New Challenges to U.S. Counterterrorism Efforts

An Assessment of the Current Terrorist Threat

BRIAN MICHAEL JENKINS

RAND
CORPORATION

Brian Michael Jenkins[1]
The RAND Corporation

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The United States confronts a more diverse terrorist threat in 2012 than it has in the past. Al Qaeda, still our principal concern, has exploited the turmoil created by the Arab uprisings to make tactical advances and open new fronts. In addition, several incidents in the past year suggest a resurgence of Iranian-sponsored terrorism. Mexico faces what some analysts have called a "criminal insurgency" by the country's drug cartels, which could expose the United States to the kind of savagery seen in that country. The global economic crisis has spawned mass protests. These are legitimate expressions of popular discontent, but they attract violence-prone anarchists and may generate their own violent fringe groups. Anti-federal-government sentiments, a continuing current in American history, have become more virulent, fueled in part by economic dislocation that transcends the current economic crisis, deep national divisions, and the rancorous partisanship that characterizes contemporary political debate.

This is a catalogue of potential dangers, not a forecast of many dooms. Later in this testimony, I will review the post-9/11 terrorist attacks and plots in order to draw some broad conclusions about the targets, tactics, and scale of today's terrorist violence.

Al Qaeda Remains Our Principal Concern

Nearly 11 years after 9/11, there is still a remarkable lack of consensus among analysts about the current threat posed by al Qaeda and, in particular, about whether al Qaeda is near defeat or remains a significant threat.[1] In part, the differences reflect the fact that al Qaeda is many things at once—an ideology of violent jihad, a universe of like-minded fanatics, a global terrorist

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[2] This testimony is available for free download at http://www.rand.org/pubs/testimonies/CT377html.

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enterprise—and it operates on a number of fronts in both the physical and virtual worlds. It therefore must be assessed in its different dimensions. Differences also arise over interpretation of available evidence. And there are differing views of al Qaeda's future trajectory and about the level of risk America can tolerate as a "postwar" norm.

We have made undeniable progress against al Qaeda. Its operational capabilities have been degraded. Its central leadership has been decimated. It has been forced to operate in a more vigilant, more hostile environment. Its ability to carry out another 9/11-scale (or greater) attack has been much reduced. Apart from the tragedy at Fort Hood, al Qaeda has not been able to launch or inspire a significant successful terrorist attack in the West since 2005.

Today's al Qaeda is more decentralized, more dependent on its regional affiliates and like-minded groups and on its ability to inspire and activate homegrown terrorists. Its historic core has been pounded. Its remaining operatives on the Afghan-Pakistan border must devote most of their attention to survival. Their fate depends on the fortunes of the Afghan Taliban. If the Taliban are able to expand their territorial control and political influence in Afghanistan, al Qaeda will find some measure of sanctuary, if not immunity from continued U.S. attacks.

U.S. forces in Afghanistan should be significantly reduced to a level that is indefinitely sustainable. This will entail risks for our counterterrorist efforts. Whether the Afghan national forces will be able to contain the Taliban as foreign forces withdraw remains uncertain. Thus far, the Taliban have shown no willingness to abandon their historic relationship with al Qaeda as part of a political settlement. It will be more difficult to continue the pursuit of al Qaeda in the area after U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan.[2]

Al Qaeda Exploiting the Arab Spring

Al Qaeda poses a new array of threats in Africa and the Middle East. Surprised by the Arab Spring, al Qaeda then made the undeserved claim that its 9/11 attacks had, in fact, set in motion the events that led to the Arab uprisings. At the same time, al Qaeda positioned itself to take advantage of the political and economic disillusion that will inevitably follow. Meanwhile, it is exploiting tactical opportunities.

The chaos in Yemen has allowed al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, along with its local jihadist allies, to strengthen its hold on portions of the country. This branch has become the principal source of attacks on the United States. Egypt's domestic political distractions have enabled local smuggling rings and radicalized Bedouin tribesmen to operate more freely in the Sinai. The latter

have formed Ansar al-Jihad, which, although not yet a formal branch of al Qaeda, has pledged its loyalty to al Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri. Al Qaeda veterans from Iraq appear to be supporting a terrorist bombing campaign in Syria. Although al Qaeda militants have little direct influence in Libya, they gained combat experience fighting the Qaddafi regime in that country and possibly acquired some of Qaddafi's arsenal. Local jihadists connected with al Qaeda have seized control in northern Mali, and al Qaeda is said to have links with Boko Haram extremists in northern Nigeria.

