

Terrorism Open Source Intelligence Report (TOSIR) No. 384 21 May 2009

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[Article 1](#) **“Al-Qaeda Today: A Movement at the Crossroads,”** by **Fawaz A. Gerges**, **OpenDemocracy**, **14 May 2009**. *If you wonder what has happened to Al-Qaeda, follow the trail of Arab and Muslim public opinion, and you’ll get a clear picture of its massive crisis of authority and legitimacy. Militants of all stripes, particularly repentant jihadis, know they are at a crossroads. At home and abroad they are blamed for unleashing the wrath of the United States against the umma (the global Muslim community). Most of their allies have deserted them; clerics and Muslim opinion scorn them. Only a miracle will resuscitate global jihad. The question is whether America’s “long war” will lead to circumstances—such as a destabilized Pakistan or an escalation of Arab-Israeli hostilities—that become such a miracle.*

[Article 2](#) **“Assessing Progress against the Global Jihadist Threat,”** by **Michael Jacobson**, **Washington Institute for Near East Policy**, **Policy Watch No. 1514**, **11 May 2009**. *In April 2009, the U.S. State Department and the European Union released their annual terrorism reports, which paint a varied picture of international counterterrorism efforts to date, with clear progress in some areas and deterioration in others. The reports also illustrate how the rapidly evolving terrorist threat presents an ongoing and significant challenge to the United States and its allies, as terrorists continually adapt to international pressure. One positive aspect of the reports is that Americans and Europeans appear to have similar views on the threat posed by international Islamist terrorism, which may offer opportunities for improving transatlantic ties.*

[Article 3](#) **“Could Taliban Get Keys to Pakistan’s A-Bomb?”** By **Ben Arnoldy**, **Christian Science Monitor**, **15 May 2009**. *International concerns are mounting again about the security of Pakistan’s nuclear weapons as fighting rages with the Taliban. Media reports that the Taliban fighters had moved within 100 kilometers (62 miles) of the capital prompted the latest concern. But thanks to safeguards, experts worry much less about the Islamic fighters in the hills making off with a warhead. It’s the radicals among the educated—potential insiders—who are in a more realistic position to abscond with nuclear material and know how to use it. Pakistan’s credibility on nuclear security took a nose dive following revelations in 2004 that scientist A. Q. Khan sold materials and know-how to states like North Korea. However, it’s unclear whether to view Mr. Khan’s activities as a true security breach, or merely the conducting of state business.*

[Article 4](#) **“In Search of Success,”** by **Steve Coll**, **New Yorker**, **25 May 2009**. *Exactly three decades ago, in the spring of 1979, an uprising against Afghanistan’s then Soviet-backed regime drew the Carter administration into discussions about how to assist the region’s Islamist rebels. Ever since, the United States has been struggling to grasp the patterns of cause and effect in its own policymaking. The miscalculations across five administrations are by now generally understood. For several months, the Obama administration has been rethinking American policy, hoping to depart from this history of dysfunction. It has announced a formal strategy that includes an adaptive counterinsurgency doctrine, economic and development aid, vigorous diplomacy, and carefully targeted warfare. But already Obama and his advisers have had to confront the puzzle of which policies in their new portfolio will promote stability in the region, and which will promote instability.*

[Article 5](#) “**National Counterproliferation Center Launches [www.CounterWMD.gov](http://www.counterwmd.gov) Website,**” **National Counterproliferation Center, May 2009.** *The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction is among the top national security challenges facing America today. The National Counterproliferation Center—the Office of the Director of National Intelligence’s mission manager for countering that spread—has unveiled its Website aimed at providing a better understanding of the threat, as well as an explanation of how the Center is leading and integrating the Intelligence Community’s work against it. The National Counterproliferation Center’s Website is located at <http://www.counterwmd.gov>.*

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1. “**Al-Qaeda Today: A Movement at the Crossroads,**” by **Fawaz A. Gerges, [OpenDemocracy](#), 14 May 2009** (<http://www.opendemocracy.net/article/al-qaida-today-the-fate-of-a-movement>). [KBTQOverview, KBTQNetwork, KBTWSummary] Fawaz A. Gerges holds the Christian A. Johnson chair in Arab and Muslim politics at Sarah Lawrence University, New York. Among his books are *America and Political Islam: Clash of Cultures or Clash of Interests?* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), *Journey of the Jihadist: Inside Muslim Militancy* (Harcourt Press, 2006), and *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global* (Cambridge University Press, 2005). We quote:

If you wonder what has happened to Al-Qaeda, follow the trail of Arab and Muslim public opinion, and you’ll get a clear picture of its massive crisis of authority and legitimacy.

The balance of forces in the world of Islam has shifted dramatically against Al-Qaeda’s global jihad and its local manifestations.

Now, **more and more Muslims view Al-Qaeda through a prism that focuses on the monstrosity of killing of non-combatants in general, not just Muslim civilians.** Recent opinion surveys and my own field research confirm that an overwhelming majority of Muslims are more than just **unsympathetic to the ideology of Osama bin Laden and his followers; they place the blame squarely at his feet for the harm he has caused to the image of Islam and the damage his movement has wrought within Muslim societies.**

Despite their constant incitement and pleading, **bin Laden and his second-in-command, Ayman al-Zawahiri, face a serious shortage of skilled recruits in the Arab heartland.** This is another byproduct of their deepening crisis of authority and legitimacy.

