Global Jihad
Does a terrorist movement threaten the West?

By Peter Katel

Introduction

President Bush declared in early October that the war in Iraq is a key front in the war with terrorist jihadists. But the president's critics insist that the war actually serves as a recruiting tool for jihadists. Since the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks that made Osama bin Laden and the al Qaeda terrorist organization notorious — and celebrated — worldwide, jihadists have struck more than 107 times in more than a dozen countries — a figure that doesn't include hundreds of attacks on civilians and American soldiers in Iraq. The global terror offensive points to the existence of a unifying jihadist ideology. But much is unknown about the terrorists. Are their goals political or strictly religious? Do they operate under a unified command or through a loose network of organizations and cells? Meanwhile, evidence is mounting that al Qaeda remains strong enough to have played a role in the subway and bus bombings in London on July 7.

Overview

The images picked up by security cameras at London's Kings Cross subway station showed four seemingly typical commuters — young men carrying backpacks.

Only in retrospect do the video shots seem ominous. They turned up after the men were identified as the suicide bombers who killed themselves and 52 people on three London subways and a bus last July 7.

One of the four was schoolteacher Mohammed Sidique Khan, who was born in England and raised there by his Pakistani Muslim immigrant parents. In early September, the Qatar-based Arabic-language station Al Jazeera ran a chilling, posthumous tape of Khan. In a distinctive Yorkshire accent, he cited “atrocities against my people” and declared: “We are at war, and I am a soldier . . . . Our words are dead until we give them life with our blood.”

The terrorists cloak their acts in the mantle of jihad — holy struggle — but their precise goals, and the nature of their organization or organizations, are murky. “Unlike the Cold War, here you don't know who the enemy is,” says Magnus Ranstorp, director of the Center for Asymmetric Threat Studies at the Swedish National Defense College. “The enemy can be entire societies or sympathizers; and weapons can be low-tech and inexpensive.”
Forensics investigators seek clues in the bombing of four commuter trains in Madrid on March 11, 2004, killing 190 people and injuring more than 1,000. Moroccan jihadists carried out the attack in an apparent effort to force the withdrawal of Spanish troops from Iraq. Since the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States, jihadists have carried out at least 107 attacks worldwide.

On Oct. 1, three suicide bombers killed 26 people on the Indonesian island of Bali — two years after a similar but far more lethal attack there. Anti-terrorism authorities around the world are studying the possible relationship between two Malaysian suspects and Osama bin Laden's al Qaeda terrorist network, considered the world's first jihadist group dedicated to killing Americans and other Westerners. The two suspected bomb makers once may have belonged to Jemaah Islamiyah, a Southeast Asian Muslim separatist group.

The recent Bali bombings were only the latest in a steady stream of attacks and attempted attacks — mostly suicide bombings — both before and following the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the United States, which killed 2,936 people. The attacks reflect the unshaken determination of Muslim terrorists around the world to kill Americans and their allies — with the stated aim of establishing theocracies in the name of Islam in Muslim lands.

“Covert and open Islamic groups have been trying for decades to establish the Islamic state, and so far they have made no progress. . . . Yesterday, we did not dream of a state; today we established states and they fall. Tomorrow, Allah willing, a state will arise and will not fall,” an al Qaeda online magazine said last year.

Al Qaeda's top strategist, Ayman al-Zawahiri, has apparently developed that vision into a military strategy. On Oct. 11, U.S. intelligence authorities released what they said was a letter from al-Zawahiri to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the top jihadist leader in Iraq. “The victory of Islam will never take place until a Muslim state is established . . . in the heart of the Islamic world, specifically in the Levant, Egypt and the neighboring states of the Peninsula and Iraq,” he wrote. With his eye on that prize, al-Zawahiri added that regional conflicts in Chechnya, Afghanistan and elsewhere are “just the groundwork” for the full-scale confrontation in the Arab heartland.