Al Qaeda finds fertile ground in failed or failing states where it can attach itself to local insurgencies. It may provide only modest material assistance and operational advice, but the diffusion of al Qaeda-affiliated and connected movements in the region demonstrates that its brand name still carries prestige.

Al Qaeda's presence in a particular part of the world does not always present an immediate terrorist threat to the United States. The local contests where al Qaeda can make a connection or purchase a foothold are likely to remain local. And while local insurgents may welcome al Qaeda assistance, this does not necessarily mean that they embrace al Qaeda's war on the "far enemy." The longer-term threat is that al Qaeda will be able to deepen relationships that ultimately provide it with new safe havens, operational bases, and experienced veterans for international terrorist operations, which remain al Qaeda's hallmark.

In this context, large-scale military intervention and ambitious American efforts to fix failing states are likely to be counterproductive. They are long, costly, and no matter how experienced and well-trained in counterinsurgency American forces are, their presence will be seen to confirm al Qaeda's allegations of infidel aggression, while necessary military operations inevitably will provoke local resentment. The United States must develop counterterrorist strategies that enable it to avoid major commitments of American forces.

Drone strikes have disrupted al Qaeda's command and communications, and must remain a component, not the entirety of U.S. strategy. Small contingents of Special Forces, not acting exclusively as commandos, but in their more traditional role, can work with local government and irregular forces to deny al Qaeda elements sanctuary. Any such mission must be sustainable for many years.

Al Qaeda's Failing Campaign to Market Its Brand of Jihad in the U.S.

Unable to directly attack the West, al Qaeda has embraced a do-it-yourself strategy, exhorting volunteers to do whatever they can wherever they are. But this online recruiting effort thus far has failed to inspire a domestic terrorist campaign. Between 9/11 and the end of 2011, there were 96 cases involving 192 U.S. citizens or residents who were charged with providing material support to jihadist groups, joining or attempting to join jihadist fronts abroad, or, more seriously, plotting to carry out terrorist attacks in the United States. (This excludes the activities of Hamas and Hezbollah, actions of individuals radicalized abroad who came here to carry out attacks, and cases that are not clearly jihadist.)[3]

It is a very low yield, suggesting that al Qaeda's ideology has very limited appeal in America's Muslim community. As a marketing campaign for terrorism, it is failing. There is no evidence of an organized jihadist underground. Decisions to join jihad appear to be highly personal, not community-supported. Embracing al Qaeda's violent jihad apparently has become a way to express individual discontents.

The year 2009 saw a sharp uptick in the overall number of cases, the number of terrorist plots, and the number of individuals arrested, but this is partly explained by the increased recruiting of Somali Americans following Ethiopia's invasion of Somalia, and by the culmination of investigations of activities going back to the middle of the decade. The number of individuals arrested declined in 2010 and again in 2011.

Of the 37 identified jihadist plots to carry out terrorist attacks in the United States, 34 were thwarted by the authorities. The majority of the plots involved a single individual. Most of the plots were immature and amateurish. Although most of them involved bombings, only two individuals attempted to build devices. Only two attacks resulted in fatalities; both of them were carried out by lone gunmen.

A Resurgence of Iranian-Sponsored Terrorism

Jihadists are not the only terrorist concern. Growing tensions with Iran could result in an escalation of Iranian-sponsored terrorist attacks on American targets abroad or in the United States, as recent events attest. In February 2012, Iranian operatives were linked to terrorist plots or attempts targeting Israeli diplomats in India, Georgia, and Thailand. In March, authorities in Azerbaijan arrested 22 Azerbaijani citizens who had been hired and trained by Iran to carry out

terrorist attacks on the American and Israeli embassies, as well as Western companies. This was third set of arrests of Iranian-trained agents in Azerbaijan since the beginning of the year. In July, Kenyan authorities reportedly uncovered another Iranian plot to attack Israeli, British, American, or Saudi targets—Iran's principal foes—in Mombasa.

Finally, in October 2011, U.S. authorities uncovered an Iranian plot to assassinate the ambassador of Saudi Arabia in Washington. Killing a Saudi diplomat on American soil in an attack that could also have killed American citizens would have enormous consequences. The United States must recalibrate Tehran's willingness to take risks.

