Laden's relinquishment of operational command over al-Qaeda satellite organizations.
- Former Osama bin Laden bodyguard Abu Jandal said in an interview with the *Al-Quds Al-Arabi* newspaper in 2005, "Every element of al Qaeda is self-activated. Whoever finds a chance to attack just goes ahead. The decision is theirs. This is regardless of whether they pledged allegiance to...bin Laden or not."⁵⁰⁷
- Al-Qaeda's centrifugal evolution reportedly contributed to the decision to disband the CIA unit responsible for neutralizing Osama bin Laden and instead concentrate on the organization's subgroups.⁵⁰⁸
- The dispersion of trained terrorist operatives around the world provides a ready source of jihadist manpower. Analysts estimate that between 20,000 and 100,000 jihadists attended al Qaeda's training facilities in Afghanistan before 9/11.⁵⁰⁹ Camps run by other groups in Chechnya, Kashmir, Lebanon's Bekaa Valley and the Maghreb since the 1980s have produced thousands more.⁵¹⁰

Contradictory evidence

"Regional groups believe [mergers with al-Qaeda] enhance their status and strengthen their ability to recruit and raise funds. However, such mergers require most regional groups to subordinate their local agendas to al-Qaida's global aspirations, which can spark internal friction....As these mergers multiply, the threat to U.S. and Western interests may increase as new

⁵⁰² Libicki, et. al. "Exploring Terrorist Targeting Preferences." RAND, 2007. pp. 70.

⁵⁰³ Home Office of the United Kingdom. "Report of the Official Account of the Bombings in London on 7th July 2005." May 11, 2006.

⁵⁰⁴ Mueller, John. "Is There Still a Terrorist Threat?" *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2006.

⁵⁰⁵ Benjamin, Daniel and Steven Simon. *The Next Attack*. 2005. pp. 6.

⁵⁰⁶ Blanchard, Christopher M. "Al Qaeda: Statements and Evolving Ideology." CRS report, July 9, 2007.

⁵⁰⁷ Coll, Steve and Susan B. Glasser. "Attacks Bear Earmarks of Evolving Al Qaeda." *The Washington Post*, July 8, 2005.

⁵⁰⁸ Mazzetti, Mark. "Qaeda Is Seen as Restoring Leadership." *The New York Times*, April 2, 2007.

⁵⁰⁹ Lacey, Jim. "Assessing al Qaeda: It's not what you think." *National Review*, August 25, 2004.

⁵¹⁰ Bowers, Faye. "Iran holds Al Qaeda's top leaders." *The Christian Science Monitor*, July 28, 2003.

franchises adopt al-Qaida's targeting priorities, namely Western interests."⁵¹¹ – Lt. Gen. Michael D. Maples, DIA Director, February 2008.

- The failure of regional al-Qaeda affiliates to attack the U.S. homeland is in some cases more a function of capability than motivation. As Peter Bergen and Paul Cruickshank note, “Today it is not clear that even if [al-Qaeda in Iraq] made attacking the United States a priority it would have the capability to do so. Its ability to attack the U.S. homeland is dependent on developing safe havens in Iraq in which the long-term planning, recruitment, and training necessary for an attack can be managed. To have a chance of launching a successful plot against the United States, AQI needs to be able to operate camps in Iraq with something like the freedom that Al Qaeda had in Taliban-run Afghanistan, a freedom it does not currently enjoy.”⁵¹²
- Rather than representing the devolution of al-Qaeda's strength, the greater cooperation between al-Qaeda and regional Salafist networks might actually have enhanced al-Qaeda's homeland attack capabilities. A publicly released 2007 NIE speculated that “al-Qa'ida will continue to enhance its capabilities to attack the Homeland through greater cooperation with regional terrorist groups.”⁵¹³
- Following the September 2006 merger between al-Qaeda and the Algerian Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (rechristened the al-Qaeda Organization in the Islamic Maghreb), Ayman al-Zawahiri implored the group to become “a bone in the throat of the American and French crusaders.”⁵¹⁴
- Primary source evidence suggests that al-Qaeda's leadership still seeks to retain control and influence over its sub-organizations, thereby suggesting that the lull in jihadist attacks against the U.S. homeland cannot be ascribed only to the local targeting preferences of subordinate organizations:
 - *The Management of Savagery*, a book-length jihadist treatise written by al-Qaeda ideologue Abu Bakr Naji, outlines the goal of conducting “medium operations” such as the bombings in Bali, Djerba, and Istanbul, but cautions against operations on the scale of the 9/11 attacks. Bombings of such magnitude, Naji suggests, “might impede the undertaking of qualitative operations that are smaller in size.” Additionally, large-scale operations should not be undertaken “without knowing the opinion of the High Command, besides the fact that (such an operation) often requires capabilities, support, and the covering (of expenses) which often cannot be obtained except from the High Command.”⁵¹⁵
 - Following the 2006 death of al-Qaeda in Iraq leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a letter believed to have been written by senior al-Qaeda operative Atiyah Abd al-Rahman was recovered from Zarqawi's safe-house instructing him that he should “abstain from making any decision on a comprehensive issue (one with a broad reach), and on substantial matters until you have turned to your leadership; Shaykh Usamah and the Doctor...”⁵¹⁶

⁵¹¹ Maples, Michael D. Testimony before the Senate Committee on Armed Services, February 27, 2008.

⁵¹² Bergen, Peter and Paul Cruickshank. “Al Qaeda: Self-Fulfilling Prophecy.” *Mother Jones*, October 18, 2007.

⁵¹³ National Intelligence Estimate. “The Terrorist Threat to the U.S. Homeland.” July 17, 2007.

⁵¹⁴ Riedel, Bruce. “Al Qaeda: The Return of the Knights.” Centre for European Policy Studies, ESF Working Papers, July 25, 2007.

⁵¹⁵ Naji, Abu Bakr. *The Management of Savagery*. Translated by William McCants, Combating Terrorism Center, USMA, May 23, 2006.

⁵¹⁶ “Letter Exposes New Leader in Al-Qa'ida High Command.” Combating Terrorism Center, USMA, September 25, 2006.

Hypothesis Z) Al-Qaeda's priority after 9/11 has been to "bleed" the United States dry economically but believes this goal is best achieved by conducting attacks outside the U.S. homeland.

"We, alongside the mujahidin, bled Russia for 10 years, until it went bankrupt and was forced to withdraw in defeat. So we are continuing this policy in bleeding America to the point of bankruptcy....[A]l-Qaida spent \$500,000 on [9/11], while America, in the incident and its aftermath, lost...more than \$500 billion. Meaning that every dollar of al-Qaida defeated a million dollars by the permission of Allah, besides the loss of a huge number of jobs. As for the size of the economic deficit, it has reached record astronomical numbers estimated to total more than a trillion dollars. And even more dangerous and bitter for America is that the mujahidin recently forced Bush to resort to emergency funds to continue the fight in Afghanistan and Iraq, which is evidence of the success of the bleed-until-bankruptcy plan – with Allah's permission."⁵¹⁷ – Osama bin Laden in his election eve video broadcast, October 2004.

"I think that bin Laden took a very important lesson away from the 9/11 attacks. He gloated over the fact that it cost the American economy \$1.4 trillion. So I think [al-Qaeda] took away from 9/11 that attacking American economic targets, or Western economic targets would be very useful...And unfortunately, this may represent a new tactic on their part, and in a way...it makes the war on terrorism even more sort of dispersed, because Western businesses and American businesses around the world may become targets."⁵¹⁸ – Peter Bergen, October 2002.

"[I]f you really want to impose pain on the U.S., the act has to be something that prompts the government to pass a bundle of very costly laws that stay in place long after they have served their purpose (assuming they had a purpose in the first place)."⁵¹⁹ – Dr. Steven D. Levitt, *The New York Times*, August 2007.

