Terrorism

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In the international community, terrorism has no legally binding, criminal law definition. [1][2] Common definitions of terrorism refer only to those violent acts that are intended to create fear (terror); are perpetrated for a religious, political, or ideological goal; and deliberately target or disregard the safety of non-combatants (e.g., neutral military personnel or civilians). Some definitions now include acts of unlawful violence and war. The use of similar tactics by criminal organizations for protection rackets or to enforce a code of silence is usually not labeled terrorism, though these same actions may be labeled terrorism when done by a politically motivated group. Usage of the term has also been criticized for its frequent undue equating with Islamism or jihadism, while ignoring non-Islamic organizations or individuals. [3][4]

The word "terrorism" is politically loaded and emotionally charged, [5] and this greatly compounds the difficulty of providing a precise definition. A study on political terrorism examining over 100 definitions of "terrorism" found 22 separate definitional elements (e.g. Violence, force, fear, threat, victim-target differentiation). [6][7] In some cases, the same group may be described as "freedom fighters" by its supporters and considered to be terrorists by its opponents. [8] The concept of terrorism may be controversial as it is often used by state authorities (and individuals with access to state support) to delegitimize political or other opponents, [9] and potentially legitimize the state's own use of armed force against opponents (such use of force may be described as "terror" by opponents of the state). [9][10] At the same time, the reverse may also take place when states perpetrate or are accused of perpetrating state terrorism. [11] The usage of the term has a controversial history, with individuals such as ANC leader Nelson Mandela at one point also branded a terrorist. [12]

Terrorism has been practiced by a broad array of political organizations to further their objectives. It has been practiced by both right-wing and left-wing political parties, nationalistic groups, religious groups, revolutionaries, and ruling governments. [13] The symbolism of terrorism can exploit human fear to help achieve these goals. [14]

Since 1994, the United Nations General Assembly has repeatedly condemned terrorist acts using the following political description of terrorism:

Criminal acts intended or calculated to provoke a state of terror in the general public, a group of persons or particular persons for political purposes are in any circumstance unjustifiable, whatever the considerations of a political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or any other nature that may be invoked to justify them. [25]
Bruce Hoffman, a scholar (now at Georgetown University but previously with RAND for many years and has long been one of the top American voices on terrorism.)

**What is Terrorism?**

Experts and other long-established scholars in the field are equally incapable of reaching a consensus. In the first edition of his magisterial survey, 'Political Terrorism: A Research Guide,' Alex Schmid devoted more than a hundred pages to examining more than a hundred different definitions of terrorism in an effort to discover a broadly acceptable, reasonably comprehensive explication of the word. Four years and a second edition later, Schmid was no closer to the goal of his quest, conceding in the first sentence of the revised volume that the "search for an adequate definition is still on". Walter Laqueur despaired of defining terrorism in both editions of his monumental work on the subject, maintaining that it is neither possible to do so nor worthwhile to make the attempt. [26]

Hoffman believes it is possible to identify some key characteristics of terrorism. He proposes that:

**By distinguishing terrorists from other types of criminals and terrorism from other forms of crime, we come to appreciate that terrorism is:**

- ineluctably political in aims and motives
- violent or, equally important, threatens violence
- designed to have far-reaching psychological repercussions beyond the immediate victim or target
- conducted by an organization with an identifiable chain of command or conspiratorial cell structure (whose members wear no uniform or identifying insignia) and
- perpetrated by a subnational group or non-state entity. [27]

- If we cannot define terrorism, then we can at least usefully distinguish it from other types of violence and identify the characteristics that make terrorism the distinct phenomenon of political violence that it is. Guerrilla warfare is a good place to start. Terrorism is often confused or equated with, or treated as synonymous with, guerrilla warfare. This is not entirely surprising, since guerrillas often employ the same tactics (assassination, kidnapping, bombings of public gathering-places, hostage-taking, etc.) for the same purposes (to intimidate or coerce, thereby affecting behaviour through the arousal of fear) as terrorists. In addition, both terrorists and guerrillas wear neither uniform nor identifying insignia and thus are often indistinguishable from noncombatants. However, despite the inclination to lump both terrorists and guerrillas into the same catch-all category of 'irregulars', there are nonetheless fundamental differences between the two. 'Guerrilla', for example, in its most widely accepted usage, is taken to refer to a numerically larger group of armed individuals, who operate as a military unit, attack enemy military forces, and seize and hold territory (even if only ephemerally during daylight hours), while also exercising some form of sovereignty or control over a defined geographical area and its population. Terrorists, however, do not function in the open as armed units, generally do not attempt to seize or hold territory, deliberately avoid
engaging enemy military forces in combat and rarely exercise any direct control or sovereignty either over territory or population.

We may therefore now attempt to define terrorism as the deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence or the threat of violence in the pursuit of political change. All terrorist acts involve violence or the threat of violence. Terrorism is specifically designed to have far-reaching psychological effects beyond the immediate victim(s) or object of the terrorist attack. It is meant to instill fear within, and thereby intimidate, a wider 'target audience' that might include a rival ethnic or religious group, an entire country, a national government or political party, or public opinion in general. Terrorism is designed to create power where there is none or to consolidate power where there is very little. Through the publicity generated by their violence, terrorists seek to obtain the leverage, influence and power they otherwise lack to effect political change on either a local or an international scale.