Several factors may explain this apparent recklessness. Radical elements may have acquired greater influence among Iran's ruling clerics. Iran may feel obliged to retaliate for what it sees as Israeli and American efforts to slow its nuclear program, not only through sanctions but also through sabotage of its facilities and assassinations of its nuclear scientists. To the extent that Iran's leaders perceive these efforts as a campaign aimed not just at preventing the country from developing nuclear weapons but, rather, at bringing down the Islamic Republic, they may reckon that they have little to lose.

The future threat posed by Iranian-sponsored terrorism will be contingent upon Iran's calculations of risk. The current shadow war could escalate further if Iran thinks military attack by either Israel or the United States is inevitable and imminent or, obviously, if hostilities begin. Under such circumstances, Iran could launch attacks on U.S. military and civilian targets in the region, including oil facilities and shipping. It could also attempt to carry out a strategic strike (a 9/11-scale attack) or something greater on U.S. soil. And it could rely on its own operatives, try to activate Hezbollah's international networks, or conceivably assist other groups, including al Qaeda, to escalate their terrorist campaigns. Hezbollah has criminal networks in the United States, primarily engaged in fraud and smuggling, which remit a portion of their proceeds to the organization and possibly could be converted into terrorist cells.

Violence South of the Border

Mexico is hardly a failed state. It boasts of a tumultuous democracy and a vibrant economy closely linked to that of the United States. There is no threat of civil war. Its government is not about to fall. But this modern, sophisticated state cohabits the country with rich and powerful criminal cartels that wage war on one another and challenge any authority that gets in their way, creating in effect a "criminal insurgency."[4] For now, the cartels are interested in the profit that

comes with territorial dominance, but they are investing their profits in the legitimate economy and eventually will seek political power.

Mexico's violence is notable not merely for the scale of killing but for its deliberately savage quality. Kidnappings, mass killings, and mass graves are common. Victims are brutally tortured and often beheaded. Messages are sent pinned to corpses. The purpose is terror, but the violence exceeds what is required to eliminate rivals and intimidate authorities. A subculture of barbarity has emerged in parts of the country where violence is normalized, even celebrated. To crack the power of these criminal barons and restore government authority when police were unable to, Mexico's president sent in the army. The military has made progress against the cartels, but the violence worsened. In the eyes of the Mexican public, the high level of violence itself has become the issue, not the criminality that generates it.

The new president-elect has promised to address the violence by bringing the army back to its barracks and deploying a more effective police force. Building that force, however, will require significant resources and take time. In the interim, some fear that peace can be purchased only through local accommodations with at least some of the cartels, which would not displease those who blame Mexico's violence on the Yankees' insatiable appetite for illegal drugs. An accommodation strategy also raises opportunities for corruption, such as existed in the old days when high-ranking Mexican officials allegedly kept the peace by allocating smuggling routes while taking a share of the profits. Supporters of the new president say there is no longer any tolerance for that kind of behavior, and anyway, the cartels have become too powerful and too violent to be easily kept in check.

U.S. officials fear that the northern tier of Mexican states will remain a chaotic, violent, ungovernable badlands abutting our southern border, pushing vast quantities of drugs and thousands of refugees north. The cartels themselves will come north as they link with domestic Hispanic gangs to expand their criminal empires into U.S. territory. This will create competition among trafficking networks, which could lead to the kind of savagery seen in Mexico. It will also bring the cartels into direct confrontation with U.S. law enforcement, which they will try to suborn with vast sums of money. Failing that, they will likely not hesitate to employ the same violent tactics that they have used to intimidate police in Mexico. That transforms the threat in Mexico from a matter of law enforcement to a national security problem. A bigger, better wall is not the total solution.

Intelligence Remains a Crucial Component of U.S. Efforts

Much of the success in preventing major terrorist operations in the West for the past seven years is owed to the unprecedented worldwide cooperation among intelligence services and law enforcement organizations that has been achieved since 9/11. However, the continuation of this cooperation is not guaranteed and may begin to fray as the imminent danger of a major terrorist strike recedes and other issues compete for attention and resources.

The jihadist threat itself has become murkier as it blends with Islamist politics in countries affected by the Arab uprisings. Counterterrorism is no longer a priority for countries confronted with the daunting task of constructing new political institutions while meeting pressing demands for economic development and rapid job creation. In some Middle Eastern countries, cooperation requires working with governments that many see as repressive while in principle supporting those struggling to bring about greater democracy. In others, it requires cooperation with new governments that represent Islamist tendencies and have very different ideas about terrorism. The newly elected president of Egypt, for example, has made it his first order of business to bring about the release of Abdel Rahman, the so-called "Blind Sheik," imprisoned in the United States for his role in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing and subsequent terrorist plots.