The new trend speaks volumes about the moral discrediting of Al-Qaeda in the eyes of Muslims and the failure of the global jihad in general.

A global trend

The evidence of recent public surveys and opinion polls is revealing of these trends. Here are six examples:

- **Gallup conducted tens of thousands of hour-long, face-to-face interviews with residents of more than 35 predominantly Muslim countries between 2001 and 2007.** It found that—contrary to the prevailing perception in the West that the actions of Al-Qaeda enjoy wide support in the Muslim world—**more than 90 percent of respondents condemned the killing of non-combatants on religious and humanitarian grounds.**
- **The not-for-profit group Terror Free Tomorrow** carried out a public opinion survey seeking to establish why people support or oppose extremism; **it found that fewer than ten percent of Saudis had a favorable opinion of Al-Qaeda, and 88 percent approved of the Saudi authorities pursuing Al-Qaeda operatives.**
- In Pakistan, despite the recent rise in the Taliban’s influence, surveys of public opinion do not bode well for Al-Qaeda and its allies. **A poll conducted by Terror Free Tomorrow in Pakistan in January 2008** tested support for Al-Qaeda, the Taliban, other militant Islamist groups, and Osama bin Laden himself, and found a recent drop by half. **In August 2007, 33 percent of Pakistanis expressed support for Al-Qaeda; 38 percent supported the Taliban. By January 2008, Al-Qaeda’s support had dropped to 18 percent, the Taliban’s to 19 percent. When asked if they would vote for Al-Qaeda, just one percent of Pakistanis polled answered in the affirmative. The Taliban had the support of three percent of those polled.**
- **Pew surveys in 2008 show that in a range of countries—Jordan, Pakistan, Indonesia, Lebanon, and Bangladesh—there have been substantial declines in the percentages saying suicide bombings and other forms of violence against civilian targets can be justified** to defend Islam against its enemies. Wide majorities say such attacks are, at most, rarely acceptable.

The shift has been especially dramatic in Jordan, where 29 percent of Jordanians are recorded as viewing suicide attacks as often or sometimes justified (down from 57 percent in May 2005). In the largest majority-Muslim nation, **Indonesia, 74 percent of respondents agree that terrorist attacks are “never justified”** (a substantial decline from the 41 percent level to which support had risen in March 2004); **in Pakistan, that figure is 86 percent; in Bangladesh, 81 percent; and in Iran, 80 percent.** (These figures may be compared with a recent study that shows **only 46 percent of Americans think that “bombing and other attacks intentionally aimed at civilians” are “never justified,”** while 24 percent believe these attacks are “often or sometimes justified”).

- **A poll conducted in Osama bin Laden’s home country of Saudi Arabia in December 2008 shows that his compatriots have dramatically turned against him, his organization, Saudi volunteers in Iraq, and terrorism in general.** Indeed, confidence in bin Laden has fallen in most Muslim countries in recent years.

- **In Iraq, people of all persuasions unanimously reject the terror tactics of “Al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia.”** An ABC News/BBC/NHK poll revealed that all of those surveyed—Sunni and Shia alike—found Al-Qaeda attacks on Iraqi civilians “unacceptable”; **98 percent rejected the militants’ attempts to gain control over areas in which they operated; and 97 percent opposed their attempts to recruit foreign fighters** and bring them to Iraq.

A static voice

Both the loss of public support for Al-Qaeda’s wholesale attacks on civilians and the theological critiques of Osama bin Laden’s organization by prominent clerics and former radical cohorts appear to have inflicted major damage on Al-Qaeda’s capacity to operate. **The result has been to exacerbate bin Laden’s crisis of legitimacy and authority, and handicapped his efforts to sustain the war** against the United States and its Western and Middle Eastern allies.

I have met former jihadis and Islamists in many countries (in Egypt, Palestine, Lebanon, Yemen, the Persian Gulf, Britain, France, Germany, and Spain) **who tell me that Al-Qaeda’s gruesome attacks on civilians, particularly in Muslim countries—**and the mayhem these wrought—**have relegated Al-Qaeda to the margins of Islamic society**, with few allies and insecure sanctuaries. **The social and political space that once provided refuge for Al-Qaeda and its affiliates has shrunk almost to nothing;** Sunni Muslims are in the forefront of hunting down such groups in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Yemen, Lebanon, Palestine, and elsewhere.

Al-Qaeda does appear to have strengthened its foothold along Pakistan’s tribal border with Afghanistan thanks to its connection with the Taliban in both countries; but it faces insurmountable challenges elsewhere. Al-Qaeda’s appeal has faded in **Indonesia** with the demise of the loose affiliate of Al-Qaeda known as Jemaah Islamiyah. **The situation in its historic arena of support—the Arab hinterland—is equally grave;** since 2006, Arab opinion has increasingly seen Al-Qaeda as a movement that promises heaven but delivers death and dust, and in consequence turned against it.