A definition proposed by Carsten Bockstette at the George C. Marshall Center for European Security Studies, underlines the psychological and tactical aspects of terrorism:

Terrorism is defined as political violence in an asymmetrical conflict that is designed to induce terror and psychic fear (sometimes indiscriminate) through the violent victimization and destruction of noncombatant targets (sometimes iconic symbols). Such acts are meant to send a message from an illicit clandestine organization. The purpose of terrorism is to exploit the media in order to achieve maximum attainable publicity as an amplifying force multiplier in order to influence the targeted audience(s) in order to reach short- and midterm political goals and/or desired long-term end states.[28]

Terrorist acts frequently have a political purpose.[34] This is often where the inter-relationship between terrorism and religion occurs. When a political struggle is integrated into the framework of a religious or "cosmic" struggle, such as over the control of an ancestral homeland or holy site such as Israel and Jerusalem, failing in the political goal (nationalism) becomes equated with spiritual failure, which, for the highly committed, is worse than their own death or the deaths of innocent civilians.[36]

Their suffering accomplishes the terrorists' goals of instilling fear, getting their message out to an audience or otherwise satisfying the demands of their often radical religious and political agendas.[37]

Some official, governmental definitions of terrorism use the criterion of the illegitimacy or unlawfulness of the act.[38][better source needed] to distinguish between actions authorized by a government (and thus "lawful") and those of other actors, including individuals and small groups. For example, firebombing a city, which is designed to affect civilian support for a cause, would not be considered terrorism if it were authorized by a government.[original research?] This criterion is inherently problematic and is not universally accepted.[attribution needed] because: it denies the existence of state terrorism;[39] the same act may or may not be classed as terrorism depending on whether its sponsorship is traced to a "legitimate" government; "legitimacy" and
"lawfulness" are subjective, depending on the perspective of one government or another; and it diverges from the historically accepted meaning and origin of the term. \[15\][40][41][42]

http://www.terrorism-research.com/
Terrorism is not new and even though it has been used since the early times of recorded history, it can be relatively hard to define terrorism. Terrorism has been described variously as both a tactic and strategy; a crime and a holy duty; a justified reaction to oppression and an inexcusable abomination. Obviously, a lot depends on whose point of view is being represented. Terrorism has often been an effective tactic for the weaker side in a conflict. As an asymmetric form of conflict, it confers coercive power with many of the advantages of military force at a fraction of the cost. Due to the secretive nature and small size of terrorist organizations, they often offer opponents no clear organization to defend against or to deter. That is why pre-emption is being considered to be so important. In some cases, terrorism has been a means to carry on a conflict without the adversary realizing the nature of the threat, mistaking terrorism for criminal activity. Because of these characteristics, terrorism has become increasingly common among those pursuing extreme goals throughout the world. But despite its popularity, terrorism can be a nebulous concept. Even within the U.S. Government, agencies responsible for different functions in the ongoing fight against terrorism and extremism use different definitions.

The United States Department of Defense defines terrorism as "the calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological." Within this definition, there are three key elements - violence, fear, and intimidation - and each element produces terror in its victims. The FBI uses this definition: "Terrorism is the unlawful use of force and violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives." The U.S. Department of State defines terrorism to be "premeditated politically-motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by sub-national groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience".

Outside the United States Government, there are greater variations in what features of terrorism are emphasized in definitions. The United Nations produced the following definition of terrorism in 1992: "An anxiety-inspiring method of repeated violent action, employed by (semi-) clandestine individual, group or state actors, for idiosyncratic, criminal or political reasons, whereby - in contrast to assassination - the direct targets of violence are not the main targets." The most commonly accepted academic definition starts with the U.N. definition quoted above, and adds two sentences totalling another 77 words on the end; containing such verbose concepts as "message generators" and "violence based communication processes". Less specific and considerably less verbose, the British Government definition of terrorism from 1974 is "...the use of violence for political ends, and includes any use of violence for the purpose of putting the public, or any section of the public, in fear."

Terrorism is a criminal act that influences an audience beyond the immediate victim. The strategy of terrorists is to commit acts of violence that draws the attention of the local populace,
the government, and the world to their cause. The terrorists plan their attack to obtain the greatest publicity, choosing targets that symbolize what they oppose. The effectiveness of the terrorist act lies not in the act itself, but in the public's or government's reaction to the act. For example, in 1972 at the Munich Olympics, the Black September Organization killed 11 Israelis. The Israelis were the immediate victims. But the true target was the estimated 1 billion people watching the televised event. Those billion people watching were to be introduced to fear - which is terrorism's ultimate goal. The introduction of this fear can be from the threat of physical harm/a grizzly death, financial terrorism from the fear of losing money or negative effects on the economy, cyber terrorism harming the critical technological infrastructures of society and psychological terrorism designed to influence people's behaviour. Terrorism is designed to produce an overreaction and anecdotally, it succeeds at that almost all the time.

The Black September Organization used the high visibility of the Munich Olympics to publicize its views on the plight of the Palestinian refugees. Similarly, in October 1983, Middle Eastern terrorists bombed the Marine Battalion Landing Team Headquarters at Beirut International Airport. Their immediate victims were the 241 U.S. military personnel who were killed and over 100 others who were wounded. Their true target was the American people and the U.S. Congress. Their one act of violence influenced the United States' decision to withdraw the Marines from Beirut and was therefore considered a terrorist success.

There are three perspectives of terrorism: the terrorist's, the victim's, and the general public's. The phrase “one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter” is a view terrorists themselves would gladly accept. Terrorists do not see themselves as evil. They believe they are legitimate combatants, fighting for what they believe in, by whatever means possible to attain their goals. A victim of a terrorist act sees the terrorist as a criminal with no regard for human life. The general public's view though can be the most unstable. The terrorists take great pains to foster a "Robin Hood" image in hope of swaying the general public's point of view toward their cause. This sympathetic view of terrorism has become an integral part of their psychological warfare and has been countered vigorously by governments, the media and other organizations.

Goals and Motivations of Terrorists

Ideology and motivation will influence the objectives of terrorist operations, especially regarding the casualty rate. Groups with secular ideologies and non-religious goals will often attempt highly selective and discriminate acts of violence to achieve a specific political aim. This often requires them to keep casualties at the minimum amount necessary to attain the objective. This is both to avoid a backlash that might severely damage the organization, and also maintain the appearance of a rational group that has legitimate grievances. By limiting their attacks they reduce the risk of undermining external political and economic support. Groups that comprise a "wing" of an insurgency, or are affiliated with aboveground, sometimes legitimate, political organizations often operate under these constraints. The tensions caused by balancing these considerations are often a prime factor in the development of splinter groups and internal factions within these organizations.