To the extent that intelligence from abroad becomes harder to obtain, the burden on domestic intelligence collection increases. This is always a delicate undertaking in a democracy, especially one where citizens tend to view federal authority with suspicion. Although not optimized into a coherent national system, America's domestic intelligence efforts have achieved remarkable success in uncovering terrorist plots and preventing attacks.

These intelligence efforts are now under assault, driven in part by sincere concerns about the protection of civil liberties but also by personal, ideological, and political agendas in both Muslim and non-Muslim communities, and fueled by organizational rivalries. The timing exploits the greater sense of security felt by many. It is legitimate to review such efforts—no reviews thus far have found any illegal conduct, but dismantling the intelligence effort, which is the politically correct goal of some critics, would be dangerous..

The Return of Anarchism

The continuing global economic crisis has led to worldwide demonstrations and occupations protesting against capitalist greed, government bailouts, and reductions in social spending and other austerity measures to reduce government deficits. These are legitimate protests, not acts of

terrorism. However, they attract violence-prone anarchists who see them as opportunities to escalate confrontations with police and foment riots, which provide diversions and cover for direct attacks on symbols of the capitalist system, which the anarchists see as the source of society's ills.

Some carry on their campaigns beyond the venues of protest. In Europe since 2008, anarchists have carried out bombings, arson attacks, and acts of sabotage and have inflicted other damage in Greece, Italy, Germany, and France. Investigators in New York have linked anarchists to a series of small bombings in the city in 2005, 2007, and 2008.

Five anarchists were arrested in March 2012 for allegedly plotting to blow up a major bridge in Ohio. Initially, the conspirators had considered attacks on financial institutions in Cleveland to coincide with the Occupy Cleveland protest, but they later decided on attacking the bridge. In May 2012, three men were arrested in Chicago for planning arson attacks on police stations during the NATO Summit protests.

Anti-capitalist violence may not come solely from those identified as anarchists. Radicalized protesters, frustrated by their inability to bring about fundamental change may also take the field. In the 1960s, the mass protests, driven mainly by opposition to the Vietnam War but also incorporating other social issues, spawned on their extremist fringe tiny groups determined to carry on the struggle with bombing campaigns that persisted into the 1980s.

Potential Anti-Federal-Government Violence

The inclusion of anti-federal-government extremists in an assessment of the terrorist threat may seem controversial. Our focus here is not on a single specific group, but on the nebula of shared ideologies and beliefs from which terrorist conspiracies have emerged.[5]

Hostility toward the federal government is nothing new in America. Its currents can be traced back to the first days of the American republic. Over the years, it has involved issues of taxation, states rights, slavery, segregation, religious beliefs, and gun control. Anti-government extremists demonize the federal government, seeing it as a tyranny controlled by hostile elements determined to disarm and destroy any domestic resistance to its accumulation of power.

The extremists view themselves as "patriots," standing up against the government as American revolutionaries did in 1776, or in some cases, as heirs of the Confederate States in the Civil War.

The number of groups promoting such ideas has increased in recent years, although it is difficult to estimate the number of people who subscribe to such beliefs. Several factors may explain the growth.

One is the state of economy. Hard times increase hostility. But this time, the discontents may transcend eventual economic recovery. Technological advance and increased global competition, combined with failures in the education system, have caused a significant group of Americans without advanced education to face bleak economic futures. They confront the prospect of permanent unemployment or low-paying jobs at best. This economic decline of a significant portion of the population coincides with the immense accumulation of wealth by a few, creating a deep divide, with what many see as a corrupt government clearly on the side of big finance.

Demographic shifts play a role as well, especially as America's white population in several decades will become a minority. Immigration further fuels nativist instincts and hostility toward a federal government, which is seen as unwilling or unable to stem the tide. Many feel they have lost *their* country.

The cause of greatest anger, however, is the federal government's perceived tyranny, which is expressed in taxes, gun control, health-care mandates, pat-downs at airport security checkpoints, and other impositions. These blossom into paranoid ideas that the government has plans to disarm the population or round up dissident patriots and intern them in concentration camps secretly being built by the Department of Homeland Security. But some concerns have a basis in fact. Measures passed to enhance U.S. efforts against terrorism, such as increased electronic surveillance and confirmation of the government's authority to indefinitely detain U.S. citizens, cause deep apprehension, which is not confined to anti-government crazies. These measures are seen as tools that will eventually be used to suppress domestic dissent.