Indeed, **since May 2003 the majority of bin Laden’s men** (numbering hundreds) **in Saudi Arabia—**as the leader’s birthplace and the religious center of Islam a pivotal country—**have been killed or arrested; this decimated the Al-Qaeda network** and seriously damaged Al-Qaeda’s chances of using Saudi Arabia as a power base.

The loss of Muslim public support has direct consequences on Al-Qaeda’s reach and operational capabilities. It **means fewer recruits, fewer shelters, and fewer opportunities to strike at enemies.** Indeed, the mainstream of Muslim opinion emerges as the most powerful weapon in the fight against Al-Qaeda (as well as other terror groups).

During Israel’s assault on Gaza in December 2008-January 2009, bin Laden sought to harness anger in the region by urging Muslims to rise up. He vowed that his organization would open “new fronts” against the United States and its partners beyond Iraq and Afghanistan. In fact, **many Palestinians and Arabs dismissed his call as more harmful to the Palestinian cause** and beneficial to their adversaries. **The evidence suggests that bin Laden and al-Zawahiri have been reduced to a static voice and**

image on television screens and radios. That is not a very effective means of waging a global jihad against the United States and its partners.

There is a larger pattern here. **The historical experience is that terror groups which alienate their core support base eventually wither—even if elements of the terrorists themselves remained undefeated. The post-Second World War history of ultra-leftist terrorism in Europe is a classic case in point.** The neo-Marxist political agendas of these small middle class groups—the Rote Armee Fraktion in Germany, the Brigade Rosse in Italy, Action Directe in France, and others—had hardly any appeal for the citizens that the radicals hoped to mobilize.

Similarly, **the failure of the Islamist armed insurgency against the Egyptian and Algerian regimes in the 1980s and 1990s was owed less to state repression than to the fact that public opinion got fed up with the violence and instability caused by the militants. Ayman al-Zawahiri’s memoirs published immediately after 11 September 2001—Knights Under the Prophet’s Banner—acknowledged that fact and advised his cohorts to labor hard to win Muslim hearts and minds.** He and his emir, Osama bin Laden, seem to have **ignored this very lesson.**

A darker view

The argument in the first part of this article is that Al-Qaeda has been morally discredited in the world of Islam and faces a massive crisis of authority and legitimacy. This has left the Osama bin Laden group internally and externally besieged. **In this second part I consider the argument of many analysts of terrorism who dispute this analysis, questioning or belittling the claim of a debilitating legitimacy crisis and of the substantial erosion of Muslim support for the group. These terrorism experts claim that Al-Qaeda is ascending, as dangerous as ever, and who see the global jihad as a success story.**

At the heart of the case is the proposition that bin Laden has over two decades struck at the heart of the greatest power in world history and forced it to get bogged down in two prolonged and costly wars, and in the process established a successful global franchise attracting recruits worldwide. Despite everything that the United States has thrown at Al-Qaeda, it has not subdued the organization or put an end to terrorist attacks.

This darker view of the threat rests more broadly on a **two-pronged argument. First, bin Laden’s followers may have suffered a setback in Iraq and other Arab countries, but they have gained new ground along Pakistan’s northwestern tribal border with Afghanistan. The outcome is an Al-Qaeda surge in the region, where bin Laden and al-Zawahiri are busy rebuilding their network and welcoming new recruits and plotting new attacks against Western targets; the two fugitives have not only escaped capture but are alive and well and in charge of an expanding pool of potential suicide bombers in Afghanistan and Pakistan.**

Second, Al-Qaeda continues to direct and manage its satellites worldwide; bin Laden and al-Zawahiri need little more than a cell phone (or a messenger) to instruct their followers and select targets.

What to make of this argument? **There is no doubt that Al-Qaeda has indeed gained limited traction in the vicinity of Pakistan’s tribal region next to Afghanistan by**

virtue of its close collaboration in both countries with the Taliban, who have come to deploy Al-Qaeda-style suicide attacks with deadly effect. **But the conflict in Afghanistan and Pakistan is much broader and more complex than the image of Al-Qaeda pitting a formidable coalition of mainly Pashtun tribesmen against what they see (rightly or wrongly) as a foreign threat to their identity and way of life.**

This view couples an overestimation of the influence of Al-Qaeda with a simplification of the background of this regional war. It is clear, for example, that Al-Qaeda is a very small element in this coalition waging the campaign against states and Western forces in the region—more of a side-effect, a parasite nourished on lawlessness and instability, than a formative agent.

For Al-Qaeda and other foreign extremists to be removed from the Pashtun tribal lands will require a region-wide political settlement that addresses the real grievances of the tribal communities as well as the geostrategic concerns of Pakistan, Iran, and India. There is also agreement among Pakistan and Afghan observers that **a reform of the political and legal system which can integrate the tribal region into the social mainstream and lift the inhabitants out of extreme poverty is crucial to achieve lasting peace.**

A negotiated settlement with the Pashtun tribes, which brings the Taliban into the government—painful and difficult though it would be to achieve—would likely result in the expulsion of Al-Qaeda and other foreign militants from the area. The case of Iraq is instructive. **Although Afghanistan and Iraq are different,** the challenge is to recognize distinctions and differences between the Pashtun tribes and the Taliban on one hand, and the global jihadis like Al-Qaeda, on the other, and **give the Pashtun tribes a real stake in the political and economic order in ways that would lead them to turn against Al-Qaeda.**