In addition to the hundreds of assaults on Americans and civilians in war-torn Iraq and Afghanistan as well as in Israel and the Palestinian territories, more than 100 major post-9/11 terrorist incidents have occurred in Pakistan, Turkey, Indonesia, Spain, Great Britain, Morocco, Kenya, Chechnya and Russia. (continued below)
# Inside the Global Jihadist Network

Osama bin Laden’s al Qaeda organization and 12 other mostly regional terrorist groups are currently active, according to a Century Foundation study. They seek to establish Muslim theocracies and view Western powers as enemies of Islam. Anti-Soviet mujahedeen who fought in Afghanistan founded most, and many retain links to al Qaeda. Jihadists’ ranks have grown significantly since 9/11, the study says.

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<th>Group</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tr>
<td>Al Qaeda (the Base)</td>
<td>Northwest Pakistan</td>
<td>Muslim rule in Muslim lands and all non-Muslims expelled; has declared war on the U.S. and other Western countries.</td>
<td>Founded in late 1980s; led by Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri. Finances and trains jihadi movements. Conducted 1998 attacks on U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania; 2000 attack on the C.S.S. Cole and the 9/11/01 U.S. attacks.</td>
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<td>Abu Sayyaf Group (Bearer of the Sword)</td>
<td>Malaysia, southern Philippines</td>
<td>An Islamic state in Southeast Asia.</td>
<td>Founded in 1991, split off from Moro National Liberation Front; led by Khadafi Janjalani. Responsible for more than 100 kidnappings, bombings, grenade attacks on Christian targets and foreigners in its first four years. Recently been taken over by criminals. Beheaded several Christians.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jemaah Islamiya (JI)</td>
<td>Malaysia, Indonesia</td>
<td>An Islamic state in Southeast Asia by 2025, encompassing Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, southern Philippines and southern Thailand</td>
<td>Founded in 1993; led by Azahari Husin, Noordin Mohammad Top. Has several thousand members, links to other jihadists runs terrorist training camps and Muslim boarding schools throughout region; receives support from al Qaeda and may be part of al Qaeda. JI and al Qaeda planners were apparently preparing a 9/11 “second strike” on U.S. West Coast with planes hijacked in Southeast Asia. New JI leaders appear even more committed to jihad than their predecessors.</td>
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<td>Al-Itihad Al-Islami (AI)</td>
<td>Somalia, Ethiopia, Kenya</td>
<td>An Islamic state in Horn of Africa.</td>
<td>Founded in early 1990s in Somalia; led by Hassan Abdallah Hersi al-Turki. Received weapons, funding from bin Laden in late 1990s. Attacks military forces in eastern Ethiopia. May have helped al Qaeda bomb a Kenyan hotel, attempt to shoot down an airliner carrying Israeli tourists in 2002 and attack an Ethiopian Kenyan hotel in 2003. May be preparing to attack ships near Horn of Africa.</td>
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<td>Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC)</td>
<td>Algeria, Mali, Libya, Niger Mauritania, and Chad</td>
<td>Topple Algerian government; attack Western targets.</td>
<td>Founded with bin Laden’s help in early 1990s; led by Ya’qub Jawadi, Abu-Anasr and Haydt Abu “The Doctor” Doha. Has 300-700 members in Algeria and Europe; participated in killing 100,000 Algerians in the 1990s. Recruits heavily among Algerian teens, particularly in France, and facilitates al Qaeda funding and recruiting; suspected of helping al Qaeda establish a ricin network in Europe.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sahifiya Jihadiya</td>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>Establish a Wahhabi government in Morocco.</td>
<td>Founded in 1990s by former Afghan mujahedeen, led by Abdel-Ramim Meati, an explosives expert, and al Qaeda operative. Recruits in poor Moroccan suburbs; receives direction and funding from al Qaeda. In May 2003, launched suicide bombing attacks in Casablanca — including the Belgian consulate, a Jewish-owned restaurant and a Spanish social club — killing 43.</td>
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Terrorism experts disagree on whether the world's far-flung jihadists belong to a single global organization, such as al Qaeda, or represent independent or loosely connected cells. Experts also debate the level of support for jihadism among the world's 1.3 billion Muslims.