"Americans have been taught by their leaders to see al-Qaeda behind every rock and tree, ready to pounce. This all gives us confidence in our plan to defeat America – by bleeding it into bankruptcy and tempting it to spread out its forces. Brothers, the amount of money that Washington spends on wars to murder Muslims and on pointless 'homeland security' measures is staggering, with no end in sight. The war in Iraq alone is costing \$12 billion per month."⁵²⁰ – Michael Scheuer, in fictitious "State of the Jihad," *The Washington Post*, February 2008.

"Thus our plan in the face of this campaign should focus on the following....Shaking the confidence in the American economy. This will lead investors to refrain from investing in America or participating in American companies, thus accelerating the fall of the American economy...."⁵²¹ – Osama bin Laden in a 2001 memo to Taliban leader Mullah Omar recovered after the fall of Kabul.

Critical Assumptions

- Jihadists believe that economic warfare against the United States is as important a goal as operations aimed at inflicting death and destruction on Americans.
- Al-Qaeda leaders believe that the health of the U.S. economy, and thus America's ability to project power overseas, can be decisively weakened by attacks overseas.
- The war in Iraq provides an opportunity to inflict damage on the United States, particularly on its military and economy, which should take priority over attacks on the U.S. homeland.

⁵¹⁷ "Transcript of Osama bin Laden's Speech." Aljazeera.net, October 30, 2004.

⁵¹⁸ "Explosion in Indonesia Kills Over 180." CNN.com, October 13, 2002.

⁵¹⁹ Levitt, Steven. "If You Were a Terrorist, How Would You Attack?" *The New York Times*, August 8, 2007.

⁵²⁰ Scheuer Michael. "The State of the Jihad, As He Might See It." *The Washington Post*, February 17, 2008.

⁵²¹ Cullison, Alan. "Inside Al-Qaeda's Hard Drive." *The Atlantic Monthly*, September 2004.

- Simultaneous campaigns against domestic American targets and American targets overseas are not practical.

Supporting evidence

- The al-Qaeda manual *The Management of Savagery* by Abu Bakr Naji instructs, “If a tourist resort that the Crusaders patronize in Indonesia is hit, all of the tourist resorts in all of the states of the world will have to be secured by the work of additional forces, which are double the ordinary amount, and a huge increase in spending. If a usurious bank belonging to the Crusaders is struck in Turkey, all of the banks belonging to the Crusaders will have to be secured in all of the countries and the (economic) draining will increase. If an oil interest is hit near the port of Aden, there will have to be intensive security measures put in place for all of the oil companies, and their tankers, and the oil pipelines in order to protect them and draining will increase.”⁵²²
- A tract authored by al-Qaeda member Abu Mus’ab al-Najadi in October 2005 entitled, “Al-Qa’ida’s Battle is Economic not Military,” offers the economic campaign as a simple explanation for the lack of a follow-up attack to 9/11: “In addition, it becomes apparent why additional al-Qa`ida strikes inside the United States have been delayed. When thinking about military strikes, it is not difficult to carry out an attack that would kill a good number of American civilians, but in my opinion this is a waste of resources without much benefit. However, when directing these resources against economic targets, it is more effective and can get us many steps closer toward victory. An attack that kills a large number of Americans cannot achieve a tenth of this effectiveness. This reveals the importance of the blessed September 11th attacks, which is not that it killed a large number of infidels, but what is more important, the economic effect that this strike achieved...”⁵²³
- An excerpt from the al-Qaeda publication “Voice of Jihad,” an official press organ of al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia: “Since September 11th America has been spending billions of dollars to protect its infrastructure and interests around the world.... The attacker determines the timing of the strike. He will carry out a concentrated strike one time at a weak point and then sit in ambush again. So the enemy will look for a gap and close it, not necessarily where he was hit but all other similar targets. So striking the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania means protecting every American embassy in the world. Striking the [U.S.S.] Cole at sea means protecting all American assets in the seas....The attack on the Trade Center forced America since that day to spend billions to protect the huge economic infrastructure that runs the American economy.”⁵²⁴

Contradictory evidence

- Within the al-Qaeda discourse, emphasis is placed both on political and economic jihad as mutually reinforcing, not mutually exclusive.⁵²⁵

⁵²² Naji, Abu Bakr. *The Management of Savagery*. Translated by William McCants, Combating Terrorism Center, USMA, May 23, 2006.

⁵²³ Salama, Sammy and David Wheeler. “From the Horse’s Mouth: Unraveling Al-Qa`ida’s Target Selection Calculus.” Center for Nonproliferation Studies, April 17, 2007.

⁵²⁴ Ibid.

⁵²⁵ See the discussion in Lewis A. Dunn, Rebecca Givner-Forbes.

- Documents uncovered during a July 2004 raid on an al-Qaeda cell in Gujarat, Pakistan, revealed a plot to attack financial targets in the United States, including the Citigroup Center and the New York Stock Exchange in New York City, the Prudential Financial building in New Jersey and the International Monetary Fund and World Bank headquarters in Washington, D.C.⁵²⁶
- The 2006 airline plot suggests that al-Qaeda is still actively attempting to damage the U.S. economy through strikes on its commercial aviation sector.
- Select small-scale attacks on U.S. public spaces such as shopping malls, public transportation hubs and entertainment venues would likely produce significant economic damage; likely effects would include reduced consumer spending from fear of venturing into public spaces and the expense of erecting costly countermeasures in response to public demand.

⁵²⁶ Pincus, Walter and John Mintz. "Pakistani-U.S. Raid Uncovered Terrorist Cell's Surveillance Data." *The Washington Post*, August 2, 2004.

Hypothesis AA) 9/11 was meant to be a one-time attack that would catapult al-Qaeda to the front of the radical Islamist movement.

“Polarizing the Islamic world between the *umma* and the regimes allied with the United States would help achieve bin Laden’s primary goal: furthering the cause of Islamic revolution within the Muslim world itself, in the Arab lands especially and in Saudi Arabia above all. He had no intention of defeating America. War with the United States was not a goal in and of itself but rather an instrument designed to help his brand of extremist Islam survive and flourish among the believers.”⁵²⁷ – Dr. Michael Scott Doran, Princeton University, January 2002.

“Al Qaeda’s hope is that its example will lead to a global uprising among the *ummah* and that this ‘awakened’ community will wield the force necessary to achieve jihadist objectives....Though the 9/11 attacks did not spark the widespread uprising of the *ummah* al Qaeda was hoping for, the spectacular success of the attacks made bin Laden a household name and vaulted al Qaeda into the media spotlight. Despite the Taliban’s quick defeat in Afghanistan...al Qaeda continued to be perceived as the apex of the jihadist movement in the Western media and, perhaps more important, on the streets of the Muslim world.”⁵²⁸ – Fred Burton, Stratfor, June 2007.

“Facing dismal prospects after some promising years from the early-to-mid 1990s, al-Qaeda and Jihad...switched their strategy and externalized their various domestic conflicts by targeting the United States....Spectacular violence...would compensate for al-Qaeda’s limitations and obstacles. A military conflict in the Islamic world involving the United States would refocus the moderate Islamists’ energies on gaining political power and following the lead of the radicals, for they would become alienated from their governments’ alliance with the United States in a war against other Muslims.”⁵²⁹ – Dr. Robert S. Snyder, Southwestern University, Fall 2003.

Critical Assumptions

- The 9/11 attacks were intended to accomplish one or more of several possible outcomes that, in light of the success of the attacks from al-Qaeda’s perspective, do not require additional attacks on the U.S. homeland:
 - Catapulting al-Qaeda to the leadership of the radical Islamist movement; al-Qaeda’s senior leadership feels that it has succeeded in its goal of becoming the most recognized and influential radical Islamist organization in the world.
 - Inspiring a global movement of independent jihadists to conduct attacks without direct guidance or support from al-Qaeda central.
 - Serving notice to the United States that a war is underway between the U.S.-led West and the vanguard of Salafist Islam.

