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9/11 Ten Years Later: Evolving Threats and US Responses
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Global Terrorism and the US: Continuing but Diminishing Threat

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Good Morning. I too want to add my welcome to this special symposium on terrorism and US responses.

Fifteen years ago, in August 1996 Usama Bin Ladin issued his special fatwa calling for jihad against the United States as the perceived "enemy of Islam." He based his fatwa on three key claims:

- **First, the US was waging a war against Islam and Muslim children in Iraq, Palestine, and elsewhere.**

- **Second, the US "infidel" troops were occupying some Muslim countries and deployed in other Muslim lands, especially Saudi Arabia, the "holy land" of Muslims, and other countries in the Arabian Peninsula.**

- **Third, US "one-sided" support for continued Israeli occupation of Arab lands in Palestine.**

Al-Qa'ida's heinous attack on 9/11 was designed to strike at the heart of America's economic and military symbols of the power. Al-Qa'ida also attacked the US because of our values of ethnic and religious tolerance, inclusion, democracy, and good governance.

Bin Ladin's message resonated with many Muslim youth who felt alienated from their societies, shut out of their mostly autocratic political systems, and who were unemployed, underemployed,

poorly educated, and saw only a bleak future. The fatwa, unfortunately, inspired some of these youth to turn to terrorism.

Terrorist attacks in the past 15 years against the US included the US embassy bombings in East Africa, the Cole off the coast of Yemen, and of course the most heinous of all, the attacks on 9/11, 2001.

Other attacks were conducted against European and pro-Western Muslim countries, ranging from Indonesia to Morocco, Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, and of course several European countries.

However, as we commemorate the 10th anniversary of 9/11, several key developments in the past 12 months should give us a cause for optimism about the marginalization of al-Qa'ida among Muslim youth globally, its fading influence as a global terrorist organization, and its eroding ability to wage another spectacular attack similar to the infamous one we are presently commemorating.

- **AQ has failed to provide the youth with jobs, adequate and useful education, a better quality of life, and a hopeful future other than the rhetoric of terror and "jihad."**

These **good news** developments include the following:

1. The Killing of Usama Bin Ladin and Other Top Leaders

The demise of Bin Ladin was a major psychological and inspirational blow to global terrorism and to al-Qa'ida Central. His removal from the scene has created fissures within the organization leadership, especially between the "Gulfies" and the Egyptians/North Africans. Furthermore, for many Muslim youth, Bin Ladin's death was an insignificant event. Some observers of AQ believe Bin Ladin's replacement, Ayman al-Zawahiri, would be unable to elude capture or death as long as UBL did.

- **The recent killing of senior AQ operatives including Atiya Abd al-Rahman and Abu Hafs al-Shahri, and the arrest of**

Younis al-Mauritani have driven the leadership deep under ground. It's also making it much more difficult for al-Qa'ida to maintain coherent operational contacts with like-minded terrorist groups and operatives globally. It's clear that al-Qa'ida senior leadership must be on the run.

- **UBL's demise, however, does not/not end the AQ threat—a major chapter closed on terrorism but not the entire book, as a commentator observed recently. Regional radical groups remain a serious threat.**

2. The Arab Uprisings

A revolutionary spirit of reform has captured the imagination of tens of millions of Arabs, young and old. A democratic fervent is underway in Arab lands despite continued human rights abuses and brutality in Yemen, Syria, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia where regimes are clinging to power and refusing to institute meaningful political reform.

Never before have so many millions demanded the dismantling of their corrupt and repressive autocratic regimes, with such persistence, perseverance, and peacefulness. We are witnessing the birth of a new Middle East, the like of which we have not seen since WWI.

A new generation—youthful, sophisticated, legitimate, inclusive, non-sectarian, and non-ideological—is asserting that Arab authoritarianism is no longer acceptable and the authoritarian narrative has run its course.

The youth generation is not beholden to radical ideology or to Islamic extremism. In fact, AQ and other Islamic groups, including mainstream Islamic political parties, were broadsided by the massive street protests across the Arab world. AQ has always considered secular "man-made" democracy as anathema.

- **Pro-democracy revolutions are anti-regime AND anti-radicalism. Arab Islamic youth are interested in indigenous, bread and butter issues and a life of dignity. Arab youth are**

NOT interested in radical ideology and will not be swayed by al-Qa'ida and other radicals.

3. Arab Islamic Attitudes

Mainstream Islamic opinion has turned against AQ, according to recent public opinion polls. Many Muslims believe AQ has lost the moral argument about the killing of innocent civilians and does not serve Islam. Some observers also believe AQ is in existential crisis—diminishing recruiting; decreasing financial support; and poor training of recruits.