Yet another unanswered question revolves around the role of U.S. ally Saudi Arabia in spreading Wahhabism, the religiously intolerant branch of Islam that is the Saudis' state religion.

“As of July 2005, U.S. agency officials did not know if the government of Saudi Arabia had taken steps to ensure that Saudi-funded curricula or religious activities in other countries do not propagate extremism,” the Government Accountability Office (GAO) reported in September.  

Many experts are unwilling to dismiss ties between al Qaeda and other terrorists. One reason for that stance is al-Zawahiri's newly disclosed letter to al-Zarqawi. In words that could be seen either as advice or directive, the al Qaeda leader tells the jihad commander in Iraq to keep targeting Americans rather than Iraqi Shiites. “The majority of Muslims don’t comprehend” the slaughter of Shiites, al-Zawahiri writes. Another apparent al Qaeda connection showed up in suicide bomber Khan's posthumous message tape, which bore the al Qaeda logo. The same tape contained a message — apparently added to Khan's original tape — from al-Zawahiri. Experts disagree on whether the evidence indicates al Qaeda commanded the bombings or simply served as a communications link.

A deeper dispute centers on how to fight jihadism. “What I usually hear is a very, very simplistic interpretation — 'If we...
would just eradicate poverty, [terrorism] would go away. 'No it won’t,’” says Michael Taarnby, an expert on terrorism at the Danish Institute for International Studies. ‘‘And if we create peace in Palestine, that would end the incentive for jihad.’ No it won’t. If you think you can appease them, think twice.”

But some students of terrorism say that while Islamic fundamentalism may provide much of the philosophical impetus for suicide bombings, poverty in the Arab world and U.S. foreign policy (and troops) in the Mideast exacerbate anti-U.S. sentiment that creates willing jihadist recruits.

“If al Qaeda were no longer able to recruit based on the presence of Western combat forces on the Arabian Peninsula,” says University of Chicago political scientist Robert Pape, “the remaining transnational network would pose a far smaller threat and simply collapse.”

Pape argues that from 1980 to 2004, suicide terrorists everywhere acted to force democratic governments to end military occupations. The Madrid train bombings of 2004 would seem to support his argument, given messages from the bombers and from bin Laden himself warning Spain and European nations in general to pull their forces out of Iraq. In Sri Lanka, Pape notes, the secular Tamil Tiger guerrillas are fighting for a separate state. Palestinian terrorists in Israeli-occupied territories claim the same goal (though at least some of them really want to destroy Israel, Israelis say), and Iraqi insurgents say they want to end foreign occupation.

But Tamils’ and Palestinians’ territorial demands have nothing to do with global jihadism, argues Richard A. Clarke, former national counterterrorism coordinator in the Bill Clinton and George W. Bush administrations. Hence, the statistical evidence that Pape has assembled isn’t helpful in analyzing al Qaeda and its ideological affiliates. “If we could wave a magic wand and solve the Israel-Palestinian problem . . . it wouldn’t affect the jihadist movement one iota,” says Clarke, who is now a consultant on security issues.

Clarke is among those who argue that the Iraq war is spurring jihadism. But President Bush argued on Oct. 6: “We were not in Iraq on Sept. the 11th, 2001, and al Qaeda attacked us anyway. The hatred of the radicals existed before Iraq was an issue, and it will exist after Iraq is no longer an excuse.”

What, then, explains the hatred? Poverty doesn’t seem plausible. For example, bin Laden was born into riches; his second-in-command, al-Zawahiri, is a physician; the four 9/11 pilots were university graduates or students; and London bomber Khan had a steady job in an elementary school.