Supporting evidence

- According to an account by Noman Benotman, former leader of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, during a conference of jihadist leaders in Kandahar in the summer of 2000, Osama bin Laden rebuffed entreaties to halt what some radical Islamists considered to be counterproductive attacks against the United States. Benotman claims that bin Laden made an allusion to 9/11 when he

⁵²⁷ Doran, Michael Scott. “Somebody Else’s Civil War.” *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2002.

⁵²⁸ Burton, Fred. “The Quiet Campaign against al Qaeda’s Local Nodes.” Stratfor, June 20, 2007.

⁵²⁹ Snyder, Robert S. “Hating America: Bin Laden as a Civilizational Revolutionary.” *The Review of Politics*, Autumn, 2003. Pgs. 325-349.

pledged, "I have one more operation, and after that I will quit. I can't call this one back because that would demoralize the whole organization."⁵³⁰

- Al-Qaeda has become the acknowledged primary non-state threat to the United States and the West, as well as the symbol of the global jihadist movement. As the October 2007 *National Strategy for Homeland Security* notes, the terrorist threat to the U.S. homeland stems "primarily from violent Islamic terrorist groups and cells."⁵³¹
- Al-Qaeda's leadership, including Osama bin Laden, is widely acknowledged to be the inspiration of the wider jihadist movement.

Contradictory evidence

"In fact, there are many terrorism analysts who are convinced that bin Laden fully anticipated that the U.S. response to 9/11 would force him and his militants into hiding and that he planned from the start to go dormant and reemerge years later, when he'd have a cleaner shot at a spectacular second attack on the U.S."⁵³² – Christopher McDougall, *New York Magazine*, December 2004.

- The al-Qaeda core leadership has sought to attack the U.S. homeland or American interests overseas on numerous occasions since 9/11, including the July 2006 transatlantic airline plot.
- In Osama bin Laden's election eve video broadcast in October 2004, the al-Qaeda leader stated: "Even though we are in the fourth year after the events of September 11th, Bush is still engaged in distortion, deception and hiding from you the real causes. And thus, the reasons are still there for a repeat of what occurred."⁵³³
- Al-Qaeda's claim to the mantle of leadership of the radical Islamist movement has not been universally accepted among jihadists. In August 2006, for example, leaders of the Egyptian Islamist group Al-Jamaa Al-Islamiya publicly denied Ayman al-Zawahiri's claim that the two groups had merged. Egyptian authorities had released more than 1,000 members of the group from prison in 2003 following its "commitment to rejecting violence."⁵³⁴ If the 9/11 attacks were meant to rally the jihadist movement behind al-Qaeda, additional and possibly more spectacular strikes may be necessary to achieve that objective.
- Osama bin Laden is widely believed to have misjudged the intensity of the U.S. response to the 9/11 attacks.⁵³⁵ Given this and possibly other miscalculations, it is questionable whether strategic decisions that al-Qaeda made six years ago in a radically different operating environment remain operational.

⁵³⁰ Bergen, Peter and Paul Cruickshank. "The Unraveling." *The New Republic*, June 11, 2008.

⁵³¹ *National Strategy for Homeland Security*. Homeland Security Council, October 2007.

⁵³² McDougall, Christopher. "Reasons They Haven't Hit Us Again." *New York*, December 6, 2004.

⁵³³ "Transcript of Osama bin Laden's Speech." Aljazeera.net, Doha, Qatar, October 30, 2004.

⁵³⁴ "Militants deny joining al Qaeda." CNN.com, August 7, 2006.

⁵³⁵ Garamone, Jim. "Tape Proves Bin Laden's Complicity in Sept. 11 Attacks." American Forces Press Service, December 13, 2001.

Hypothesis BB) Al-Qaeda is focused on preventing Shia ascendancy in the Middle East.

“In Iraq...Al Qaeda has morphed into a purist Sunni group that spends most of its time killing Shiites. In its original *fatwas* and other statements, Al Qaeda makes no mention of Shiites, condemning only the ‘Crusaders’ and ‘Jews.’ But Iraq changed things. Abu Mussab al-Zarqawi, the head of Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia, bore a fierce hatred for Shiites.... In a February 2004 letter to Osama bin Laden, he claimed that ‘the danger from the Shia...is greater...than the Americans....’ If there ever had been a debate between him and bin Laden, Zarqawi won. As a result, an organization that had hoped to rally the entire Muslim world to jihad against the West has been dragged instead into a dirty internal war within Islam.”⁵³⁶ – Dr. Fareed Zakaria, *Newsweek*, July 2007.

“Al Qaeda worries about the Sunni minority’s future in a Shiite-dominated Iraq after the Americans leave. Propaganda material of Sunni jihadists in Iraq and elsewhere openly discusses their fear that Iran will dominate a post-occupation Iraq and seek to restore the type of regional control that the Persian Empire had in the sixteenth century.”⁵³⁷ – Bruce Riedel, Saban Center for Middle East Policy, May 2007.

“Al-Qaeda’s basic credo minces no words on the subject: ‘We believe that the Shi`ite heretics are a sect of idolatry and apostasy, and that they are the most evil creatures under the heavens.’...Al Qaeda’s nightmare scenario is that the Americans and the Iraqi Shi`ites will force Riyadh to enact broad reforms and bring the Saudi Shi`ites into the political community.”⁵³⁸ – Dr. Michael Scott Doran, Princeton University, January 2004.

Critical Assumptions

- Al-Qaeda core operatives who are otherwise trained for and inclined toward attacks on the U.S. homeland have diverted their energies to support the anti-Shia campaign being waged by al-Qaeda in Iraq, possibly as an indirect means of weakening the United States by sabotaging its Iraq stabilization effort.
- Anti-Shia statements by al-Qaeda ideologues and senior leaders reflect a genuine hostility to what they consider a heretical fringe of Islam rather than perfunctory rhetoric meant to satisfy Salafist Sunni orthodoxy.
- Senior al-Qaeda leaders perceive the accumulation of Shia political power in Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East as a threat to the strategic goal of reestablishing a Sunni-led Islamic caliphate.

Supporting evidence

- Al-Qaeda theorist Yusuf al-Ayyiri wrote before his death at the hands of Saudi security forces in 2003 that “The danger of the Shi`ite heretics to the region is not less than the danger of the Jews and the Christians.”⁵³⁹
- An intercepted letter believed to have been written by al-Qaeda in Iraq leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in 2004 and intended for al-Qaeda leaders in Afghanistan lists the incitement of Sunni-Shia civil war as one of the group’s chief aims in Iraq.⁵⁴⁰

⁵³⁶ Zakaria, Fareed. “True or False: We Are Losing the War Against Radical Islam.” *Newsweek*, July 2, 2007.

⁵³⁷ Riedel, Bruce. “Al Qaeda Strikes Back.” *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2007.

⁵³⁸ Doran, Michael Scott. “The Saudi Paradox.” *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2004.

⁵³⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁰ “Letter may detail Iraqi insurgency’s concerns.” CNN.com, February 10, 2004.

- The February 2006 bombing of the Shia Al-Askari Mosque in Samarra is generally accepted to have been an attempt by al-Qaeda in Iraq to foment Sunni-Shia civil war.
- In December 2006, 38 Saudi clerics signed an edict warning Sunni Muslims of the danger posed by the Shia in Iraq: “Muslims must stand directly with our Sunni brothers in Iraq and support them by all appropriate, well-studied means ...Muslims generally should be made aware of the danger of the Shiites....Nearly four years after the occupation of Iraq, it is clear that their goal is to take over Iraq as a partnership between the Crusaders and the Safavid [the 16th and 17th Century Persian dynasty that established Shiism as the religion of the Iranian empire], realizing their ambitions in the region, protecting the Jewish occupiers, removing Sunni influence, encircling the Sunnis in the whole region and creating a Shi’a crescent.”^{541,542}
- Additional evidence exists of a growing unease among Sunnis in the Middle East over the ascension of Iran as a regional hegemon.⁵⁴³ This fear may manifest itself in violence by radical Sunni groups such as al-Qaeda.
 - In 2004, King Abdullah of Jordan alluded to the danger of a Shi’ite “crescent” in the region extending from Iran and Iraq to Syria and Lebanon.⁵⁴⁴
 - In April 2006, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak suggested that the loyalty of Shia living in Arab nations is questionable: “Most of the Shiites are loyal to Iran, and not the countries they are living in.”⁵⁴⁵

Contradictory evidence

“Bin Laden has always kept al-Qaeda’s three main strategic priorities clear and consistent: first, to use incremental increases in force to drive the United States as far as possible out of the Muslim world; second, to destroy the apostate Muslim regimes and Israel; and finally, once the first two steps have been accomplished, to violently settle the Sunnis’ historical scores with the heretical Shiites. Having set this agenda in the mid-1990s, bin Laden and his deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri have repeatedly reinforced the absolute need to avoid widespread Shiite-Sunni conflict.”⁵⁴⁶ – Dr. Michael Scheuer, former head of the CIA’s Alec Station unit, August 2007.