The Pashtun harbor no love for Al-Qaeda, whose leaders after all “bit the hand” (the Taliban) that hosted and sheltered them in the 1990s. **By plotting the 9/11 attacks on the United States from Afghanistan, bin Laden violated the terms of his stay and the assurances he gave to Mullah Omar and his Taliban followers.** This brought ruin to the Taliban

The current marriage of convenience between Pashtun tribesmen and Al-Qaeda operatives will hold until the tribes that host bin Laden and his men view them as a liability, as they did immediately after 9/11 when they sold foreign fighters to the United States. **The key is for the United States not to lump the Pashtun tribes with Al-Qaeda but instead try to separate them, as it belatedly did in the Anbar region in Iraq.**

It is positive in this respect that the Barack Obama administration is revising its strategy on Afghanistan and exploring a more regional approach (including possible talks with Iran); and that it may be looking favorably on the nascent dialogue between the Kabul government and “reconcilable” elements of the Taliban.

A place of safety

Al-Qaeda does retain some appeal in Europe, mainly among a few young members of Muslim populations who are particularly alienated, ghettoized, and vulnerable to

indoctrination. There are, however, **indicators that support for Al-Qaeda's ideology among European Muslims is declining.** The evidence includes testimony from those in the security frontline; Peter Clarke (a former head of the London police's anti-terrorism branch) and Armando Spataro (Milan's deputy chief prosecutor and anti-terrorist coordinator) told a conference organized by the New York University Law School in Florence that there were **signs of a shift among Muslim immigrants away from ideas that supported or justified terrorism.**

The weight of evidence also suggests that bin Laden and al-Zawahiri do not exercise effective operational control over their far-flung followers. Rather, **Al-Qaeda's control of its loose network of affiliates seems limited to the organization's chief of external operations,** who often either trains or sanctions freelancers' attacks without consulting the two leaders. The visibility of this position makes its occupant very vulnerable, and several have been swiftly captured or killed.

Indeed, **the notion of Al-Qaeda being under tightly-knit centralized control presupposes physical links which no longer exist.** Although bin Laden and al-Zawahiri are still at large, they are forced to hibernate deeper in the underground and know well the deadly costs of establishing any physical link outside the circle of their inner trusted lieutenants. If an Al-Qaeda operative uses a cell phone, that amounts to an invitation to killing via a CIA drone. Human carriers, safer than other forms of communication, are the preferred method. But **it is extremely hard and risky for bin Laden and al-Zawahiri to micromanage a global war** via such agents while they themselves are constantly being pursued.

Overall, **there is plenty of evidence to suggest that defections, internal cleavages, and the decline of Muslim public support have sapped Al-Qaeda's strength—to the extent that the original menace of Al-Qaeda is winding down.** Since 9/11, **Al-Qaeda has not delivered on its repeated threats to strike inside the United States.** Most of its seasoned field lieutenants have been either captured or killed—replaced by unskilled and ineffective operators, and new skilled recruits are hard to come by.

The movement no longer has a large base of support or a safe haven. Right now, the bin Laden group consists mainly of roving suicide bands in the valleys and mountains along Pakistan's frontier with Afghanistan.

Militants of all stripes whom I have interviewed, particularly repentant jihadis, know they are at a crossroads. At home and abroad they are blamed for unleashing the wrath of the United States against the umma (the global Muslim community). Most of their allies have deserted them; clerics and Muslim opinion scorn them. **Only a miracle will resuscitate global jihad.** The question is whether America's "long war" will lead to circumstances—such as a destabilized Pakistan or an escalation of Arab-Israeli hostilities—that become such a miracle.

Osama bin Laden succeeded on 11 September 2001, and he may even succeed again. The weakening of Al-Qaeda does not mean that it is no longer dangerous. **Terrorism perpetrated by certain factions will continue over the next decade.** But this reality, **frightening as it is, should not distract from the self-limiting nature of the Al-Qaeda challenge.** In the final analysis, **Al-Qaeda is more of a security nuisance than a strategic threat.**

Al-Qaeda has shown itself to be its own worst enemy and is in a process of self-decomposition. Perhaps its adversaries should follow Napoleon's maxim: "Never interrupt your enemy when he is making a mistake."

The foregoing is Article No. 1 (TR384A01) in the **Terrorism Open Source Intelligence Report (TOSIR)**, No. 384, 21 May 2009, prepared by Interaction Systems Incorporated (isinreports@mindspring.com).

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2. "Assessing Progress against the Global Jihadist Threat," by Michael Jacobson, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Watch No. 1514, 11 May 2009. [KBTQNetwork, KBTWSummary, KBTZRecruiting, KBTREurope] Michael Jacobson, a senior fellow in the Washington Institute's Stein Program on Counterterrorism and Intelligence, previously served as a senior advisor in the Treasury Department's Office of Terrorism and Financial Intelligence. From <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=3051> we quote:

In April 2009, the U.S. State Department and the European Union (EU) released their annual terrorism reports, which paint a varied picture of international counterterrorism efforts to date, with clear progress in some areas and deterioration in others. **The reports also illustrate how the rapidly evolving terrorist threat presents an ongoing and significant challenge to the United States and its allies,** as terrorists continually adapt to international pressure.