“In the world’s poorest countries there is little or no terrorism,” writes historian Walter Laqueur, a longtime scholar of extremism. “Imponderable factors might be involved: indoctrination, but also psychological motives. Neither economic nor political analysis will be of much help in gaining an understanding.”

Recent history does provide some clues. The jihadist movement largely grew out of the U.S.-supported war against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s, which drew religiously oriented fighters from various countries, including Egypt, which already had a tradition of Islamist opposition to secular rulers. The shift to an international fight for militant Islam grew out of the defeat of religious nationalists on their home fronts, argues Fawaz A. Gerges, a Lebanese-born political scientist at Sarah Lawrence College. “Jihadis’ attacks on America were a desperate attempt to reinvigorate their declining movement,” he argues.  

Meanwhile, Western nations have had limited success in eliminating terrorists before they kill. To be sure, U.S. and other security agencies say they have stopped many attacks — in his speech, Bush said that 10 “serious” al Qaeda plots, including three aimed at targets in the United States, had been disrupted over the past four years. But specialists say the jihadist world so far has been largely impenetrable to Western security agencies.

Even culturally attuned Arabic-speakers can go astray. Gerges writes in a newly published book that while interviewing jihadists and others in the Middle East in 1999-2000, he missed the key angle. “We underestimated bin Laden’s mobilizational skills and charisma as well as his determination to exact revenge on ‘the enemies of God.’”
Spouses can miss all the signs as well. In late September, the widow of one of the London suicide bombers told a British newspaper that she had no idea how her “innocent, naive and simple” husband, Jamaican-born Germaine Lindsay, had been transformed into a suicide bomber. “He was so angry when he saw Muslim civilians being killed on the streets of Iraq, Bosnia, Palestine and Israel. . . . Then he is responsible for doing the same thing, but to his fellow British people.”  

As experts seek to understand what motivates the jihadists and stop their lethal attacks, here are some of the questions they are debating.

Is there a global jihadist organization?

The jihadist terrorists who have bombed and assassinated around the world over the past seven years shared similar targets, techniques and ideology. Yet they didn't all report to the same boss, and didn't even all speak the same languages. “Al Qaeda-linked” has become the common way of describing connections that aren't always clear. Or, as two analysts described non-Iraqi suicide bombers in Iraq: “insurgents who are connected by conviction, if not organization, to a global jihad symbolized by al Qaeda.”  

Al-Zawahiri’s letter to his ally in Iraq does seem to show an effort to enforce ideological unity. “The mujahedeen must not have their mission end with the expulsion of the Americans from Iraq, and then lay down their weapons,” al-Zawahiri wrote, going on to lay out a strategy for establishing jihadist rule in Iraq, then expanding the battlefield to Syria, Lebanon and Egypt, before finally confronting Israel.  

Al-Zawahiri’s organization in Iraq is only one of a host of regional jihadist groups believed to be allied to al Qaeda, at least ideologically. Among them: Abu Sayaf, Philippines; Jemaah Islamiyah, Indonesia, Malaysia; the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat, Algeria; Salifiya Jihadiya, Morocco; the Islamic International Battalion and other extremist separatists fighting the Russian government in Chechnya; Hizb-I Islami Gulbuddin, Afghanistan; Lashkar-e-Tayibba and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Pakistan; and Ansar Al-Islam, Iraq. In many cases, the level of commitment to global jihad, as opposed to regional or nationalist conflicts, is unclear.

A commission headed by former anti-terrorism czar Clarke and formed by The Century Foundation, a New York policy research organization, noted that some experts who had thought al Qaeda was severely weakened in 2003-2004 after the U.S. security-agency response to 9/11 have begun revising those views. Those experts believe “that the core al Qaeda organization does still exist as an organization, with a communications network of some sort linking its leaders with cells in Europe and elsewhere.” In short, they said, al Qaeda “is clearly still vibrant and dangerous.”  