“Ayman al-Zawahiri’s July 27 statement on the Israel-Hezbollah conflict deftly advanced al-Qaeda’s own interests, as well as al-Qaeda’s goal of putting the world’s multiple ongoing Islamic insurgencies into the context of a single, Shiite-and-Sunni struggle against ‘the Zionist-Crusader aggression.’.....Al-Zawahiri took advantage of the unexpected war in the Levant to advance the effort bin Laden began after al-Zarqawi’s death to reassert al-Qaeda’s longstanding position that Sunni vs. Shiite conflict must be subordinated to building a united Islamist movement to drive the United States from the Middle East and to destroy Israel and the apostate Muslim regimes.”⁵⁴⁷ – Dr. Michael Scheuer, August 2006.

⁵⁴¹ Riedel, Bruce and Bilal Y. Saab. “Al Qaeda’s Third Front: Saudi Arabia.” *The Washington Quarterly*, Spring 2008.

⁵⁴² “Saudi clerics seek help for Iraqi Sunnis.” *The Daily Times* (Pakistan), December 12, 2006.

⁵⁴³ Fuller Graham E. “The Hizballah-Iran Connection: Model for Sunni Resistance.” *The Washington Quarterly*, Winter 2006-2007.

⁵⁴⁴ Ghosh, Bobby. “Behind the Sunni-Shi’ite Divide.” *Time*, February 22, 2007.

⁵⁴⁵ Blanford, Nicholas. “Shiite-Sunni ‘Rift’ a Worry Across Region.” *USA Today*, April 13, 2006.

⁵⁴⁶ Scheuer, Michael. “Abu Yahya al-Libi: Al-Qaeda’s Theological Enforcer – Part 2.” *Terrorism Focus*, Volume 4, Issue 27, August 14, 2007.

⁵⁴⁷ Scheuer, Michael. “Zawahiri: Internationalizing Jihad, Uniting Muslims and Trumping Saudi Clerics.” *Terrorism Focus*, August 1, 2006.

- Al-Qaeda is believed to have cooperated with Shiite terrorist groups in the past, including Hezbollah, suggesting that its antipathy for the Shia is less pronounced than toward Americans. The 9/11 Commission Report notes that “senior managers in al Qaeda maintained contacts with Iran and the Iranian-supported worldwide terrorist organization Hezbollah....Al Qaeda members received advice and training from Hezbollah.”⁵⁴⁸
- In an intercepted July 2005 letter, Ayman al-Zawahiri cautioned Abu Musab al-Zarqawi that “many of your Muslim admirers amongst the common folk are wondering about your attacks on the Shia...My opinion is that this matter won’t be acceptable to the Muslim populace however much you have tried to explain it, and aversion to this will continue.” Zawahiri rhetorically asks, “Is [the conflict with the Shia] something that is unavoidable? Or, is it something can be put off until the force of the *mujahed* movement in Iraq gets stronger? And if some of the operations were necessary for self-defense, were all of the operations necessary? Or, were there some operations that weren't called for?...Or, does this conflict with the Shia lift the burden from the Americans by diverting the *mujahedeen* to the Shia, while the Americans continue to control matters from afar? And if the attacks on Shia leaders were necessary to put a stop to their plans, then why were there attacks on ordinary Shia?”⁵⁴⁹
- In a July 2006 propaganda video, al-Zawahiri offered rhetorical support for Hezbollah in its conflict with Israel, stating, “We cannot just stand idly by while we see all these shells fall on our brothers in Gaza and Lebanon. We must target Jewish and American interests everywhere.”⁵⁵⁰ However, some al-Qaeda watchers have suggested that this statement of solidarity was issued out of necessity, for al-Qaeda could not afford to be seen as irrelevant while a Shia organization galvanized the Arab world through its success in combat against Israel.
- In a September 2006 interview commemorating the fifth anniversary of 9/11, al-Zawahiri denied that al-Qaeda’s senior leaders had ordered the targeting of Iraqi Shia: “Let me be frank and explicit on this point. The instructions of Sheikh Osama...to the brothers in Iraq, chief among them Abu Musab...were that they focus their efforts on the Americans and neutralize the rest of the powers as best they could....Someone busy fighting the Americans will be more eager than anyone to lessen his enemies and increase his friends.”⁵⁵¹
- Osama bin Laden’s October 22, 2007, propaganda video criticized jihadists in Iraq for having waged internecine warfare, which suggests that al-Qaeda’s core leadership has not diverted its energies to counter the rise of the Shia. Bin Laden advised that “interest of the Islamic nation surpasses that of a group...The strength of faith is in the strength of the bond between Muslims and not that of a tribe, nationalism or an organization...Some of you have been lax in one duty, which is to unite your ranks...Beware of division...Muslims are waiting for you to gather under a single banner to champion righteousness. Be keen to oblige with this duty.”⁵⁵²

⁵⁴⁸ National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States. pp. 240.

⁵⁴⁹ Office of the DNI. “Letter from al-Zawahiri to al-Zarqawi.” October 11, 2005.

⁵⁵⁰ Scheuer, Michael. *Terrorism Focus*, August 1, 2006.

⁵⁵¹ Scheuer, Michael. “Al-Zawahiri’s September 11 Video Hits Main Themes of al-Qaeda Doctrine.” *Terrorism Focus*. September 19, 2006.

⁵⁵² Baker, Graeme. “Osama bin Laden urges Iraq fighters to unite.” *The Telegraph*, October 24, 2007.

Hypothesis CC) Non-Salafist terrorist groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas have lacked the motivation to attack the U.S. homeland.

“Groups such as Hamas, Hizballah, and Islamic Jihad, which so many Americans love to revile – and fear – do not make the list of potential superterrorists. These organizations and their state sponsors may loathe the Great Satan, but they also wish to survive and prosper politically. Their leaders...understand that a Hiroshima-like disaster would effectively mean the end of their movements.”⁵⁵³ – Ehud Sprinzak, Autumn 1998.

“Islamist insurgent leaders with nationalist aims in the Palestinian territories, Chechnya, Kashmir, and elsewhere have so far followed a pragmatic calculus: Direct attacks against the United States are difficult to pull off, will do little to advance their local political claims, and indeed may jeopardize those claims.”⁵⁵⁴ – Steve Coll, Aspen Strategy Group report, July 2005.

“Hamas has not joined al-Qaeda’s global jihad. They have not yet bought into the strategy...that militants can best undermine local governments by targeting the Western powers that support them. Despite shared ideological roots with al-Qaeda-affiliated groups like the Egyptian Islamic Group, Hamas sees itself as a local ‘resistance’ organization and has traditionally limited its operations to targeting Israelis in Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip.”⁵⁵⁵ – Dr. Matthew Levitt, Washington Institute for Near East Studies, November 2007.