Liquidation of AQ leaders, through drone attacks and arrests, and transnational intelligence sharing and collaboration have limited AQ's operational freedom and effectiveness. Also, more and more Muslim religious leaders and mainstream Islamic political parties have been speaking out against AQ's radical ideology and terrorism.

4. Values and Policies

Despite al-Qa'ida's ideological animosity toward the US and other liberal secular political systems and its view that these countries are "enemies of Islam," most Muslims who are critical of the US base their criticism on specific policies, not values of good governance. These policies include US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Guantanamo, perceived one-sided support for Israel in the Arab-Israeli conflict, and continued support for several authoritarian regimes, especially Bahrain and Saudi Arabia.

- **Whereas it's impossible to talk to al-Qa'ida because of their hardened anti-Western ideology, it is possible to engage with other mainstream groups despite their opposition to our policy.**

- **According to a recent White House statement, the US government does not "label someone as an extremist simply because of their opposition to the policies of the US government or their strong religious beliefs."**

5. American Muslims

Anti-radical and anti-AQ attitudes are also evident among American Muslims. Despite frequent "profiling" and perceived discrimination and civil rights violations, Pew and Gallup public opinion polls have repeatedly shown that a vast majority of American Muslims does not support radicalism. American Muslim community organizations have worked closely with law enforcement agencies to undercut the radical ideology among the youth, to identify potential terrorists, and emphasize the compatibility of their faith and active civic citizenship. Unlike Europe, the US has no "Muslim problem."

A couple of months ago, Denis McDonough, Deputy National Security Advisor to the President, issued a national strategy to combat violent extremism in America through partnering with communities. Mr. McDonough said, "In combating violent extremism, Muslim Americans are not part of the problem; they are part of the solution."

Four quick points:

- First, American Muslims, by and large, have assimilated into American society, prospered economically, acquired high levels of education, and attained prominent positions in the professions and the economy at large. American Muslims also are as diverse as the rest of the United States—educationally, ethnically, ideologically, and politically.

- Second, Muslims in small cities and large urban centers—for example, in Albuquerque and Gallup, NM, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Houston, St. Louis, Chicago, Minneapolis, Detroit, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Akron, Indianapolis, Pittsburg, Baltimore, Washington, DC, New York, and Boston—tend to see no conflict between their piety and the need to be a productive and prosperous segment of American society.

- Third, the country of origin and the perceived grievances associated with it oftentimes influence political attitudes and

activism among American Muslims. Palestinians in Los Angeles, Somalis in Minneapolis, Pakistanis in Brooklyn, or Iraqis in Detroit—whether recent or second-generation immigrants—invariably become caught up in the perceived political injustice in their homeland.

- Fourth, thanks to global satellite television, such as al-Jazeera, BBC, and CNN, and the new social media, including Facebook, Twitter, and the Internet, American Muslims can identify more easily with troubles in the "old country."

Bad News

Having discussed the good news about global terrorism, let's turn to the bad news.

First, whereas we used to talk only about Al-Qa'ida in reference to global terrorism, we are now faced with local and regional franchise terror organizations—country-specific, region-specific, and issue-specific. AQAP presents the most serious danger to the US.

Second, regardless of the varied capabilities of terrorist organizations, their intent is the same—to mount spectacular attacks in the United States or against US interests and personnel and US allies.

Third, franchise terror groups include AQAP in Yemen, al-Shabab in Somalia, Al-Qa'ida in Iraq, AQIM in the Maghreb, The Islamic Fighting Force in Libya, the Boko Haram in Nigeria, the Taliban in Pakistan (Tehrik-i-Taliban), the Haqqani Network in Pakistan, and the Kashmiri Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Muhammad in Pakistan and other parts of South Asia.

Fourth, although available information shows al-Qa'ida Central does not exercise command and control over the so-called SPIN ("Segmented Polycentric Ideologically Networked") groups, the SPINS espouse the same radical ideology and enmity toward

modern, liberal, secular, democratic politics and continue to view the US as their primary enemy.

Fifth, according to recent US counterterrorism reports, as reported in the New York Times, al-Qa'ida affiliated AQAP is "trying to produce the lethal poison ricin, to be packed around small explosives for attacks against the United States."

Challenges Facing the US regarding Global Terrorism

- Although our knowledge of terrorist groups has grown significantly since 9/11, we still need to know more about the franchise groups, especially their second and third tier leaders, their decision-making processes, sources of funding, and methods of recruitment.

- The radicalization process still eludes us. Psychologists, social theory experts, and others constantly attempt to explain how a person moves along the path of radicalization. Unfortunately, theoretical paradigms do not adequately explain the radicalization process, especially on the individual level.