In contrast, religiously oriented and millenarian groups typically attempt to inflict as many casualties as possible. Because of the apocalyptic frame of reference they use, loss of life is irrelevant, and more casualties are better. Losses among their co-religionists are of little account,
because such casualties will reap the benefits of the afterlife. Likewise, non-believers, whether
they are the intended target or collateral damage, deserve death, and killing them may be
considered a moral duty. The Kenyan bombing against the U.S. Embassy in 1998 inflicted
casualties on the local inhabitants in proportion to U.S. personnel of over twenty to one killed,
and an even greater disparity in the proportion of wounded (over 5000 Kenyans were wounded
by the blast; 95% of total casualties were non-American ). Fear of backlash rarely concerns these
groups, as it is often one of their goals to provoke overreaction by their enemies, and hopefully
widen the conflict.

The type of target selected will often reflect motivations and ideologies. For groups professing
secular political or social motivations, their targets are highly symbolic of authority; government
offices, banks, national airlines, and multinational corporations with direct relation to the
established order. Likewise, they conduct attacks on representative individuals whom they
associate with economic exploitation, social injustice, or political repression. While religious
groups also use much of this symbolism, there is a trend to connect it to greater physical
devastation. There also is a tendency to add religiously affiliated individuals, such as
missionaries, and religious activities, such as worship services, to the targeting equation.

Another common form of symbolism utilized in terrorist targeting is striking on particular
anniversaries or commemorative dates. Nationalist groups may strike to commemorate battles
won or lost during a conventional struggle, whereas religious groups may strike to mark
particularly appropriate observances. Many groups will attempt to commemorate anniversaries
of successful operations, or the executions or deaths of notable individuals related to their
particular conflict. Likewise, striking on days of particular significance to the enemy can also
provide the required impact. Since there are more events than operations, assessment of the
likelihood of an attack on a commemorative date is only useful when analyzed against the
operational pattern of a particular group or specific members of a group's leadership cadre.

The Intent of Terrorist Groups

A terrorist group commits acts of violence to -

- Produce widespread fear
- Obtain worldwide, national, or local recognition for their cause by attracting the attention
  of the media
- Harass, weaken, or embarrass government security forces so that the government
  overreacts and appears repressive
- Steal or extort money and equipment, especially weapons and ammunition vital to the
  operation of their group
- Destroy facilities or disrupt lines of communication in order to create doubt that the
  government can provide for and protect its citizens
- Discourage foreign investments, tourism, or assistance programs that can affect the target
country's economy and support of the government in power
- Influence government decisions, legislation, or other critical decisions
- Free prisoners
- Satisfy vengeance
• Turn the tide in a guerrilla war by forcing government security forces to concentrate their efforts in urban areas. This allows the terrorist group to establish itself among the local populace in rural areas

Differences between Terrorism and Insurgency

If no single definition of terrorism produces a precise, unambiguous description, we can approach the question by eliminating similar activities that are not terrorism, but that appear to overlap. For the U.S. military, two such related concepts probably lead to more confusion than others. Guerilla warfare and insurgencies are often assumed to be synonymous with terrorism. One reason for this is that insurgencies and terrorism often have similar goals. However, if we examine insurgency and guerilla warfare, specific differences emerge.

A key difference is that an **insurgency is a movement** - a political effort with a specific aim. This sets it apart from both **guerilla warfare** and terrorism, as they are both methods available to pursue the goals of the political movement.

Another difference is the intent of the component activities and operations of insurgencies versus terrorism. There is nothing inherent in either insurgency or guerilla warfare that requires the use of terror. While some of the more successful insurgencies and guerilla campaigns employed terrorism and terror tactics, and some developed into conflicts where terror tactics and terrorism became predominant; there have been others that effectively renounced the use of terrorism. The deliberate choice to use terrorism considers its effectiveness in inspiring further resistance, destroying government efficiency, and mobilizing support. Although there are places where terrorism, guerilla warfare, and criminal behavior all overlap, groups that are exclusively terrorist, or subordinate "wings" of insurgencies formed to specifically employ terror tactics, demonstrate clear differences in their objectives and operations. Disagreement on the costs of using terror tactics, or whether terror operations are to be given primacy within the insurgency campaign, have frequently led to the "urban guerilla" or terrorist wings of an insurgency splintering off to pursue the revolutionary goal by their own methods.

The ultimate goal of an insurgency is to challenge the existing government for control of all or a portion of its territory, or force political concessions in sharing political power. Insurgencies require the active or tacit support of some portion of the population involved. External support, recognition or approval from other countries or political entities can be useful to insurgents, but is not required. A terror group does not require and rarely has the active support or even the sympathy of a large fraction of the population. While insurgents will frequently describe themselves as "insurgents" or "guerillas", terrorists will not refer to themselves as "terrorists" but describe themselves using military or political terminology ("freedom fighters", "soldiers", "activists"). Terrorism relies on public impact, and is therefore conscious of the advantage of avoiding the negative connotations of the term "terrorists" in identifying themselves.

Terrorism does not attempt to challenge government forces directly, but acts to change perceptions as to the effectiveness or legitimacy of the government itself. This is done by ensuring the widest possible knowledge of the acts of terrorist violence among the target audience. Rarely will terrorists attempt to "control" terrain, as it ties them to identifiable
locations and reduces their mobility and security. Terrorists as a rule avoid direct confrontations with government forces. A guerilla force may have something to gain from a clash with a government combat force, such as proving that they can effectively challenge the military effectiveness of the government. A terrorist group has nothing to gain from such a clash. This is not to say that they do not target military or security forces, but that they will not engage in anything resembling a "fair fight", or even a "fight" at all. Terrorists use methods that neutralize the strengths of conventional forces. Bombings and mortar attacks on civilian targets where military or security personnel spend off-duty time, ambushes of undefended convoys, and assassinations of poorly protected individuals are common tactics.