“Despite its widespread popularity and Iranian connections, Hizballah is a basically local organization with goals primarily in the immediate region.... Aside from two anti-Israeli terrorist attacks in Argentina on Jewish targets, the organization has not engaged in any violent activities in the United States, Canada, or anywhere else outside Lebanon except across the border against Israel....Hizballah’s basic lack of involvement in out-of-state guerrilla operations is indicative of its essentially Israel-Lebanon-Palestine orientation and concentration on local grievances.”⁵⁵⁶ – Graham E. Fuller, former vice chair of the National Intelligence Council, winter 2006.

“Terrorism analysts say Hezbollah attacks on Americans declined as its leaders focused on making the transition from terrorists to political players in Lebanon. Equally significant, analysts say, Hezbollah and other radical Muslim groups realized that they could raise millions of dollars in the USA – legally and illegally – as long as they didn’t draw attention by killing Americans.”⁵⁵⁷ – Toni Locy, USA Today, May 2003.

“When the United States has talked about terrorist organizations other than al Qaeda, U.S. officials have tended to blur the line between national and transnational ones, often lumping them together as part of the same global war on terrorism.”⁵⁵⁸ – Jeremy Pressman, *The Washington Quarterly*, Autumn 2007.

Critical Assumptions

- The leaders of Hezbollah, Hamas and other non-Salafist terrorist groups do not believe that their strategic objectives would be advanced by attacking Americans or American interests, especially within the U.S. homeland.

⁵⁵³ Sprinzak, Ehud. “The Great Superterrorism Scare.” *Foreign Policy*, Autumn 1998.

⁵⁵⁴ Coll, Steve. “Al Qaeda’s Evolution Since September 11.” Aspen Strategy Group report, 2006. pp. 26.

⁵⁵⁵ Levitt, Matthew. “Could Hamas Target the West?” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, November 2007.

⁵⁵⁶ Fuller, Graham E. “The Hizballah-Iran Connection: Model for Sunni Resistance.” *The Washington Quarterly*, Winter 2006-2007.

⁵⁵⁷ Locy, Toni. “U.S. looks at potential danger from Hezbollah.” *USA Today*, May 13, 2003.

⁵⁵⁸ Pressman, Jeremy. “Rethinking Transnational Counterterrorism: Beyond a National Framework.” *The Washington Quarterly*, Autumn 2007.

- With regard to organizations whose principal adversary is Israel, senior leaders have concluded that striking American targets will not result in a cessation of U.S. support for Israel and perhaps may produce the reverse effect.
- These leaders exercise sufficient control over their operatives to ensure that unapproved terrorist operations using the organizations' resources do not occur.
- Hezbollah's anti-American rhetoric – for example, Hassan Nasrallah's leading crowds in chanting "Death to America" – is largely symbolic and not genuinely indicative of its intent to conduct terrorist operations against American interests.

Supporting evidence

- Since 1992, Hezbollah has attempted to cultivate its image as a legitimate political party and social services provider by contesting seats in Lebanon's Parliament and administering a considerable infrastructure of schools, health care facilities and charitable enterprises.^{559,560} Coupled with the prestige that the group accrued as a legitimate military peer of Israel in the 2006 summer war, Hezbollah's leaders may be reluctant to conduct terrorist attacks that subtract from the group's image as a responsible political movement.
- Hamas' consolidation of political power in Gaza may produce similar sensitivities to maintaining a state-like image. As Dr. Matthew Levitt has noted, "Hamas' decision to run in the Palestinian elections, its participation in the Palestinian National Unity Government, and its control of Gaza even after the collapse of that unity government mitigate against a Hamas decision to target Western interests....Hamas believes itself to be engaged in 'resistance,' not terrorism."⁵⁶¹
- An attack on the United States by Hezbollah or Hamas could undermine support for these groups among a wider Western and Islamic audience, as occurred initially when Hezbollah seized two Israeli soldiers in 2006.
- Historical evidence offers little confidence to the leaders of Hezbollah and Hamas that an attack on the U.S. homeland would produce favorable changes to American policy concerning Israel. The withdrawal of U.S. forces from Lebanon after the 1983 Marine barracks bombing and from Somalia following the "Black Hawk Down" incident may suggest a casualty-averse American response, while the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq after 9/11 would indicate a more muscular reaction to an attack on the homeland. Uncertainty concerning the U.S. response may limit enthusiasm for a strike on American interests.
- Leaders of Hamas, Hezbollah and dozens of other nationalist Islamist movements publicly condemned the 9/11 attacks, in part by signing a joint statement on September 14, 2001, disavowing the attacks as "against all human and Islamic norms."⁵⁶² If sincere, this condemnation may suggest a genuine rejection by these groups of attacks against (non-Israeli) civilians abroad.

Contradictory evidence

"The war against Islam is the same war which is launched in Iraq. In Palestine also, there is a war against Islam. So, the Islamic nation should wake up and shake the land under the feet of those

⁵⁵⁹ Atran, Scott. "Mishandling Suicide Terrorism." *The Washington Quarterly*, Summer 2004.

⁵⁶⁰ Goldberg, Jeffrey. "A Reporter at Large: In the Party of God (Part I)." *The New Yorker*, October 14, 2002.

⁵⁶¹ Levitt, Matthew. "Could Hamas Target the West?" *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, November 2007.

⁵⁶² Wiktorowicz, Quintan and John Kaltner. "Killing in the Name of Islam: Al-Qaeda's Justification for September 11." *Middle East Policy*, Summer 2003.

Zionists and the Americans who back them.”⁵⁶³ – Abdel Aziz al-Rantissi, successor to assassinated Hamas founder Sheikh Ahmed Yasin, March 2004.

“Bush stands next to Sharon and after that they assassinate Rantissi. We should carry our fight against the Americans as much as we are against Israel. Israel and America share the same face.”⁵⁶⁴ – Masked Hamas militant at Rantissi’s funeral following his assassination by Israeli forces, April 2004.

- U.S. military and economic support for Israel remains a powerful and enduring source of grievance among both Hamas’ and Hezbollah’s supporters, providing at least some motivation to attack American interests.
- Hezbollah, with Iranian support, is widely believed to have conducted the 1983 U.S. Marine barracks bombing in Beirut, Lebanon, which killed 241 American personnel, and the 1996 Khobar Towers bombing, which killed 19 service members.⁵⁶⁵ U.S. military forces departed Lebanon en masse shortly after the Marine barracks bombing; within two years of the 9/11 attacks, most U.S. forces were withdrawn from Saudi Arabia. If Hezbollah or Hamas come to perceive that U.S. assistance to foreign governments – namely, support for Israel – can be influenced by violent acts in the same way that U.S. troop redeployments have been, the groups may find the incentive to conduct attacks against American targets, including in the U.S. homeland.
- On December 18, 2001, Hamas released a declaration asserting that “Americans [are] now considered legitimate targets as well as Israelis.”⁵⁶⁶
- On July 31, 2002, a suicide bomb detonated at Jerusalem’s Hebrew University killed five Americans.⁵⁶⁷ Following the bombing, Israeli security officials arrested a number of Hamas operatives and charged them with the bombing. However, alleged ringleader Muhammad Odeh reportedly denied having deliberately targeted Americans in the attack.⁵⁶⁸

⁵⁶³ Levitt, Matthew. “Could Hamas Target the West?” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, November 2007.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁵ Priest, Dana. “Attacking Iran May Trigger Terrorism.” *The Washington Post*, April 2, 2006.

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁷ Bennet, James and John Kifner. “At Least 7 Killed as Militants Bomb Jerusalem Campus.” *The New York Times*, July 31, 2002.

⁵⁶⁸ Schmemmann, Serge. “Hamas Members Held in Recent Bombings.” *The New York Times*, August 22, 2002.