One positive aspect of the reports is that Americans and Europeans appear to have similar views on the threat posed by international Islamist terrorism, which may offer opportunities for the Obama administration as it attempts to improve transatlantic ties.

The threat

According to both the State Department and Europol, the EU's law enforcement organization, **the major terrorist threat to the West now emanates from the tribal areas in Pakistan and Afghanistan,** where Al-Qaeda's leadership is safely ensconced.

The numbers released by the National Counterterrorism Center for the State Department's report demonstrate markedly the growth of the terrorist threat within Pakistan. **In 2008, at least 1,839 terrorist incidents in Pakistan killed 2,293 people, a dramatic rise from 2007,** when 890 incidents claimed 1,340 lives. **What may be even more disturbing is the expansion of attacks beyond the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) into other parts of Pakistan. While attacks rose in FATA from 61 to 321, incidents in the North West Frontier Province rose from 28 to 870.**

Although the situation in Pakistan is extremely dire, the U.S. government has portrayed Al-Qaeda's core as an organization in decline. Osama bin Laden's terrorist group continues to **"lose ground, both structurally and in the court of world public opinion,"** according to the State Department. This echoed the comments of Admiral Dennis Blair, the Director of National Intelligence, during congressional testimony in February. Admiral Blair noted that in 2008, "Al-Qaeda lost significant parts of its

command structure . . . in a succession of blows as damaging to the group as any since the fall of the Taliban in late-2001.”

Some of Al-Qaeda’s affiliates are also hurting, according to the State Department and EU reports. Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) has been particularly damaged by international efforts and poses far less of a threat today. The capabilities of Jemaah Islamiyah, an Indonesian-based organization, have also been markedly reduced through Indonesia’s successful counterterrorism campaign.

Both reports make clear, however, that not all Al-Qaeda affiliates have been weakened.

In Somalia, for example, Al-Shabab, an Al-Qaeda-linked organization, has “overrun” parts of the country, creating a safe haven for a number of Al-Qaeda operatives.

Al-Qaeda in Yemen remains a threat and has been able to launch several attacks in the past year, as the government lacks both the political will and capability to crack down effectively on the organization.

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb has also become more dangerous since its 2006 merger with Al-Qaeda “central.” For example, according to the EU report, the organization conducted more suicide attacks in Algeria in 2008 than it did in the previous year.

The evolution

Assessing overall progress in combating the international terrorist threat is difficult because it continues to change, often in response to U.S. and international efforts. As Washington and its allies make progress in one area, they lose ground in another. For example, as the situation in Iraq improves, and AQI weakens, many prospective jihadists are choosing to go elsewhere.

The EU report observes that Afghanistan and Pakistan have now replaced Iraq as the preferred destination for prospective jihadists, including Europeans. Saudi Arabia is another example. While the Saudis have taken aggressive steps over the past several years to defeat Al-Qaeda networks in the kingdom, the Saudis are now facing a serious threat from cells operating out of Yemen.

Even terrorist recruitment has changed, primarily because terrorist groups seek to avoid detection by law enforcement and intelligence agencies.

According to the EU report, **terrorist and extremist groups are, generally speaking, no longer using mosques as a venue to radicalize and recruit new members.** Since recruiting efforts have been driven underground, radical imams—many of whom are known to governments—are no longer playing as big a role.

Instead, **other “activists” have stepped up their efforts to get the message out and bring in new recruits.** For example, Muhammad Sadiq Khan was the

ringleader who recruited and trained the cell responsible for the July 2005 London transport bombings.

Terrorist groups are also increasingly taking advantage of the Internet to further these efforts, since face-to-face recruiting has a higher risk of compromise.

The reports also point to a worrying trend: global jihadist groups have been able to expand their pool of prospective suicide bombers. The growing use of women in suicide bombing has been well documented, but another development that may be even more troubling, from a national security perspective, is **the increase in suicide bombers from the West.**

In 2008, the first German-born suicide bomber conducted an attack in Afghanistan. Closer to home, **in October 2008, an American citizen of Somali origin, apparently radicalized and recruited in the Minneapolis area, participated in what the FBI believes is the first instance of an American suicide bomber anywhere.** In Minneapolis, the FBI reports, **“there has been an active and deliberate attempt to recruit individuals—all of whom are young men, some only in their late teens—to travel to Somalia to fight or train on behalf of Al-Shabab.”**

The threat posed by global jihadist groups is likely to continue evolving rapidly in the years ahead. In the United Kingdom’s new counterterrorism strategy report, released in March 2009, **the British project that the threat will look very different in three years than it does now.** In the UK’s view, **Al-Qaeda is likely to fragment** and may not survive in its current form. Instead, **smaller, “self-starter groups” will likely grow stronger and more prominent.** Admiral Blair offered a slightly different perspective on how the situation could evolve, speculating that **Al-Qaeda could relocate to the Persian Gulf, Africa, or elsewhere in South Asia should their Pakistan-Afghanistan safe haven be eliminated.**

Reading the same page

During his April trip to Europe, **President Obama spoke of the need to improve transatlantic ties and forge “common solutions to our common problems.”** An examination of the State Department and Europol reports suggests that there may be **opportunities for the Obama administration to strengthen ties with Europe in the counterterrorism arena, given how similarly the United States and Europe appear to view the threat** posed by global jihadist groups.