Ranstorp at the Swedish National Defense College agrees, arguing that al Qaeda remains very much on the scene. Bin Laden and his closest associates “are still at large,” he says. “They are extraordinarily patient.”

But Ranstorp, who is leading a research project on jihadist radicalization and recruitment throughout Europe, acknowledges that the picture is complicated. “Disconnected cells” also exist. And he suggests that “professional recruiters” are maintaining a flow of new members, but security agencies don’t know who the recruiters are.

However, some specialists say al Qaeda’s power has waned. “For all practical purposes that organization is not relevant,” says Marc Sageman, a Maryland psychiatrist and former CIA officer. The global jihad “is too decentralized to be anything like an organization. It is basically made up of spontaneously home-grown gangs, competing with each other for headlines.”

“You can't call it an organization,” says Juan Cole, a University of Michigan historian of the Middle East whose Iraq War-centered blog is frequently cited by Bush administration critics. “It's a loosely affiliated set of networks, often not affiliated at all.”

But Michael Scheuer, a CIA veteran of the Afghanistan jihad who later created a unit dedicated to hunting bin Laden,
says he is still a serious threat. Al Qaeda remains the source of ideological, strategic and tactical doctrine in the jihad against the West, Scheuer says. Hence, he says of bin Laden, “I think he’d be delighted every morning when he wakes up with the way the war is going.”

Indeed, Scheuer argues, bin Laden planned things just the way they have turned out. “Very early on, he decided that the al Qaeda role would be three things. The third in importance would be to conduct military actions against the United States. The second — in his mind more important — was to train insurgent fighters from around the world so they could go back and fight their home governments. And from the very beginning, he has declared that he and al Qaeda are the vanguard and that their mission was to instigate and incite.”

Nevertheless, Gerges of Sarah Lawrence argues that bin Laden envisioned himself in a larger role than instigator-in-chief. Bin Laden, Gerges writes, ordered the 9/11 attacks confident they would mobilize a vast army of jihadists to fight the Americans, who then would surely invade Afghanistan in response. The U.S. invasion did come, but not the large number of jihadists that bin Laden expected. Consequently, Gerges writes, some jihadists have been attacking bin Laden as a disastrous strategist.  

Today, Gerges says, “The centralized leadership that used to direct and organize and plan is hibernating deeper and deeper underground and is no longer capable of organizing spectacular attacks along 9/11 lines.”

Perhaps the most provocative view comes from military analyst David Ronfeldt. Now on leave from the Rand Corp., a think tank in Palo Alto, Calif., Ronfeldt argues that jihadists should be seen as a global tribe. “It is held together not by command-and-control structures but by a gripping sense of shared belonging, principles of fusion against an outside enemy and a jihadist narrative so compelling that it amounts to both an ideology and a doctrine.” (continued below)
But defining the jihadist movement as a tribe doesn't necessarily mean it lacks structure, he adds in an interview.

“There is an organization there. We just don't quite know how to detect it any more.”

Are the jihadists motivated by religion?

Jihadists invariably portray themselves as warriors for God. Their public statements are steeped in Quranic citations and the writings of Islamic theologians, suggesting strongly that jihadism is all about religion.

But specialists who reject that conclusion point out that throughout history religious war makers always claim to be fighting for their faith — even when most of their coreligionists disagree. They cite the Hindu fanatic who, in 1948, assassinated the leader of India's independence movement, Mohandas K. Gandhi, who was revered by his fellow Hindus, for allegedly making too many concessions to Muslims. And today, jihadists make up only a tiny fraction of the world's Muslims.

Nonetheless, the jihadists do spring from well-established religious traditions. Bin Laden (and 15 of the 19 attackers on 9/11) were natives of Saudi Arabia, where Wahhabism, the fundamentalist state religion, considers other branches of Islam as outside the faith and has a history of violence toward Shiites and other non-Wahabbi Muslims.