- The key question: What tips individuals and groups toward terrorism? Is it revenge, anger, family, recruitment, specific US policy, on-going regional conflicts, globalization, values, group identity, single issue, or what?

- The factors that contribute to radicalization of course are of course multi-faceted. They include religion; social and political issues; community experiences at home or in the Diaspora; group dynamics; and individual ("lone wolf") action based on a variety of considerations, including radical religious interpretations.

- In order to penetrate Western societies, al-Qa'ida Central and franchise terrorist organizations have moved toward recruiting "ordinary" young men who live in, or who have

access to, Western countries (Abdulmutallab and Shahzad, etc.).

MI5 Report on Radicalization

Three years ago, the British MI5 issued a classified report on terrorism, which was leaked to The Guardian newspaper. The report, based on hundreds of case studies and interviews, argued that it is difficult to draw a profile of home-grown terrorists and that "there is no single pathway to violent extremism" or a "conveyor belt to terrorism." The report challenges many of the current "stereotypes that are held about who becomes a terrorist and why" and makes several other salient points about "British terrorists" and "British extremists." The report offers a few key points:

- **Most "British terrorists" are demographically "unremarkable;" they are not "mad and bad."**

- **Most of them are not religious fundamentalists, or even pious, nor are they steeped in Islamic studies.**

- **Most of the hundreds of those interviewed are British citizens or are living in the UK legally.**

- **British extremists, like the British Muslim population, are ethnically diverse with varying levels of education and marital status. Their educational levels range from elementary school to college education, but "they are almost all employed in low-grade jobs."**

- **Personal contacts and recruitment, not religious zealotry, are what drive British extremists to terrorism.**

This report could be instructive in analyzing the potential radicalization of some American Muslims and how to undercut the radical message and its resonance among some Muslim youth. The MI5 report also could be helpful in three other areas:

- **Working with Muslim organizations and charitable societies**

- **Engaging tolerant and moderate community and religious leaders**

- **Paying a closer attention to educational programs and textbooks used in Islamic schools and mosques.**

Managing the Domestic Threat: Partnering with Local Communities Through Community Based Intelligence

Terrorist threats to the homeland will not be adequately dealt with unless a functional partnership is established between federal government agencies and states and cities across the United States. In order for this partnership to be most effective, it must cover collection and analysis of data, sharing of information from all sources—to include satellite imagery and human intelligence—and deepening of expertise.

- **The partnership should include joint efforts to learn more about Islam and Muslims, as a religion and as citizens, and to fight off bigoted attitudes toward American Muslims.**

- **The proposed Community Based Intelligence or CBI partnership also should involve members of the Muslim community across American cities and towns. As a local law enforcement agent told me, "A cop on the beat in Gallup, NM, knows more about what's going on in the community than ten SES's from Washington!"**

The recent Wired Magazine investigation of the training materials used last spring at the FBI training facility in Quantico, VA, clearly shows that we need to review such materials and make sure that an accurate and objective picture is given to our law enforcement officers about different religions and cultures in our society.

Bottom Line Judgment

In order to address potential threats to the homeland at the state and local levels adequately, federal officials must share meaningful

information about terror threats with their state and local counterparts, must keep them in the loop, and communicate with them regularly.

Bottom Line Challenge

Develop a framework to assess the process of radicalization, measure the dynamics of contention among Islamic activists, and identify the different metrics that can be used to measure the different kinds of activism—violent and non-violent.

A Couple of Concluding Thoughts

- **There is no single path to radicalization or a one-fits-all strategy to counter the threat.**

- **National power—hard and soft—are necessary to undermine the terrorist threat.**

- **To succeed, we must form partnerships with other countries and indigenous mainstream communities and governments across the Muslim world and at home to promote better life and a hopeful future for the youth.**

- **We also need to be more assertive in defending our values of freedom and democracy in the on-going struggle against dictators and corrupt government in the Arab world and elsewhere. Saudi Arabia and Bahrain are a case in point.**

- **Muslims themselves will ultimately be the ones to defeat terrorism and reject radicalism, especially if they pursue a future based on inclusion, tolerance, and pragmatism.**

- **As President Obama said in Cairo in June 2009, we must devise strategies to engage mainstream Muslim communities across the globe and support people's struggle for human rights, dignity, and justice.**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the past ten years, we have learned much about threats, vulnerabilities, radical groups, and mainstream Islamic activist organizations. We have also learned how to fight terrorist criminals on the global level. Much has been published about detentions, renditions, interrogations, and the value and usefulness of information gotten through such methods.

Most importantly, however, we have learned that this country's constitutional principles, the rule of law, and the belief in individual and civil rights are the surest way to fight terrorism and to protect the values we cherish so deeply.

Thank you.

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