Insurgency need not require the targeting of non-combatants, although many insurgencies expand the accepted legal definition of combatants to include police and security personnel in addition to the military. Terrorists do not discriminate between combatants and non-combatants, or if they do, they broaden the category of "combatants" so much as to render it meaningless. Defining all members of a nation or ethnic group, plus any citizen of any nation that supports that nation as "combatants" is simply a justification for frightfulness. Deliberate de-humanization and criminalization of the enemy in the terrorists' mind justifies extreme measures against anyone identified as hostile. Terrorists often expand their groups of acceptable targets, and conduct operations against new targets without any warning or notice of hostilities.

Ultimately, the difference between insurgency and terrorism comes down to the intent of the actor. Insurgency movements and guerilla forces can adhere to international norms regarding the law of war in achieving their goals, but terrorists are by definition conducting crimes under both civil and military legal codes. Terrorists routinely claim that were they to adhere to any "law of war" or accept any constraints on the scope of their violence, it would place them at a disadvantage vis-à-vis the establishment. Since the nature of the terrorist mindset is absolutist, their goals are of paramount importance, and any limitations on a terrorist's means to prosecute the struggle are unacceptable.

Hearing before the Senate Committee on Homeland Security
Worldwide Threats to the Homeland
September 17, 2014
Matthew G. Olsen, Director, National Counterterrorism Center

Opening
Thank you Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Thompson, and members of the Committee. I appreciate this opportunity to be here today to discuss the terrorist threat against the United States and our efforts to counter it. As I conclude three years as Director of the National Counterterrorism Center, I also want to express my deep appreciation to the Committee for its unflagging support of the men and women at the National Counterterrorism Center and our counterterrorism community, as a whole. I am also particularly pleased to be here today with Secretary of Homeland Security Jeh Johnson and FBI Director James Comey. DHS and the FBI are two of our closest partner agencies. Together we are a part of the broader counterterrorism effort that is more integrated and more collaborative than ever.
Earlier this summer the 9/11 Commissioners released their most recent report, and asked national security leaders to communicate to the public in specific terms what the threat is, and how it is evolving. Hearings like this provide an opportunity to continue this dialogue with the public and their elected representatives.

The Overall Terrorist Threat
In May, the President told the graduating class of West Point cadets, "For the foreseeable future, the most direct threat to America at home and abroad remains terrorism." The 9/11 Commissioners agreed, noting in their July report, "The terrorist threat is evolving, not defeated." From my vantage point at the National Counterterrorism Center, I would agree. Since we testified before this committee last year, the terrorist threat has continued to evolve, becoming more geographically diffuse and involving a greater diversity of actors.

Overseas, the United States faces an enduring threat to our interests. We have adopted precautionary measures at some of our overseas installations. The threat emanates from a broad geographic area, spanning South Asia, across the Middle East, and much of North Africa, where terrorist networks have exploited a lack of governance and lax security.

Here in the United States, last year's attack against the Boston Marathon highlighted the danger posed by lone actors and insular groups not directly tied to terrorist organizations, as well as the difficulty of identifying these types of plots before they take place. The flow of more than 15,000 foreign fighters to Syria with varying degrees of access to Europe and the United States heightens our concern, as these individuals may eventually return to their home countries battle-hardened, radicalized, and determined to attack us.

In the face of sustained counterterrorism pressure, core al-Qaeda has adapted by becoming more decentralized and is shifting away from large-scale, mass casualty plots like the attacks of September 11,2001. Al-Qaeda has modified its tactics, encouraging its adherents to adopt simpler attacks that do not require the same degree of resources, training, and planning. Instability in the Levant, Middle East, and across North Africa has accelerated this decentralization of the al-Qaeda movement, which is increasingly influenced by local and regional factors and conditions. This diffusion has also led to the emergence of new power centers and an increase in threats by networks of like-minded violent extremists with allegiances to multiple groups. Ultimately, this less centralized network poses a more diverse and geographically dispersed threat and is likely to result in increased low-level attacks against U.S. and European interests overseas.

Today, I will begin by examining the terrorist threats to the homeland and then outline the threat to U.S. interests overseas, including from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). I will then focus the remainder of my remarks on some of NCTC's efforts to address this complicated threat picture.

Threat to the Homeland
Starting with the homeland, terrorist groups continue to target Western aviation. In early July, the United States and United Kingdom implemented enhanced security measures at airports with
direct flights to the United States, which included new rules aimed at screening personal electronic devices. This past winter, we implemented additional security measures for commercial aviation to address threats to the Sochi Olympics. Although unrelated, taken together these two instances reflect the fact that terrorist groups continue to see commercial aviation as a desirable symbolic target. Al-Qa’ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) remains the al-Qa’ida affiliate most likely to attempt transnational attacks against the United States. The group’s repeated efforts to conceal explosive devices to destroy aircraft demonstrate its longstanding interest in targeting Western aviation. Its three attempted attacks demonstrate the group’s continued pursuit of high-profile attacks against the West, its awareness of security procedures, and its efforts to adapt. Despite AQAP’s ambitions, homegrown violent extremists (HVEs) remain the most likely immediate threat to the homeland. The overall level of HVE activity has been consistent over the past several years: a handful of uncoordinated and unsophisticated plots emanating from a pool of up to a few hundred individuals. Lone actors or insular groups who act autonomously pose the most serious HVE threat, and we assess HVEs will likely continue gravitating to simpler plots that do not require advanced skills, outside training, or communications with others.

The Boston Marathon bombing underscores the threat from HVEs who are motivated to act violently by themselves or in small groups. In the months prior to the attack, the Boston Marathon bombers exhibited few behaviors that law enforcement and intelligence officers traditionally use to detect readiness to commit violence. The perceived success of previous lone offender attacks combined with al-Qa’ida and AQAP propaganda promoting individual acts of terrorism is raising the profile of this tactic. HVEs make use of an online environment that is dynamic, evolving, and self-sustaining. This online environment is likely to play a critical role in the foreseeable future in radicalizing and mobilizing HVEs towards violence. Despite the removal of important terrorist leaders during the last several years, the online outlets continue to reinforce a violent extremist identity, highlight grievances, and provide HVEs the means to connect with terrorist groups overseas. This boundless virtual environment, combined with terrorists’ increasingly sophisticated use of social media, makes it increasingly difficult to protect our youth from propaganda. ISIL’s online media presence has become increasingly sophisticated, disseminating timely, high-quality media content across multiple platforms.