The EU report, for example, refers to Afghanistan and Pakistan as “the central front” in the fight against Al-Qaeda, a sentiment often expressed by President Obama. Yemen, Somalia, and Algeria are highlighted in both reports as emerging areas of concern, while both the United States and Europe view AQI as a terrorist group in sharp decline. Perhaps most importantly, **both the Americans and Europeans are very concerned about the situation within Europe itself, even though there was only one Islamist terrorist attack in Europe in 2008, a failed bombing in Exeter, England.** **The EU’s report makes clear that the threat within Europe has not diminished,** pointing to a number of other indicators, such as arrests, to make the case that **the threat level remains high.**

The United States may find particularly fertile ground for cooperation with the Europeans in the counterradicalization arena. A number of European countries, including the UK and the Netherlands, are developing counterradicalization strategies and programs, the success and effectiveness of which could have direct implications for U.S. national security. **A better understanding of the radicalization process—particularly in terms of preventing and even reversing it—will be key for both the United States and its European allies.** With the recent American suicide bomber in Somalia, the Europeans’ experience in this area may even offer critical lessons for the United States.

The foregoing is Article No. 2 (TR384A02) in the [Terrorism Open Source Intelligence Report](#) (TOSIR), No. 384, 21 May 2009, prepared by Interaction Systems Incorporated (isincreports@mindspring.com).

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3. “Could Taliban Get Keys to Pakistan’s A-Bomb?” By Ben Arnoldy, [Christian Science Monitor](#), 15 May 2009 (<http://www.csmonitor.com/2009/0515/p06s11-wosc.html>). [KBTSPakWT, KBTTNuclear] *We quote:*

Islamabad, Pakistan—**Some of Professor Pervez Hoodbhoy’s nuclear physics students will go on to oversee Pakistan’s atomic bombs. That gives him pause. “The student body has become very conservative, very Islamist, their outward appearance has changed,”** says Professor Hoodbhoy, the chair of the physics department at Quaid-i-Azam University in Islamabad. “It’s row after row of these burqa women.” Students avoid talking politics with **Hoodbhoy, a cautionary voice on nuclear weapons in a nation that takes boisterous pride in having them.** “They think I’m on the wrong side,” he says.

International concerns are mounting again about the security of Pakistan’s nuclear weapons as fighting rages with the Taliban. But thanks to safeguards, experts worry much less about the Islamic fighters in the hills making off with a warhead. **It’s the radicals among the educated—potential insiders—who are in a more realistic position to abscond with nuclear material and know how to use it.**

“Nuclear weapons are just about as safe as the people who are their custodians,” says Hoodbhoy. **The threat comes not from the “mountain barbarians,”** he says, **but from “Al-Qaeda, together with their Islamist allies within the Pakistani state and society. These are urban people, engineers, technicians, people in fairly high offices.”**

Clinton worries about Taliban getting A-bomb

According to research compiled by the Federation of Atomic Scientists, **Pakistan has several suspected nuclear facilities near regions with Taliban infiltration.** Media reports that the Taliban fighters had moved within 100 kilometers (62 miles) of the capital prompted the latest concern. **“One of our concerns is that if the worst, the unthinkable were to happen, and this advancing Taliban were to essentially topple the government . . . then they would have the keys to the nuclear arsenal of Pakistan,”** said U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton late last month.

But the notion of the Taliban as a conventional force able to overrun such sites overlooks the massive size of the Pakistani military, centered on the twin cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi, near where much of the nuclear infrastructure also lies.

After a week of requests, Pakistani military officials failed to offer comment on their program's safeguards. But Pakistan has assured the West that certain procedures are in place. These include keeping warheads in a disassembled state, requiring multiple people to sign off on any activation orders, and so-called permissive action links that electronically lock the warheads unless codes are provided and environmental conditions—such as atmospheric pressure for plane-dropped bombs—are met.

\$100 million U.S. investment in nuke security

The United States also spent \$100 million to help Pakistan beef up nuclear security. Several experts said it's unknown exactly how that money was spent, but presumably it went toward these safeguards, enhancing perimeter fencing, and advanced training of personnel. "It was money well spent," says Rolf Mowatt-Larssen, who was the head of nuclear intelligence at the U.S. Department of Energy until January. **"There's not a lot of transparency into it though, and going into it I think the U.S. felt like that was acceptable."**

Presuming Pakistan has indeed implemented the safeguards it says it has, experts say the chance of outsiders snatching a usable warhead is extremely small. "It would be very hard for pure outsiders to take over a facility," says Mr. Mowatt-Larssen. "My big concern is the insider threat combined with outsiders." Specifically, **insiders could pass nuclear material to the outside as it passes through multiple production facilities.** Most of Pakistan's **estimated 60 to 100 warheads** are made from highly enriched uranium. That involves moving uranium from a mine to several processing plants before producing a grapefruit-sized core of a nuclear bomb.