Growing political partisanship in the United States, along with the injudicious rhetoric it has generated, does not help. At worst, it delegitimizes political opponents and fuels the idea that politics is war. At best, it denigrates all political leadership.

Anti-government extremists have engaged in acts of violence, most dramatically in the 1995 bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City, which killed 168 people—the worst incident of terrorism on U.S soil until 9/11. Authorities have uncovered a handful of more recent plots. For now, however, anti-government extremists are content to talk about justified armed resistance and the coming civil war. Nevertheless, the causes of hostility run deep and reflect long-term

trends. The potential for violence is there, and if realized, would represent a far greater threat to the republic than al Qaeda or any other foreign terrorist group.

Terrorist Targeting

It is an axiom of terrorism that terrorists can attack anything, anywhere, anytime, while governments cannot protect everything, everywhere, all the time. Finite resources require decisions about allocation. A threat assessment, therefore, must identify not only the groups that may carry out terrorist attacks but what they may attack and how.

Jihadist training manuals urge attacks on targets of iconic or "emotional" value, such as New York's World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and Mumbai's Taj Mahal Hotel; attacks that jihadists think will cause economic disruption, such as attacks on stock exchanges or banks; and attacks aimed at concentrations of people that will bring high body counts, such as a tourist-filled Times Square, crowded train stations, Portland's Christmas tree lighting ceremony. Body count often seems to be the most important criterion.

A review of terrorist attacks and foiled terrorist plots since 9/11 shows that jihadist terrorists have contemplated a wide range of mostly unprotected targets, including government and commercial buildings; churches and synagogues; restaurants and nightclubs; shopping malls and markets; hotels and tourist sites; power stations, tank farms, gas stations, and pipelines; bridges and tunnels; subways, trains, buses, and ferries; public officials and those deemed by fanatics to have offended Islam; police and military personnel, especially those readily accessible, such as recruiting officers; and public gatherings.

Among these, government buildings predominate along with public surface transportation, followed by hotels and tourist sites, religious institutions, commercial buildings, and aviation.

Terrorists remain obsessed with attacking commercial aviation. With improved passenger screening, locked and armored cockpit doors, armed air marshals, armed pilots, and, most importantly, airline passengers no longer willing to remain passive bystanders but more likely to assault would-be hijackers, terrorist hijackings may no longer be viable, but sabotage of aircraft with concealed explosives remains a favored terrorist tactic.

Since 9/11, terrorists have made eight attempts to smuggle bombs on board commercial aircraft. Four of the attempts involved planes flying to the United States (the shoe bomber in 2001, the underwear bomber in 2009, and the two bombs aboard cargo aircraft in 2010). There also were

several thwarted plots, including the 2006 Heathrow plot, the recovery by an undercover agent of an improved underwear bomb in 2012, and the recent discovery of another plot in the United Kingdom to sabotage a U.S. airliner. Aviation security remains a matter of national security.[6]

While terrorists apparently consider airliners to be their gold-medal target, public surface transportation offers easier access and concentrations of people in confined environments, enhancing the effects of explosives and unconventional weapons. Surface transportation has become a terrorist killing field. Between 9/11 and the end of 2011, there were 75 terrorist attacks on airplanes and airports worldwide, resulting in 157 deaths. During the same period, there were 1,804 terrorist attacks on trains and buses, resulting in more than 3,900 fatalities.[7]

Most of the attacks on surface transportation resulted in only handfuls of deaths and therefore attracted little attention, but 11 of the attacks caused 50 or more fatalities, and three resulted in nearly 200 deaths each—in all, the equivalent of seven airline crashes. The solution is not the implementation of an aviation security model on surface transportation, which would be too expensive and would be unworkable because of the huge volumes of passengers. Other security approaches must be developed, including greater participation by staff and riders themselves. Some level of risk is inevitable.

Anarchists in the 19th century assassinated political leaders but also did not blink at blowing up bourgeoisie-filled cafes. Their ideological descendants have shied away from indiscriminate attacks and instead have focused on symbols of capitalism and political oppression. Corporate offices predominate, but a recent anarchist plot involved blowing up a bridge in Ohio, demonstrating that terrorist targeting can be idiosyncratic and capricious.