**The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)**

ISIL is a terrorist organization that has exploited the conflict in Syria and sectarian tensions in Iraq to entrench itself in both countries. The group’s strength, which we estimate may include more than 30,000 members as well as its expansionary agenda pose an increasing threat to our regional allies and to U.S. facilities and personnel in both the Middle East and the West. ISIL’s goal is to solidify and expand its control of territory and govern by implementing its violent interpretation of sharia law. The group aspires to overthrow governments in the region, govern all the territory that the early Muslim caliphs controlled, and expand. ISIL’s claim to have re-established the caliphate reflects the group’s desire to lead violent extremists around the world. ISIL exploited the conflict and chaos in Syria to expand its operations across the border. The group, with al-Qaida approval, established the al-Nusrah Front in late 2011 as a cover for its Syria-based activities but in April 2013, unilaterally declared its presence in Syria under the ISIL name. ISIL accelerated its efforts to overthrow the Iraqi government, seizing control of
Fallujah this past January. The group expanded from its safe haven in Syria and across the border into northern Iraq, killing thousands of Iraqi Muslims on its way to seizing Mosul this June. Along the way, ISIL aggressively recruited new adherents. In Syria, some joined ISIL to escape Assad's brutal treatment and oppression of the Syrian people. Others in Iraq joined out of frustration, marginalized by their own government. But many joined out of intimidation and fear, forced to choose either obedience to ISIL or a violent death.

The withdrawal of Iraqi Security Forces during those initial military engagements has left ISIL with large swaths of ungoverned territory. The group has established sanctuaries in Syria and Iraq from where it plans, trains, and plots terrorist acts with little interference. We assess ISIL's strength has increased and reflects stronger recruitment this summer following battlefield successes, the declaration of a caliphate, and additional intelligence. ISIL's freedom of movement over the Iraq-Syria border enables the group to easily move members between Iraq and Syria, which can rapidly change the number of fighters in either country. ISIL is also drawing some recruits from the more than 15,000 foreign fighters who have traveled to Syria. ISIL's recent victories have provided the group with a wide array of weapons, equipment, and other resources. Battlefield successes also have given ISIL an extensive war chest, which as of early this month probably includes around $1 million per day in revenues from black-market oil sales, smuggling, robberies, looting, extortion, and ransom payments for hostages. While ISIL receives some funding from outside donors, this pales in comparison to its self-funding through criminal and terrorist activities.

ISIL has sought to question the legitimacy of Ayman al-Zawahiri's succession of Usama bin Ladin. While al-Qa'ida core remains the ideological leader of the global terrorist movement, its primacy is being challenged by the rise of ISIL whose territorial gains, increasing access to a large pool of foreign fighters, and brutal tactics are garnering significantly greater media attention. We continue to monitor signs of fracturing within al-Qa'ida recognized affiliates. ISIL's safe haven in Syria and Iraq and the group's access to resources pose an immediate and direct threat to U.S. personnel and facilities in the region. This includes our embassy in Baghdad and our consulate in Erbil and, of course, it includes the Americans held hostage by ISIL.

But ISIL's threat extends beyond the region, to the West. This January, ISIL's leader publicly threatened "direct confrontation" with the U.S., and has repeatedly taunted Americans, most recently through the execution of two American journalists who were reporting on the plight of the Syrian people, and one British aid worker. In Europe, the May 2014 shooting in Brussels by an ISIL-trained French national and the separate, earlier arrest of an ISIL-connected individual in France who possessed several explosive are two examples that demonstrate this threat, and the overall threat posed by returning foreign fighters. In the United States, the FBI has arrested more than half a dozen individuals seeking to travel from the U.S. to Syria to join the fighting there, possibly with ISIL. We remain mindful of the possibility that an ISIL-sympathizer could conduct a limited, self-directed attack here at home with no warning.

Al-Qa'ida Core and Afghanistan/Pakistan-based Groups
Turning to core al-Qa'ida and Afghanistan/Pakistan-based groups, we anticipate that despite core al-Qa'ida's diminished leadership cadre, remaining members will continue to pose a threat to
Western interests in South Asia and would attempt to strike the homeland should an opportunity arise. Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri’s public efforts to promote individual acts of violence in the West have increased, as the Pakistan-based group’s own capabilities have diminished. Despite ISIL’s challenge, Zawahiri remains the recognized leader of the global jihadist movement among al-Qaeda affiliates and allies, and the groups continue to defer to his guidance on critical issues. Since the start of the Arab unrest in North Africa and the Middle East, Zawahiri and other members of the group’s leadership have directed their focus there, encouraging cadre and associates to support and take advantage of the unrest.

**Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent.**

This month, al-Qaeda announced the establishment of its newest affiliate, al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS). Al-Qaeda used social media and online web forums to make known the existence of AQIS, which al-Qaeda said it has worked for more than two years to create. We assess the creation of AQIS is not a reaction to al-Qaeda’s split with ISIL, though the timing of the announcement may be used to bolster al-Qaeda’s standing in the global jihad movement. AQIS, which is led by Sheikh Asim Umer, has stated objectives that include violence against the U.S., establishing Islamic law in South Asia, ending occupation of Muslim lands, and defending Afghanistan under Mullah Omar’s leadership. AQIS on 11 September publicly claimed responsibility for a thwarted September attack on a Pakistani Naval vessel at the Karachi Naval Dockyard. The group had planned to use the attack to target a U.S. Navy ship. AQIS also claimed responsibility for the killing of a senior Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence officer earlier this month.