Three years to build a bomb from scratch

Hoodbhoy estimates it would take one of his physics graduate students about three years to figure out how to take that material and build a crude bomb from scratch on the magnitude of Hiroshima.

Further, **if material gets pilfered, there's no guarantee anyone will notice.** The theft of a warhead remains hypothetical, but **there have been cases of stolen nuclear material showing up on the black market. In all of those cases, the facility where it came from never noticed it went missing,** says Mowatt-Larssen. For this reason, he talked to then Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf about sending someone to the country's nuclear facilities to do an in-person audit of materials—a suggestion Mowatt-Larssen says was taken seriously.

Pakistan's credibility on nuclear security took a nose dive following revelations in 2004 that scientist A. Q. Khan sold materials and know-how to states like North Korea. However, it's unclear whether to view Mr. Khan's activities as a true security breach, or merely the conducting of state business.

The country now has a quarter-century track record, point out some experts, and it's one that suggests the most serious risk isn't unique to Pakistan. **"The only scenario that**

gives me concern is one that applies as much to the United States as Pakistan, which is the question of accidents occurring,” says Shuja Nawaz, an analyst at the Atlantic Council in Washington, D.C. In fact, **it’s the United States that recently transported a live nuke across the country by accident,** while there have been no reports of such mishaps in Pakistan or India. **But “even with the best-laid plans, things happen.”** As for the risk of rogue insiders, Mr. Nawaz says American technical assistance as well as periodic monitoring of personnel help mitigate the potential.

As teacher to some of the people in Pakistan’s program, **Hoodbhoy has one window into the personnel risk. He recalls one Ph.D. candidate who was “very right wing” and went on to a top military position.** “After spending a few years with me, I think some of his edges came off,” he says.

No love for Taliban

On the lawn in front of the university library, **ten of Hoodbhoy’s physics graduate students** are cramming for a test together and enjoying the sunshine. **The consensus among them is pride in Pakistan’s nuclear weapons program, but there’s little indication they have any affinity for radical Islam. They speak of being disgusted with the Taliban** and are supportive of the military action to crush them, a view shared by students from Taliban-influenced regions of the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) and Swat Valley.

“They do this by guns and they don’t want peace. They just want to impose on us, and we are with the Army,” says Madiha Maryam from Rawalpindi. She has her hair covered by a scarf, something she says doesn’t mean she’s conservative: **“I like wearing the scarf and everyone should do what they like.”**

From behind full face covering, Nilem Khaliq from the NWFP says, “of course we are proud” of Pakistan’s nuclear arsenal. Yet, if she could choose, **“we want all nuclear weapons to be restricted for all countries in the world”—not just Pakistan.**

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4. **“In Search of Success,”** by Steve Coll, **New Yorker**, 25 May 2009. [KBTSPakWT, KBTSAfghanGW, KBTWLegal, KBTGStrategies] Steve Coll is president and CEO of the New America Foundation and author of Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001 (Penguin, 2004). From http://www.newyorker.com/talk/comment/2009/05/25/090525taco_talk_coll we quote:

In 2007, a Guantanamo military commission reviewed prisoner No. 008, also known as Abdullah Gulam Rasoul, a designated enemy combatant who had been held without legal rights for about six years. **Rasoul told his captors that he had “never been America’s enemy and I never intend to be.”** Guantanamo’s quasi-jurists transferred him to Afghanistan’s government, which set him free. **This spring, under the name Mullah Abdullah Zakir, he has resurfaced as one of the most vicious and effective**

Taliban commanders in Afghanistan's southern Helmand Province, where thousands of recently deployed U.S. troops are now arriving to join the battle.

As a parable of the United States and its enemies in Afghanistan and Pakistan, Rasoul's case has a familiar, circular quality. See in its particulars what you will: the deficiencies of the Bush administration's detention system; incompetent intelligence collecting; an Afghan government without a plausible justice system. **The long-lived trend is of greater consequence.**

Exactly three decades ago, in the spring of 1979, an uprising against Afghanistan's then Soviet-backed regime **drew the Carter administration into discussions about how to assist the region's Islamist rebels. Ever since, the United States has been struggling to grasp the patterns of cause and effect in its own policymaking.**

[President Obama must confront which policies will promote stability and which instability]

The miscalculations across five administrations are by now generally understood: near unequivocal support for anti-American militias during the 1980s; **averted eyes as Pakistan pursued its covert nuclear ambitions; the abandonment of Afghanistan after the Soviet withdrawal; the failure to recognize the menace of Al-Qaeda during the 1990s; erratic investments in Pakistan's democracy, economy, and civil society;** and, most recently, **a war in Afghanistan after 9/11 which did not defeat Al-Qaeda or the Taliban but chased them into Pakistan, where they regrouped and have proceeded to destabilize a country now endowed with atomic bombs.**

For several months, **the Obama administration has been rethinking American policy**, hoping to depart from this history of dysfunction. **It has announced a formal strategy: an adaptive counterinsurgency doctrine that seeks to emphasize the security and the prosperity of the Afghan and Pakistani people above all; economic and development aid; vigorous diplomacy; and carefully targeted warfare**, particularly aimed at Al-Qaeda. Already, however, **Obama and his advisers have had to confront the puzzle of which policies in their new portfolio will promote stability in the region, and which will promote instability.**

Just a few weeks ago, the Taliban advanced so close to Islamabad, Pakistan's capital, that it seemed the Pakistan Army might have lost its will to fight. The Obama administration urged the Army into battle. Fortunately, given the stakes, **the Army acted, and it has evidently fought with gusto in recent days, but to such an extent that it has now churned up a million internal refugees**, who constitute yet another pool of displaced and disaffected civilians that the Taliban will surely attempt to exploit.