Michigan's Cole suggests that jihadist recruits see Islam more as a national identity than a religion. He theorizes that London subway bomber Khan responded to a recruiting pitch along the following lines: "Islam is in danger of being destroyed. Your people are being oppressed. Islam is the only pillar of truth and proper human behavior. Within 25 years it could be gone. When it's gone, all that's left is hell on earth. There is something you can do — take dramatic action."
action. Demonstrate to the imperial West that Islam is not going to go quietly. When other Muslims see you do this dramatic thing, they will take heart from it and may take dramatic actions of their own.”

But ex-CIA officer Scheuer argues that religious faith makes up an inseparable part of the jihadist mindset. “I would have thought Christian evangelicals [like President Bush] would understand this,” Scheuer says, referring to the jihadist assertion that foreign presence on the Arabian Peninsula profanes the Muslim holy cities of Mecca and Medina, much as they object to Israel's possession of all of Jerusalem. A Western taboo against seeing another religion as a threat prevents frank discussion of jihadism, Scheuer insists.

Scheuer says he’s simplifying but not distorting. “When people take me to task for generalizing and referring to ‘Muslims’ as if they are a single, monolithic group, they’re right. It’s a diverse Islamic world, but bin Laden recognized that early on. He has created a movement that looks to the United States as the key oppressor of the Muslim world. He is a national-security threat because he has encouraged and strengthened the perception of us as attacking Islam.”

Daniel Byman, who directs Georgetown University's Security Studies Program and served on the staff of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States (the “9/11 Commission”), argues that jihadists' religious rhetoric amounts to a delivery system for a nationalistic message. “There is a strong sense that Muslims are under attack; to me, that dynamic is more comparable to nationalism than religion per se.”

Nevertheless, Byman acknowledges that attacks on Shiite Muslims in Iraq (and Pakistan) by Sunni jihadis do reveal the influence of a sectarian reading of the Quran and of Islamic history. “The jihadist agenda is vast,” he explains. “Some elements enjoy broad sympathy, others none. This is like many broad ideologies, where parts appeal to different constituents — some parts only to the core, and other parts to a wider range of followers.”

Most Westerners, coming from a political culture that remains largely secular, may not recognize the realities of a movement rooted in religion. But Husain Haqqani, a Pakistani scholar and former diplomat who teaches international relations at Boston University, notes that jihadists are exceeding the norms of Muslim societies. Only jihadists, he says, “think of Islam as an ideology rather than as a religion.” The vast majority of Muslims don't look on their religion that way, he says.

Jihadis, “all think they have a religious obligation to create an Islamic state,” says Haqqani, who is also a visiting scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. “They all think that Islam's political aspect is an integral part of the religion. They have a lot of anger against the West. A lot of their ideology is not well thought out, but for them it's enough.”

Taarnby of Denmark's Institute for International Studies argues that religious devotion can't be separated from other factors that drive a tiny minority of Muslims into jihadist ranks. “Economic stagnation, massive unemployment, the question of identity — all this combined with a newfound religious identity” — are among the ingredients, he says.

Non-Muslims who view jihadists as upholders of traditional religious faith are missing the fact that the jihadists are actually wedded to the culture of today's world, Taarnby argues. “The entire project of dissecting the Quran, looking for passages that justify the killing of infidels and crusaders — that is modern literary criticism, not traditional belief,” he says.

For all that, jihadist ideology does have roots in a form of Muslim thought that dates back hundreds of years, says Ali Al-Ahmed, a native of Saudi Arabia who directs a Washington-based research and advocacy group, the Institute for Gulf Affairs. Al-Ahmed is a member of Saudi Arabia's Shiite minority, which has a long history of discrimination and mistreatment at the hands of the Wahhabi Sunni monarchy. "Part of Sunni Arab Islam is their eternal belief that they should exert control over the world, that, 'We as Muslims are responsible for this world and this universe, and all non-Muslims should be under us and all Muslims, because we are the true group of Islam.' That is why in Saudi Arabia, [Shiites] are not allowed to be head of anything.”
Are Western governments dealing effectively with the global jihadists?