**South Asia-Based Militants.**

Pakistani and Afghan militant groups, including Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP), the Haqqani Network, and Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LT) continue to pose a direct threat to U.S. interests and our allies in the region, where these groups probably will remain focused. We continue to watch for indicators that any of these groups, networks, or individuals are actively pursuing or have decided to incorporate operations outside of South Asia as a strategy to achieve their objectives. TTP remains a significant threat in Pakistan despite the ongoing Pakistan military operations in North Waziristan and leadership changes during the past year. Its claim of responsibility for the June attack on the Jinnah International Airport in Karachi that killed about 30 people underscores the threat the group poses inside the country.

The Haqqani network is one of the most capable and lethal terrorist groups in Afghanistan and poses a serious threat to the stability of the Afghan state as we approach 2014 and beyond. Last month, the Department of State listed four high-ranking Haqqani members—Aziz Haqqani, Khalil Haqqani, Yahya Haqqani, and Qari Abdul Rauf—on the Rewards for Justice most-wanted list for their involvement in terrorist attacks in Afghanistan and ties to al-Qaeda. The Haqqanis have conducted numerous high-profile attacks against U.S., NATO, Afghan Government, and other allied nation targets. In October 2013, Afghan security forces intercepted a truck bomb deployed by the Haqqanis against Forward Operating Base Goode in the Paktiya Province. The device, which did not detonate, contained some 61,500 pounds of explosives and constitutes the largest truck bomb ever recovered in Afghanistan. Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LT) remains focused on its regional goals in South Asia. The group is against improving relations between India and Pakistan, and its leaders consistently...
speak out against India and the United States, accusing both countries of trying to destabilize Pakistan. LT has attacked Western interests in South Asia in pursuit of its regional objectives, as demonstrated by the targeting of hotels frequented by Westerners during the Mumbai attacks in 2008. LT leaders almost certainly recognize that an attack on the U.S. would result in intense international backlash against Pakistan and endanger the group’s safe haven there. However, LT also provides training to Pakistani and Western militants, some of whom could plot terrorist attacks in the West without direction from LT leadership.

**Al-Qaeda Affiliates**

AQAP. Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) remains the affiliate most likely to attempt transnational attacks against the United States. AQAP’s three attempted attacks against the United States to date—the airliner plot of December 2009, an attempted attack against U.S.-bound cargo planes in October 2010, and an airliner plot in May 2012—demonstrate the group’s continued pursuit of high-profile attacks against the United States. In a propaganda video released in March, the group’s leader threatened the U.S. in a speech to recruits in Yemen, highlighting AQAP’s persistent interest in targeting the United States.

AQAP also presents a high threat to U.S. personnel and facilities in Yemen and Saudi Arabia. In response to credible al-Qaeda threat reporting in August 2013, the State Department issued a global travel alert and closed U.S. embassies in the Middle East and North Africa as part of an effort to take precautionary steps against such threats. We assess that we at least temporarily delayed this particular plot, but we continue to track closely the status of AQAP plotting against our facilities and personnel in Yemen. AQAP continues to kidnap Westerners in Yemen and carry out numerous small-scale attacks and large-scale operations against Yemeni government targets, demonstrating the range of the group’s capabilities. In addition, this past July AQAP launched its first successful attack in Saudi Arabia since 2009, underscoring the group’s continued focus on operations in the Kingdom. Finally, AQAP continues its efforts to radicalize and mobilize to violence individuals outside Yemen through the publication of its English-language magazine *Inspire*.

Following the Boston Marathon bombings, AQAP released a special edition of the magazine claiming that accused bombers Tamarlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev were inspired by *Inspire* highlighting the attack’s simple, repeatable nature, and tying it to alleged U.S. oppression of Muslims worldwide. The most recent issue in March continued to encourage lone offender attacks in the West, naming specific targets in the United States, United Kingdom, and France and providing instructions on how to construct a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device.

**Al Nusrah Front.**

Al-Nusrah Front has mounted suicide, explosive, and firearms attacks against regime and security targets across the country; it has also sought to provide limited public services and governance to the local population in areas under its control. Several Westerners have joined al-Nusrah Front, including a few who have perished in suicide operations, raising concerns capable individuals with extremist contacts and battlefield experience could return to their home countries to commit violence. In April 2013, Al-Nusrah Front’s leader, Abu Muhammad al-Jawlani, pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, publicly affirming the
group’s ties to core al-Qa’ida. Al-Zawahiri named the group al-Qaida’s recognized affiliate in the region later last year, ordering ISIL to return to Iraq.

Al-Shabaab.
Al-Shabaab and its foreign fighter cadre are a potential threat to the U.S. homeland, some al-Shabaab leaders have publicly called for transnational attacks and the group has attracted dozens of U.S. persons mostly ethnic Somalis who have traveled to Somalia since 2006. A recent U.S. military airstrike killed al-Shabaab’s leader, Ahmed Abdi. This removes a capable leader of the group, but also raises the possibility of potential retaliatory attacks against our personnel and facilities in East Africa. Al-Shabaab is mainly focused on undermining the Somali Federal Government and combating African Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and regional military forces operating in Somalia. While al-Shabaab’s mid-September 2013 attack on the Westgate mall in Kenya demonstrated that the group continues to plot against regional and Western targets across East Africa, as part of its campaign to remove foreign forces aiding the Somali Government.

AQIM and regional allies.
Al-Qa’ida in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and its allies remain focused on local and regional attack plotting, including targeting Western interests. The groups have shown minimal interest in targeting the U.S. homeland. In Mali, the French-led military intervention has pushed AQIM and its allies from the cities that they once controlled, but the groups maintain safe haven in the less populated areas of northern Mali from which they are able to plan and launch attacks against French and allied forces in the region. Elsewhere, AQIM is taking advantage of permissive operating environments across much of North Africa to broaden its reach. We are concerned that AQIM may be collaborating with local violent extremists, including Ansar al-Sharia groups in Libya and Tunisia. In August of last year, two highly capable AQIM offshoots, Mokhtar Belmokhtar’s al-Mulathamun battalion and Tawhid Wal Jihad in West Africa, merged to form the new violent extremist group al-Murabitun which will almost certainly seek to conduct additional high profile attacks against Western interests across the region. Belmokhtar the group’s external operations commander played a leading role in attacks against Western interests in Northwest Africa in 2013, with his January attack on an oil facility in In-Amenas, Algeria and double suicide bombings in Niger in May. Early this year, Belmokhtar relocated from Mali to Libya to escape counterterrorism pressure, and probably to collaborate with Ansar al-Sharia (AAS) and other violent extremist elements in the country to advance his operational goals.