[Recent accuracy of drone attacks has disrupted Al-Qaeda's ability to plan attacks]

"A key aspect to the new strategy is to put more attention and resources toward Pakistan's economic and governance challenges," Richard Holbrooke, Obama's special envoy to the region, told Congress last week. **Yet Pakistan's prideful insistence on its sovereignty means, among other things, that the United States cannot provide relief directly to internally displaced civilians. Their fate will now depend on Pakistan's fragile and unpopular government, with support from charities and the United Nations; the Obama administration must stand in the rear, urgently working its bellows.**

Obama's strategy seeks to alter the daily experiences and thus the political outlooks of Afghan and Pakistani civilians. Yet to an overwhelming extent the American presence in the region is located in its Afghan military deployments. The President's advisers grasp this dilemma, too, but they have not yet solved it. It has been plain for some time, for example, that the tactical advantage that the United States enjoys in Afghanistan because of its superior air power may be more than offset by the deepening resentments that aerial attacks produce in the minds of helpless civilians below.

Four years ago, polls showed that eighty-three percent of Afghans held a favorable view of the United States; today, only half do, and the trajectory is downward. **Persistent civilian casualties caused by air strikes in rural Afghanistan are a major cause of this deterioration.** American commanders say that they understand the problem, and **the rate of such incidents has declined, but mistakes continue;** dozens of Afghan civilians died earlier this month during a U.S.-led bombing raid in Farah Province.

In Pakistan's tribal regions, near the Afghan border, the United States deploys the armed flying robots known as Predator drones in attacks against Al-Qaeda and Taliban leaders. About a year ago, the United States began to acquire better intelligence regarding these terrorist groups. **The recent accuracy of the attacks has caused Al-Qaeda to murder suspected spies in self-defeating fits of paranoia, a trend that has disrupted the organization's ability to plan attacks against the United States and its allies.** General David Petraeus, the overall American military commander in the region, told CNN, "Al-Qaeda, in particular, has sustained some very serious losses over the course of the last six to ten months or so, and there is a considerable concern among those leaders because of the losses that they have sustained."

[New bipartisan plan aims to give Pakistan \$1.5 billion per year in non-military aid]

It would be difficult for any President to set aside military analysis of this tenor; in any event, Obama has persisted with the Predator strikes at roughly the same rate as George W. Bush. **There is no evidence, however, that the drone campaign has yet moved closer to Al-Qaeda's senior leaders, Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, or dismantled the group decisively;** instead, the targeting still seems to be stuck in the middle of Al-Qaeda's leadership lists.

Moreover, **Pakistan's government, although it apparently facilitates the drone attacks in private, finds it necessary to vocally oppose them in public, knowing how unpopular they are.** Opportunism and hypocrisy hardly seem the foundation for a sustainable political-military partnership that breaks with the unhappy past.

There are some ideas in train that may truly be transformative. Last week, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee held hearings on the Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act, **a bipartisan plan to provide Pakistan with \$1.5 billion in annual non-military aid,** for at least five years. **The legislation is intended to "mend a broken relationship with the Pakistani people,"** as John Kerry, who co-sponsored the bill with Richard Lugar, put it. The bill has been well designed **to support, for the first time in years, the long-term goal of rebalancing U.S. aid to strengthen pluralism and democracy in Pakistan.**

“Most Pakistanis feel that America has used and abandoned their country in the past,” Kerry noted. Indeed, **most Afghans feel the same.** Obama has inherited a toxic legacy; Congress, at least, could ease his burden.

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5. “National Counterproliferation Center Launches [www.CounterWMD.gov](http://www.counterwmd.gov) Website,” National Counterproliferation Center, May 2009 (<http://www.counterwmd.gov>). [KBTTProLiferation, KBTGDNI] *We quote:*

The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction is among the top national security challenges facing America today. The National Counterproliferation Center—the Office of the Director of National Intelligence’s mission manager for countering that spread—is pleased to unveil its Website aimed at providing a better understanding of the threat, as well as an explanation of how the Center is leading and integrating the Intelligence Community’s work against it. The National Counterproliferation Center’s Website is located at <http://www.counterwmd.gov>.

The Office of the Director of National Intelligence currently oversees three mission centers: the National Counterproliferation Center (NCPC), the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC, <http://www.nctc.gov>), and the National Counterintelligence Executive (NCIX, <http://www.ncix.gov>). The NCPC, NCTC, and NCIX have **significantly enhanced intelligence collaboration across the Intelligence Community for collection, analysis, and dissemination.** In addition, each serves as the principal Intelligence Community organization overseeing all aspects of national intelligence related to their respective mission area.

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