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In an effort to deliver a benefit beyond the mere enumeration of the competing hypotheses, the study team sought to capture the conference participants' general sense of which theories are most compelling in explaining the non-occurrence of a homeland attack since 9/11. Toward this end, the study team developed a rudimentary tool that allowed the participants to assess each hypothesis according to the likelihood of its being valid and their confidence in the information upon which their answers were based. After the morning plenary session, in which an overview of the study was presented and a period of general discussion took place, the participants were divided into three Working Groups for this purpose. A general attempt was made to assign conference attendees to the Working Group in which their particular expertise would be most relevant.⁵⁶⁹ These groups were tasked with analyzing the hypotheses within the following categories:

- **Working Group I:** Hypotheses suggesting that U.S. and allied efforts have prevented another attack or that terrorists have limited attack capabilities (Baskets I & II, or Hypotheses A through K);
- **Working Group II:** Hypotheses suggesting that terrorists view a major attack on the U.S. homeland as ill-advised or counterproductive for the time being (Basket III, or Hypotheses L through U);
- **Working Group III:** Hypotheses suggesting that terrorists have other attack priorities at the moment (Basket IV, or Hypotheses V through CC).

Methodology

The use of the assessment tool in the Working Group sessions had two principal purposes: to provide a general sense of the validity of the hypotheses and to serve as a jumping-off point for discussion among the participants. The study team does not wish to imply a greater quantitative or qualitative rigor than was attempted in this process. While certain characteristics of the assessment process resembled formal Subject Matter Expert opinion elicitation methodologies, several components of these processes were deliberately excluded in the interest of time and resources. For example, no attempt was made to incorporate a weighting mechanism to account for the participants' different levels of professional expertise with respect to a particular hypothesis being assessed by the Working Group.

The question on the horizontal axis of the assessment tool asked for the participants' response to the following question: "What is the likelihood that the hypothesis is valid?" Respondents could choose from five gradations of likelihood: "Remote," "Unlikely," "Even Chance," "Probably, Likely,"⁵⁷⁰ and "Almost Certainly." These five gradations are identical to language used in the July 2007 NIE, "The Terrorist Threat to the U.S. Homeland." The question on the vertical axis asked, "What confidence do you have in your assessment given the quality of available evidence, your knowledge and experience, and other factors that inform your judgment?" For the sake of simplicity, the participants were asked to rank their confidence as being either "High," "Medium," or "Low." These gradations also reflect NIE language, with the only difference being the use of "Medium" in place of "Moderate."

⁵⁶⁹ This sorting process was casual, and in a few cases reassignments were made on the morning of the conference at the request of individual participants.

⁵⁷⁰ Due to an administrative error, the choice "Probably, Likely" was offered for Hypotheses A through K (Working Group I) and Hypotheses V through CC (Working Group III), while in the tables for Hypotheses L through U (Working Group II), the fourth choice was presented as "Probably Likely" with no comma separating the words. This error created confusion among some participants who felt that the absence of the comma reduced the precision of the choice.

In the course of developing this methodology, the study team was confronted with an intellectual dilemma concerning the interpretation of “confidence” as it related to validity. On one hand, a respondent could simultaneously choose all five levels of likelihood – “Remote” through “Almost Certainly” – and thus be absolutely confident that the likelihood of the hypothesis’ being valid was somewhere within that band. In contrast, choosing a single level of likelihood necessarily decreased one’s confidence that the answer was objectively correct. Ultimately, the team concluded that the plain purpose of the tool was to gauge participants’ confidence in their judgment and that attempting to codify a more liberal allowance for inputting confidence would subtract from the clarity of the exercise. For this reason, the decision was made to allow only one level of input on each axis.

Finally, a critical piece of information needed to understand the judgments reflected in the tables is that the participants were asked to judge each hypothesis *individually* rather than relative to other hypotheses. Thus, Hypothesis X was evaluated not by its convincingness relative to Hypothesis Y but by whether the theory had any strength as a stand-alone explanation for the non-occurrence of a domestic attack since 9/11. In reality many, if not most, of the hypotheses contain variables that are impacted by those contained in other hypotheses. For example, if it is correct that al-Qaeda is refraining from further attacks on the U.S. homeland until it can achieve a CBRN capability (Hypothesis H), it cannot be true that al-Qaeda has withheld attacks out of concern about public backlash from the killing of American civilians (Hypothesis P). However, the study team concluded that attempting to evaluate the hypotheses holistically, even in small groups separated according to the four “baskets,” would have been a hopelessly difficult undertaking.

A few observations from the Working Group sessions are worthy of mention. First, there was a consensus view that none of the hypotheses could be thoroughly explored given the time constraints. The three groups discussed and ranked 11, 10 and eight hypotheses, respectively, in roughly two hours. Additionally, in contrast to some expert opinion elicitation models that allow for two or more rounds of input, the participants went through the assessment process only once for each hypothesis. As a result, there was no opportunity to record how the participants’ views on each hypothesis evolved through the course of discussion. A final comment centered on the wording of the hypotheses, some of which the participants felt could be more precisely worded, and the lack of a mechanism for amending such language according to the wishes of the group. Some participants believed that the study team should have tried to achieve consensus concerning how each hypothesis *should* have been worded before the voting occurred.

Though suggested changes to the titles of certain hypotheses were not incorporated in the assessment tables, several recommendations were later incorporated into the final study report. For example, Hypothesis W, which suggested that “Terrorists have seized on Iraq as an opportunity to bloody the United States and establish a Muslim theocracy,” was changed to read, “Opportunities to attack Americans in Iraq have diverted jihadist resources that otherwise might be used to attack the U.S. homeland.” According to several participants, the original wording incorrectly suggests that insurgents in Iraq are monolithic in their objective – establishing an Islamic state governed by Sharia law – when in fact many are Arab nationalists or have other less defined motives for fighting. In another example, the original wording of Hypothesis Y read, “Self-activated terrorist cells and regional Salafist groups such as Jemaah Islamiyah and Jaish-E-Mohammed are exercising their own prerogative in target selection.” In the analysis section, this wording was later changed to read “Self-activated terrorist cells and regional Salafist groups are exercising their own prerogative in target selection *and are not motivated to attack the U.S. homeland.*” This change reflects the fact that the original wording did not capture a key element that explains the lack of al-Qaeda affiliate attacks on the U.S. homeland: their lack of motivation.

Hypothesis A: U.S. homeland security policies and general public awareness have made large-scale domestic attacks more difficult to conduct.

What confidence do you have in your assessment given the quality of available evidence, your knowledge and experience, and other factors that inform your judgment?

High	X	X			
Medium		X	X	X	
Low		X			

Remote Unlikely Even Chance Probably, Likely Almost Certainly

What is the likelihood that the hypothesis is valid?

Hypothesis B: U.S. and allied counterterrorism efforts have prevented al-Qaeda from training recruits and forced its leaders to focus more on survival than planning attacks

What confidence do you have in your assessment given the quality of available evidence, your knowledge and experience, and other factors that inform your judgment?

High					
Medium		X X	X X	X	
Low	X	X	X		

Remote Unlikely Even Chance Probably, Likely Almost Certainly

What is the likelihood that the hypothesis is valid?

Hypothesis C: The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have succeeded in drawing jihadists away from the U.S. homeland.

What confidence do you have in your assessment given the quality of available evidence, your knowledge and experience, and other factors that inform your judgment?

High	X	X			
Medium		X X	X X	X	
Low					

Remote Unlikely Even Chance Probably, Likely Almost Certainly

What is the likelihood that the hypothesis is valid?

Hypothesis D: Reduced state support for terrorism since 9/11 has constrained terrorists' ability to conduct large-scale attacks on the U.S. homeland.

What confidence do you have in your assessment given the quality of available evidence, your knowledge and experience, and other factors that inform your judgment?

High	X X		X		
Medium	X X				
Low	X	X			

Remote Unlikely Even Chance Probably, Likely Almost Certainly

What is the likelihood that the hypothesis is valid?

Hypothesis E: Crackdowns on private financing of terrorism since 9/11 have constrained terrorists' ability to conduct large-scale attacks on the U.S. homeland.

What confidence do you have in your assessment given the quality of available evidence, your knowledge and experience, and other factors that inform your judgment?

High	X	X		X	
Medium		X	X		
Low				X	

Remote Unlikely Even Chance Probably, Likely Almost Certainly

What is the likelihood that the hypothesis is valid?