Boko Haram.
While Boko Haram is not an official al-Qa’ida affiliate, the group is waging unprecedented violence in northeast Nigeria this year and is expanding its reach into other parts of Nigeria and neighboring states to implement its harsh version of sharia law and suppress the Nigerian Government and regional CT pressure. Since late 2012, Boko Haram and its splinter faction Ansaru have claimed responsibility for five kidnappings of Westerners, raising their international profile and highlighting the threat they pose to Western and regional interests, although Ansaru has not claimed an operation since February 2013. Boko Haram has kidnapped scores of additional Nigerians in northeast Nigeria since the kidnapping of 276 school girls from Chibok, Nigeria in April 2014.
Threat from Shia Groups

Iran and Hizballah remain committed to defending the Assad regime, including sending billions of dollars in military and economic aid, training pro-regime and Shia militants, and deploying their own personnel into the country. Iran and Hizballah view the Assad regime as a key partner in an "axis of resistance" against Israel and the West and are prepared to take major risks to preserve the regime as well as their critical transshipment routes. Lebanese Hizballah. In May of last year, Hizballah publicly admitted that it is fighting for the Syrian regime and its chief, Hasan Nasrallah, framed the war as an act of self-defense against Western-backed Sunni violent extremists. Hizballah continues sending capable fighters for pro-regime operations and support for a pro-regime militia. Additionally, Iran and Hizballah are leveraging allied Iraqi Shia militant and terrorist groups to participate in counter-opposition operations. This active support to the Assad regime is driving increased Sunni violent extremist attacks and sectarian unrest in Lebanon. Beyond its role in Syria, Lebanese Hizballah remains committed to conducting terrorist activities worldwide and we remain concerned the group's activities could either endanger or target U.S. and other Western interests. The group has engaged in an aggressive terrorist campaign in recent years and continues attack planning abroad. In April 2014, two Hizballah operatives were arrested in Thailand and one admitted that they were there to carry out a bomb attack against Israeli tourists, underscoring the threat to civilian centers.

Iranian Threat.

In addition to its role in Syria, Iran remains the foremost state sponsor of terrorism, and works through the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Quds Force and Ministry of Intelligence and Security to support groups that target U.S. and Israeli interests globally. In March, Israel interdicted a maritime vessel that departed Iran and was carrying munitions judged to be intended for Gaza-based Palestinian militants. Iran, largely through Qods Force Commander Soleimani, has also provided support to Shia militias and the Iraqi government to combat ISIL in Iraq. Iran continues to be willing to conduct terrorist operations against its adversaries. This is demonstrated by Iran's links to terrorist operations in Azerbaijan, Georgia, India, and Thailand in 2012. Iran also continues to provide lethal aid and support the planning and execution of terrorist acts by other groups, in particular Lebanese Hizballah.

Addressing the Threat from Syria Foreign Fighters

NCTC draws on these capabilities and initiatives to address the threat posed by Syrian foreign fighters. The United States, the European Union including the United Kingdom, France, and other member states and the broader international community have increasingly expressed concerns about the greater than 15,000 foreign fighters who could potentially return to their home countries to participate in or support terrorist attacks. The UK's Home Secretary announced the terrorist threat level in the United Kingdom had been raised to severe, explaining, "The increase in threat level is related to developments in Syria and Iraq where terrorist groups are planning attacks against the West. Some of those plots are likely to involve foreign fighters who have traveled there from the UK and Europe to take part in those conflicts." This past week, Australia also raised its threat level from medium to high.

Syria remains the preeminent location for independent or al-Qa'ida-aligned groups to recruit, train, and equip a growing number of violent extremists, some of whom we assess may seek to conduct external attacks. The rate of travelers into Syria exceeds the rate of travelers who went
into Afghanistan/Pakistan, Iraq, Yemen, or Somalia at any point in the last ten years. European governments estimate that more than 2,000 westerners have traveled to join the fight against the Assad regime, which include more than 500 from Great Britain, 700 from France, and 400 from Germany. Additionally, more than 100 U.S. persons from a variety of backgrounds and locations in the United States have traveled or attempted to travel to Syria. NCTC, FBI, and DHS are part of a broader U.S. government and international effort to resolve the identities of potential violent extremists and identify potential threats emanating from Syria. Central to this effort is TIDE, which is much more than a screening database — it is an analytic database. It feeds the unclassified screening database so that DHS, the State Department, and other agencies have access to timely and accurate information about known and suspected terrorists. Initiatives such as Kingfisher aid in this screening process. As disparate pieces of information about KSTs are received, trained analysts create new records in TIDE, most often as the result of a nomination by a partner agency. The records are updated or enhanced regularly as new, related information is included and dated or as unnecessary information is removed. In all cases, there are several layers of review before a nomination is accepted into the system. In the case of U.S. persons, there are at least three layers of review, including a legal review, to ensure the derogatory information is sufficient and meets appropriate standards. To better manage and update the identities of individuals who have travelled overseas to engage in violence in Syria and Iraq, we’ve created a special threat case in TIDE. This is a special feature in the TIDE system which allows us to focus efforts on smaller groups of individuals. A threat case links all known actors, and their personal information, involved in a particular threat stream or case and makes that information available to the intelligence, screening, and law enforcement communities. NCTC’s management of this unique consolidation of terrorist identities has created a valuable forum for identifying and sharing information about Syrian foreign fighters including ISIL with community partners. It has better integrated the community’s efforts to identify, enhance, and expedite the nomination of Syrian foreign fighter records to the Terrorist Screening Database for placement in U.S. government screening systems.