Anti-federal-government extremists attack government targets that they see as symbols of tyranny. The 1995 bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City is an example. But they also have contemplated indiscriminate attacks on the civilian population, for example, blowing up large propane tanks or dispersing ricin in populated areas.

Terrorist Tactics

Bombings have remained the most common mode of attack for all terrorist groups since the emergence of contemporary terrorism in the late 1960s. Large vehicle-borne explosive devices predominated through the first half of the post-9/11 decade as al Qaeda sought to carry out continued spectaculars, then declined. Improved intelligence, government crackdowns, and increased vigilance over explosives and chemical ingredients made it more difficult to amass the

large amount of explosives required, at least outside of conflict zones. Vehicle-borne bombs continue to be the norm in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. In the West, the vehicle-borne devices have been seen mostly in foiled plots and FBI stings.

Jihadists began exploring devices that use readily available flammables, for example, in the 2007 attempts in London and the 2009 attempt at Times Square, but they encountered technical difficulties in creating a blast. They have also employed smaller devices that could be easily delivered and concealed or carried on a person and detonated in suicide bombings. These appear in the majority of the post-9/11 plots uncovered in the United States, although none succeeded. American jihadists have shown little inclination to carry out suicide attacks, although American Somalis blew themselves up in Somalia.

Assaults carried out by heavily armed gunmen account for comparatively few attacks. Ten trained attackers armed with automatic weapons, ample ammunition, grenades, and small explosive devices terrorized the city of Mumbai in 2008, ultimately killing 162 people.[8] Since 9/11, the only two jihadist attacks causing fatalities in the United States were carried out by lone gunmen.

Given the availability of guns in the United States, it is surprising that jihadists have not used this tactic more often. Homicidal rages by mentally disturbed or temporarily crazed gunmen regularly illustrate the possibilities, but American jihadists have shown little inclination to go down shooting. Perhaps this is due to the fact that they are unwilling to participate in any mission that ends in certain death, or they may be put off by the association of this type of attack with crazy behavior as opposed to martyrdom.

Examination of unrealized or foiled terrorist plots offers glimpses into terrorist ambitions. Those plots are more ambitious than the attacks that have succeeded. For example, since 9/11, authorities have reported seven plots to crash hijacked airliners into targets. None of these got much beyond the thinking stage.[9]

Eight jihadist plots early in the past decade involved chemical weapons or ricin, reflecting the newly acquired skills of a handful of terrorists who trained with al Qaeda. None of these plots succeeded, and chemical and biological weapons have largely disappeared from jihadist plotting, although anti-government extremists still contemplate their use.

Al Qaeda's central leadership clearly had nuclear ambitions and made an effort to acquire fissile material and technical expertise. However, there is no evidence that they acquired or even came close to acquiring nuclear weapons, and at some point in the last decade, the organization's

nuclear weapons project turned from an acquisition effort to a propaganda program calculated to excite its followers and frighten its foes.[10]

Estimating the Scale of Terrorist Violence

The last decades of the 20th century saw a steady escalation in terrorist violence, from incidents involving scores of fatalities to incidents involving hundreds of fatalities, culminating in the thousands killed in the 9/11 attacks. It was natural in the circumstances to view the 9/11 attacks not as an anomaly but as an indicator of worse to come. Now, more than ten years later, that view is being revised.

The 9/11 attacks, however, left deep psychological scars and continue to have an insidious effect on analysis of the terrorist threat. The United States has adopted the debilitating habit of catastrophizing every terrorist threat. Terrorism analysts fear failure of imagination more than they fear causing unnecessary alarm. Competition for limited resources, especially in the current fiscal environment, encourages exaggeration of favored threats. And it is difficult to mobilize popular and political support for action without a worst-case scenario. Without asserting any predictive value, it is nonetheless useful to look at what actually has occurred.

Before 9/11, the bloodiest terrorist incidents involved deaths in the low hundreds. These included incidents of airline sabotage or very large truck bombs. Since 9/11, the worst terrorist attacks, outside of war zones in Iraq and Afghanistan, have ascended to almost the same level. Terrorists achieved these casualty levels with large vehicle bombs or coordinated multiple bombings. Outside of Iraq and Afghanistan, there were fewer than 20 such attacks. Foiled terrorist plots, had they succeeded, also would have caused casualties on this scale.

Attacks with smaller improvised explosive devices involve both single and multiple bombings. Multiple bombings can be deadlier than attacks with single large, vehicle-borne devices.