Hypothesis F: The terrorist threat has been massively exaggerated.

What confidence do you have in your assessment given the quality of available evidence, your knowledge and experience, and other factors that inform your judgment?

High	X X				
Medium	X X	X			
Low	X				

Remote Unlikely Even Chance Probably, Likely Almost Certainly

What is the likelihood that the hypothesis is valid?

Hypothesis G: Time is required to rebuild al-Qaeda's capabilities after the death or capture of most of its senior leaders and operatives.

What confidence do you have in your assessment given the quality of available evidence, your knowledge and experience, and other factors that inform your judgment?

High	X	X			
Medium	X	X	X	XX	
Low		X			

Remote Unlikely Even Chance Probably, Likely Almost Certainly

What is the likelihood that the hypothesis is valid?

Hypothesis H: Al-Qaeda is waiting to acquire a CBRN capability.

What confidence do you have in your assessment given the quality of available evidence, your knowledge and experience, and other factors that inform your judgment?

High	XXX				
Medium	X				
Low	XX				

Remote Unlikely Even Chance Probably, Likely Almost Certainly

What is the likelihood that the hypothesis is valid?

Hypothesis I: The assimilation of U.S. Muslims into mainstream American society has limited the pool of homegrown radicals who might conduct domestic attacks.

What confidence do you have in your assessment given the quality of available evidence, your knowledge and experience, and other factors that inform your judgment?

High	X				
Medium			XX	XX	
Low		X			

Remote Unlikely Even Chance Probably, Likely Almost Certainly

What is the likelihood that the hypothesis is valid?

Hypothesis J: A lull is occurring between the disruption of al-Qaeda after 9/11 and the next generation of transnational terrorists that will rise from the Iraq war.

What confidence do you have in your assessment given the quality of available evidence, your knowledge and experience, and other factors that inform your judgment?

High				X	
Medium	X	XX	X		
Low	X				

Remote Unlikely Even Chance Probably, Likely Almost Certainly

What is the likelihood that the hypothesis is valid?

Hypothesis K: Non-Salafist terrorist groups such as Hezbollah have lacked the capability to attack the U.S. homeland.

What confidence do you have in your assessment given the quality of available evidence, your knowledge and experience, and other factors that inform your judgment?

High	X				
Medium	X		X		
Low	X X	X			

Remote Unlikely Even Chance Probably, Likely Almost Certainly

What is the likelihood that the hypothesis is valid?

Hypothesis L: Al-Qaeda's next attack on the U.S. homeland must surpass 9/11.

What confidence do you have in your assessment given the quality of available evidence, your knowledge and experience, and other factors that inform your judgment?

High					
Medium		X X	X X	X X	X
Low					

Remote Unlikely Even Chance Probably, Likely Almost Certainly

What is the likelihood that the hypothesis is valid?

Hypothesis M: 9/11 was a strategic miscalculation that al-Qaeda does not wish to repeat.

What confidence do you have in your assessment given the quality of available evidence, your knowledge and experience, and other factors that inform your judgment?

High	XX			X	
Medium		X		X	X
Low				X	
	Remote	Unlikely	Even Chance	Probably Likely	Almost Certainly

What is the likelihood that the hypothesis is valid?

Hypothesis N: Al-Qaeda has refrained from attacking the U.S. homeland again out of concern for preserving its sanctuary in Pakistan.

What confidence do you have in your assessment given the quality of available evidence, your knowledge and experience, and other factors that inform your judgment?

High	XX				
Medium			X	X	
Low		X	XX		
	Remote	Unlikely	Even Chance	Probably Likely	Almost Certainly

What is the likelihood that the hypothesis is valid?

Hypothesis O: Terrorists believe that striking the U.S. homeland again could rally international support for America and weaken the Islamist movement.

What confidence do you have in your assessment given the quality of available evidence, your knowledge and experience, and other factors that inform your judgment?

High	X	X			
Medium	X	X	X X X		
Low					

Remote Unlikely Even Chance Probably Likely Almost Certainly

What is the likelihood that the hypothesis is valid?

Hypothesis P: Al-Qaeda has become more sensitive to possible Muslim backlash from the killing of civilians.

What confidence do you have in your assessment given the quality of available evidence, your knowledge and experience, and other factors that inform your judgment?

High	X X X	X			
Medium	X	X X			
Low					

Remote Unlikely Even Chance Probably Likely Almost Certainly

What is the likelihood that the hypothesis is valid?

Hypothesis Q: Al-Qaeda is undertaking a campaign to warn the U.S. of its intent to attack and give Americans the chance to convert to Islam.

What confidence do you have in your assessment given the quality of available evidence, your knowledge and experience, and other factors that inform your judgment?

High			XX	
Medium	X		X	
Low			X	X

Remote Unlikely Even Chance Probably Likely Almost Certainly

What is the likelihood that the hypothesis is valid?

Hypothesis R: Al-Qaeda needs success – and believes that failure is offensive to Allah and success is reflective of Allah’s will – resulting in conservative planning.

What confidence do you have in your assessment given the quality of available evidence, your knowledge and experience, and other factors that inform your judgment?

High	XXXX	X		
Medium		X		
Low			X	

Remote Unlikely Even Chance Probably Likely Almost Certainly

What is the likelihood that the hypothesis is valid?

Hypothesis S: Right-wing and left-wing extremist political organizations in the U.S. lack the motivation to conduct a large-scale terrorist attack.

What confidence do you have in your assessment given the quality of available evidence, your knowledge and experience, and other factors that inform your judgment?

High	XX			X	X
Medium		X		X	X
Low					
	Remote	Unlikely	Even Chance	Probably Likely	Almost Certainly

What is the likelihood that the hypothesis is valid?

Hypothesis T: "Lone Wolf" terrorists have lacked the motivation to conduct large-scale domestic attacks.

What confidence do you have in your assessment given the quality of available evidence, your knowledge and experience, and other factors that inform your judgment?

High	X	XX			
Medium			X	X	
Low			X	X	
	Remote	Unlikely	Even Chance	Probably Likely	Almost Certainly

What is the likelihood that the hypothesis is valid?

Hypothesis U: Hezbollah has the motivation and capability to attack the United States, but has been restrained by Iran and Syria.

What confidence do you have in your assessment given the quality of available evidence, your knowledge and experience, and other factors that inform your judgment?

High		X		X	X
Medium	X	X		XX	
Low					
	Remote	Unlikely	Even Chance	Probably Likely	Almost Certainly

What is the likelihood that the hypothesis is valid?

Hypothesis V: Terrorists have seized on Iraq as an opportunity to bloody the United States and establish a Muslim theocracy.

What confidence do you have in your assessment given the quality of available evidence, your knowledge and experience, and other factors that inform your judgment?

High	X			XX	X
Medium			XXXX X		
Low					
	Remote	Unlikely	Even Chance	Probably, Likely	Almost Certainly

What is the likelihood that the hypothesis is valid?

Hypothesis W: Al-Qaeda has shifted its focus from the U.S. homeland to attacking U.S. allies, especially in Europe.

What confidence do you have in your assessment given the quality of available evidence, your knowledge and experience, and other factors that inform your judgment?

High			X	X	XX
Medium			XX	XX	X
Low					

Remote Unlikely Even Chance Probably, Likely Almost Certainly

What is the likelihood that the hypothesis is valid?

Hypothesis X: Al-Qaeda has shifted its focus from the U.S. homeland to toppling "apostate" Middle Eastern regimes.

What confidence do you have in your assessment given the quality of available evidence, your knowledge and experience, and other factors that inform your judgment?

High				X	
Medium		X	XXXX	XX	
Low		X			

Remote Unlikely Even Chance Probably, Likely Almost Certainly

What is the likelihood that the hypothesis is valid?

Hypothesis Y: Self-activated terrorist cells and regional Salafist groups such as Jemaah Islamiyah and Jaish-E-Mohammed are exercising their own prerogative in target selection.