Counterterrorism efforts focused on law enforcement disruptions are critical to mitigating threats. We also recognize that government alone cannot solve this problem and interdicting or arresting terrorists is not the full solution. Well-informed and well-equipped families, communities, and local institutions represent the best long-term defense against violent extremism. To this end, we continue to refine and expand the preventive side of counterterrorism. Working with DHS, in the last year NCTC revamped the Community Awareness Briefing (CAB), a key tool we use to convey information to local communities and authorities on the terrorist recruitment threat. The CAB now also includes information on the recruitment efforts of violent extremist groups based in Syria and Iraq. Additionally, this year NCTC and DHS developed and implemented a new program — the Community Resilience Exercise program, designed to improve communication between law enforcement and communities and to share ideas on how to counter violent extremism.

**Conclusion**

Confronting these threats and working with resolve to prevent another terrorist attack remains the counterterrorism community’s overriding mission. This year, NCTC celebrates its 10th year in service to the nation, and we remain focused on continuing to enhance our ability to counter the terrorist threat in the years ahead.
Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Thompson, and members of the Committee, thank you.

http://usforeignpolicy.about.com/od/defense/a/counterterrorism-strategy.htm

Combatting Terrorism in 2010

Examining the Elements of the US Counterterrorism Strategy

By Barry Kolodkin

After eight years of fighting the war in Afghanistan, the Obama Administration deliberated whether to support a troop surge recommended by General Stanley McChrystal, commander of US forces in Afghanistan, or opt for a counter-terror approach focused on attacking Al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters. President Obama ultimately selected the surge.

Military Invasions Cannot Stop Small-Scale Terror Attempts

However, a surge of 30,000 troops in Afghanistan, or even 300,000, cannot nullify terrorists emerging from Yemen, Pakistan or other countries. There will never be a sufficient number of US troops to patrol every terrorism hotbed. Terrorism is a global threat emanating from sources all over the world including the United States. Placing soldiers in Iraq or Afghanistan will not preclude incidents like an underwear bomb on an airplane.

So, if large-scale military invasions and nation-building are not effective tools of counterterrorism, then how does the US combat terrorism? What are some of the key elements of a global counterterrorism strategy? A revised counterterrorism strategy might emphasize intelligence, protecting America’s borders and overseas assets, and being able to strike at known terrorists anywhere in the world over a full-scale assault on terrorism in priority locations.

The US Government is currently pursuing all of the following counterterrorism activities. A revised strategy could emphasize these elements over protracted military campaigns and have an overall plan of action with clear leadership and lines of communication.

Intelligence sharing. While there is a National Counterterrorism Center, there has not been an extant culture of information sharing within the US intelligence community. The US intelligence community must be able to fuse intelligence data, diplomatic reports, and open-source information and distribute it to the relevant parties in real-time fashion. For example, there was a diplomatic cable from the State Department warning about Umar Farouk Muttalub, the Nigerian bomber, but it was not sufficient evidence to place him on a no-fly list. Yet, no one at the National Counterterrorism Center used that information to cross-check to see if other sources warned about Muttalub. A critical element is ensuring data is shared with local police in foreign countries so they can arrest potential terrorists before they execute their plans.

International financial cooperation. Most countries are parties to the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing to Terrorism but many countries still lack sufficient
legislation to criminalize terrorist financing. Furthermore, states often lack the capability to enforce these regulations. The US and its allies would need to provide technical assistance to help many of the countries in the Middle East and South Asia cut off finance to terrorists.

**Increased use of drones.** The use of drones or Predator unmanned aerial vehicles carrying weapons to attack terrorists or terrorist installations has become a focal point of the Obama strategy in Pakistan and Afghanistan. More [CIA drone attacks](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CIA_drone_attacks) have been conducted under President Obama than under President George W. Bush. While the ethics of drone attacks have been challenged by the Pakistani Government, they clearly provide a method of neutralizing terrorists without a military presence.

**Renditions.** In the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the US was criticized for renditions or secret abductions of suspected terrorists to third party countries for interrogation. Suspects purportedly were brought to secret prisons operated by the CIA and tortured. Renditions have been an effective tool in capturing international criminals for many years. Carlos the Jackal, the infamous terrorist and assassin, was captured by rendition. The Obama Administration has not ruled out the use of renditions. To ensure that renditions are effective and do not violate human rights, there must be strict standards regarding holding locations (no secret prisons), conduct of interrogation, evidence against the suspect and how long a suspect can be held without being released or tried. The prospects of abuse are reduced by an approval through a classified court or external review proceeding prior to executing the rendition.

**Raids on terrorist bases, safe havens and training camps.** When terrorist bases and training camps are located on foreign soil, governments are encouraged to take action to destroy those sites. Recently, the Governments of Pakistan and Yemen have taken action against terrorists. In the event that foreign governments are unable or unwilling to take action against terrorists, the US would be prepared to do so. This means re-orienting military missions and capabilities from establishing strongholds in places like Baghdad, Kabul and Kandahar to launching quick strikes at terrorist sites. Since any military strike on another sovereign nation's territory brings international political fallout, US intelligence and military officials must be certain about the target and in sync prior to action.

**Development aid.** Osama Bin Laden is the exception to the rule. Most terrorists are not from wealthy Saudi business families. Generally, terrorists are disaffected politically and economically.[ Note from Craig: Since the 1980s that I'm aware of studies of terrorism, including those conducted on the 9/11 terrorists, Hamas today in Palestine, and even suicide bombers, agree that that individual terrorists are generally middle class and better educated than the normal population. This doesn't mean that economic deprivation in the environment might not be relevant to their complaints, but it is not generally the poor who are rising up and committing terrorist acts. I also have comments on the efficacy of development aid, but this can be discussed later.) Providing aid to improve economic opportunity and political life in terrorist breeding grounds may reduce the sense of despair and incentive to commit acts of terror.

It should be noted that this strategy focuses on countering terror from foreign sources.