Since 9/11, terrorists have attempted on a number of occasions to bring down airliners with bombs smuggled on board. They succeeded in bringing down two planes in Russia, killing 88 persons. Had the shoe bomber succeeded in bringing down the plane in 2001, 197 people would have been killed; 290 persons were on board the flight targeted by the underwear bomber in 2009. The 2006 Heathrow plot envisioned bringing down several wide-bodied jets flying across the Atlantic, which could easily have pushed fatalities past a thousand.

Armed assaults appear to be the deadliest tactic, primarily reflecting the 2008 attack on Mumbai. The median number of fatalities in such attacks, however, is seven.

On the basis of these admittedly rough calculations, keeping terrorists off of airplanes, preventing them from amassing large quantities of explosives for vehicle-borne bombs, or assembling conspiracies large enough to field multiple bombers or gangs of shooters will deprive them of the means they have used to kill hundreds.

That leaves smaller-scale attacks—tiny bombing conspiracies or individual shooters—with potential fatalities in the low tens. These are difficult to intercept, although thus far, the authorities have achieved a near perfect record. Whether this level of risk is tolerable is a question of public reaction.

Common Will and Common Purpose

Terror is just as much an enemy as the terrorists who try to create it. Our reactions to terrorism are part of any assessment. America has come through the dark shadow of 9/11, but as a nation, are we stronger?

Individual acts of courage inspire us, but Americans remain anxious rather than confident in the country's ability to survive the threats we face. Fear-mongers and doomsayers still find a receptive audience.

Instead of our traditional self-reliance, Americans look too much to government to protect them, in part the reflection of rhetoric that, rather than involving us in a national effort, tells us that as individuals we can do nothing beyond remaining vigilant.

Americans have come to hold unrealistic expectations about security, believing that risk can be abolished. We are too ready to seek someone to blame when security fails.

Instead of the stoicism needed for a long fight, Americans remain vulnerable to overreaction. A terrorist attack of even modest scale could provoke paroxysms of panic.

Whatever one thinks about the wisdom, or the folly, of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the sacrifices of war have been borne unequally. Our sense of community has eroded.

Terrorists did not create America's anxieties. Terrorism acted as their condenser. Nor will America's homeland be secured in the mountain passes of Afghanistan, the Arabian Peninsula, or the sands of the Sahara. Our commonwealth, our common defense, will come only from the recovery our own sense of common will and common purpose.

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[1] Brian Michael Jenkins, "Is the War on Terror Over? Not Yet," *National Journal* National Security Experts Blog, April 30, 2012.

[2] Brian Michael Jenkins, *Al Qaeda in Its Third Decade: Irreversible Decline or Imminent Victory?* Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation, 2012; see also Brian Michael Jenkins and John Paul Godges (eds.), *The Long Shadow of 9/11: America's Response to Terrorism,* Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation, 2011, and; Seth G. Jones, *Hunting in the Shadows: The Pursuit of al Qa'ida since 9/11,* New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012.

[3] Brian Michael Jenkins, *Stray Dogs and Virtual Armies: Radicalization and Recruitment to Jihadist Terrorism in the United States Since 9/11,* Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation, 2011; see also Emma Disley, *Individual Disengagement from al Qaeda- Influenced Groups,* Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation, 2011.

[4] John P. Sullivan, "From Drug Wars to Criminal Insurgency: Mexican Cartels, Criminal Enclaves and Criminal Insurgency in Mexico and Central America. Implications for Global Security" Paris: *Fondation Maison des sciences de l'homme.* No. 9, April 2012. See also: Brian Michael Jenkins "Could Mexico Fail?" *Homeland Security Today,* Vol. 6, No. 2, February 2009.

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[7] These statistics are taken from the Mineta Transportation Institute's Database of Attacks on Surface Transportation. See also: Brian Michael Jenkins and Joseph Trella, *Carnage Interrupted: An Analysis of Fifteen Terrorist Plots Against Public Surface Transportation,* San Jose, CA: Mineta Transportation Institute, 2012.

[8] Angel Rabasa, et.al. *The Lessons of Mumbai,* Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation, 2009.

[9] Brian Michael Jenkins, *Unconquerable Nation: Knowing Our Enemy, Strengthening Ourselves,* Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation, 2006.

[10] Brian Michael Jenkins, *Will Terrorists Go Nuclear?* Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2008.