What confidence do you have in your assessment given the quality of available evidence, your knowledge and experience, and other factors that inform your judgment?

High			XXX	XX
Medium	X		XX	
Low			X	

Remote Unlikely Even Chance Probably, Likely Almost Certainly

What is the likelihood that the hypothesis is valid?

Hypothesis Z: Al-Qaeda’s priority after 9/11 has become to “bleed” the United States dry economically but believes this goal is best achieved by conducting attacks outside the U.S. homeland.

What confidence do you have in your assessment given the quality of available evidence, your knowledge and experience, and other factors that inform your judgment?

High	X	X		
Medium	X	X	XX	
Low	X	X	X	

Remote Unlikely Even Chance Probably, Likely Almost Certainly

What is the likelihood that the hypothesis is valid?

Hypothesis AA: 9/11 was meant to be a one-time attack that would catapult al-Qaeda to the front of the radical Islamist movement.

What confidence do you have in your assessment given the quality of available evidence, your knowledge and experience, and other factors that inform your judgment?

High	X	X			
Medium	X X		X X X X		
Low		X			

Remote Unlikely Even Chance Probably, Likely Almost Certainly

What is the likelihood that the hypothesis is valid?

Hypothesis BB: Al-Qaeda is focused on preventing Shia ascendancy in the Middle East.

What confidence do you have in your assessment given the quality of available evidence, your knowledge and experience, and other factors that inform your judgment?

High			X X		
Medium	X	X	X	X	
Low		X X	X		

Remote Unlikely Even Chance Probably, Likely Almost Certainly

What is the likelihood that the hypothesis is valid?

Hypothesis CC: Non-Salafist terrorist groups such as Hezbollah have lacked the motivation to attack the U.S. homeland

What confidence do you have in your assessment given the quality of available evidence, your knowledge and experience, and other factors that inform your judgment?

High			XXX	XXXX
Medium				XX
Low				

Remote Unlikely Even Chance Probably, Likely Almost Certainly

What is the likelihood that the hypothesis is valid?

As the Introduction to this report acknowledges, a number of terrorist plots against the United States have been disrupted or have failed for a variety of reasons in the more than six years since 9/11. The following list contains a number of known terrorist attacks and plots against the U.S. homeland or American interests abroad. (Attacks against U.S. personnel in Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East are excluded from this compendium). While in some cases these plots have been small in ambition and slipshod in execution, other plans have been assessed as more advanced and potentially highly destructive. This list, while not comprehensive, serves as an important base of reference for evaluating the validity of several of the hypotheses discussed in this report.

2001

- On December 22, al-Qaeda operative Richard Reid attempted to detonate plastic explosives hidden in his shoe while traveling on a transatlantic flight from the United Kingdom to the United States. Reid was allegedly dispatched by 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed.⁵⁷¹

2002

- In February 2006, President Bush offered previously undisclosed details concerning the disruption of a joint Al-Qaeda-Jemaah Islamiyah plot to crash a plane into the Bank Tower in Los Angeles in early 2002. The plan allegedly involved the use of explosives hidden in terrorists' shoes to breach the hardened cockpit door and take control of the aircraft.⁵⁷² (A number of highly regarded terrorism experts later dismissed the plot as never having evolved beyond the conceptual phase).⁵⁷³
- In May 2002, U.S. authorities arrested American-born former gang member Jose Padilla for his role in an alleged al-Qaeda plot to detonate a Radiological Dispersal Device, or "dirty bomb," in the United States.
- In March 2003, Columbus, Ohio, truck driver Iyman Faris, a U.S. citizen, was arrested for his involvement in a plot to cut the suspension cables of the Brooklyn Bridge using acetylene torches. He later pleaded guilty to conspiracy and providing material support to al-Qaeda. Faris was reportedly acting on orders from Khalid Shaikh Mohammed.
- On September 11, 2002, six Yemeni-Americans known alternatively as the Buffalo Six or the Lackawanna Six were indicted on charges of providing support to al-Qaeda. All six later pleaded guilty to terrorism charges.

2003

- In February 2006, as part of a list of 10 foiled terrorist plots since 9/11, President Bush disclosed details concerning an operation in mid-2003 to use hijacked commercial aircraft to destroy several East Coast buildings.⁵⁷⁴
- On March 5, 2003, Pakistani security personnel arrested U.S. resident Majid Khan in Karachi, Pakistan. He was accused of taking part in a plot to explode underground gasoline storage tanks in the United States and has since been held at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, as a "high value" detainee.⁵⁷⁵

⁵⁷¹ Elliott, Michael. "The Shoe Bomber's World." *Time*, February 16, 2002.

⁵⁷² Bumiller, Elisabeth and David Johnston. "Bush Gives New Details of 2002 Qaeda Plot to Attack Los Angeles." *The New York Times*, February 10, 2006.

⁵⁷³ Coultan, Mark, Tom Allard and Mark Forbes. "Bush seizes on al-Qaeda plot to hit Los Angeles." *The Sydney Morning Herald*, February 11, 2006.

⁵⁷⁴ "White House lists 10 foiled attacks." CNN.com, February 15, 2006.

⁵⁷⁵ Rich, Eric and Dan Eggen "From Baltimore Suburbs to a Secret CIA Prison." *The Washington Post*, September 10, 2006.

- According to media accounts, in 2003 al-Qaeda operatives were within weeks of conducting an elaborate attack on the New York City subway system using a hydrogen cyanide dispersal device. The plot is believed to have been aborted on orders from al-Qaeda second-in-command Ayman al-Zawahiri.⁵⁷⁶

2004

- Eight alleged al-Qaeda operatives were charged with plotting to attack U.S. financial targets, including the New York Stock Exchange, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.
- In August 2004, NYPD counterterrorism personnel arrested two men for conspiring to blow up the Herald Square subway station in New York City.⁵⁷⁷

2005

- In February 2005, federal officials charged U.S. citizen Ahmed Omar Abu Ali with conspiring to assassinate President Bush and other terrorism-related offenses.⁵⁷⁸ Ali was found guilty in November 2005 of providing material support to al-Qaeda and in March 2006 was sentenced to 30 years in prison.⁵⁷⁹

2006

- In August 2006, British authorities arrested 24 British Muslims alleged to have been in the final stages of conducting an attack to bring down as many as 12 commercial aircraft en route between the United Kingdom and the United States.⁵⁸⁰
- In June 2006, the FBI arrested seven Floridians known as the “Liberty City Seven,” who were accused of plotting to destroy Chicago’s Sears Tower.

2007

- In May 2007, the FBI arrested six foreign-born militants plotting to attack the Fort Dix Army base in New Jersey.⁵⁸¹
- In June 2007, four men – U.S. citizen Russell Defreitas and Caribbean natives Abdul Kadir, Kareem Ibrahim, and Abdel Nur – were indicted for their role in an alleged terrorist plot to destroy an underground system of aircraft fuel tanks at John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York.⁵⁸²

⁵⁷⁶ Suskind, Ron. *The One Percent Doctrine*. pp. 218-220.

⁵⁷⁷ Rashbaum, William K. “Staten Island Man Describes Shattered Life, Then a Plot to Bomb a Subway Station.” *The New York Times*, May 10, 2006.

⁵⁷⁸ Markon, Jerry and Dana Priest. “Terrorist Plot to Kill Bush Alleged.” *The Washington Post*, February 23, 2005.

⁵⁷⁹ FBI press release: “Ahmed Omar Abu Ali Sentenced to Prison on Terrorism Charges.” March 29, 2006.

⁵⁸⁰ Laville, Sandra, et. al. “A plot to commit murder on an unimaginable scale.” *The Guardian*, August 11, 2006.

⁵⁸¹ Russakoff, Dale and Dan Eggen. “Six Charged in Plot To Attack Fort Dix.” *The Washington Post*, May 9, 2007.

⁵⁸² Fernandez, Manny. “One Had Stature and One Didn’t, but Neither Seemed an Extremist.” *The New York Times*, June 4, 2007.

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