After the 9/11 attacks, President Bush launched a “war on terror,” but the terrorists continue to attack around the world, even as the United States claims it has prevented many attacks. The latest terrorist strikes in Europe have provoked widespread concern about the alienation of European-born children of Muslim immigrants. Bin Laden apparently remains on the loose, along with his top associate, al-Zawahiri. A U.S. intelligence community think tank, the National Intelligence Council, says some experts think the war in Iraq is training a new generation of jihadist terrorists.

In this climate Western governments’ response to jihadist terrorism has been challenged by critics who say the West doesn’t understand the nature of the jihadist threat, or what is required to defeat it.

To a great extent the argument centers on the war in Iraq — even though its objective was to destroy the regime of Saddam Hussein, whose Baath Party was essentially a secular organization. “Everybody has used 9/11 for their own purposes, including Bush, and one of his purposes was to get Saddam,” says Robert Leiken, immigration and national security director at the Nixon Center. The Washington think tank is a haven for foreign-policy “realists,” who distrust the notion of fighting wars in the name of spreading democracy. “Iraq has, on the whole, been a mistake from the point of view of fighting the global jihad and al Qaeda. One way to start back-pedaling would be to stop talking about the ‘war on terror’ and start talking about the fight against terrorism. The Europeans point out that it’s a fight — police, prosecutors, intelligence” — rather than a military operation.

But what the jihadists declared was war. And — at the jihadists’ insistence — it’s global, the Washington-based British columnist Christopher Hitchens argues. “The peaceniks love to ask: ‘When and where will it all end?’” Hitchens writes. “The answer is easy: It will end with the surrender or defeat of one of the contending parties.” He adds: “It is out of the question — plainly and absolutely out of the question — that we should surrender the keystone state of the Middle East to a rotten, murderous alliance between Baathists and bin Ladenists.”

But not all opponents of the Iraq war are “peaceniks.” Former anti-terrorism czar Clarke, who had been a major advocate in the Clinton and Bush administrations for aggressive action against bin Laden and al Qaeda, argues that the Iraq war diverted resources from the anti-jihadist campaign. Even worse, says Clarke, a fierce critic of Bush’s anti-terrorism strategy, “It’s the judgment of every Western intelligence service — including the CIA — that Iraq has created many more jihadists and motivated ones that previously existed. No expert in or out of government argues with that.”

Ranstorp of the Swedish National Defense College, however, maintains the outlook isn’t that bleak. “To some extent, we can pat ourselves on the back. We have had some successes, we understand the adversary better,” he says, citing successes like the 2003 arrest of Khalid Shaikh Mohammed of Pakistan, who introduced bin Laden to the idea of using hijacked airliners as weapons.

Nonetheless, says Ranstorp, the war in Iraq has created a gulf between the United States and Europeans. Referring to Michael Moore, the savagely anti-Bush filmmaker and writer, Ranstorp says that in Europe, “More people believe in [him] than President Bush. When you have that, something is seriously wrong.”

Outside government, criticism of Bush administration anti-terrorism policy is pervasive. “But I don’t see a great wellspring of ideas from people who say they’re doing everything wrong,” says Georgetown’s Byman.

Non-American critics often suggest that the U.S. military response is overblown. “These [jihadists] are very small groups,” says Rohan Gunaratna, director of the International Center for Political Violence and Terrorism Research in Singapore and a senior fellow at the Combating Terrorism Center at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. “They do not have enough strength to radicalize large amounts of people. If issues like Iraq are resolved, there is no real rationale for these extremist groups to exist.”
Background

Origins of Jihad

Jihadists’ fundamental claim is that they’re fighting the ungodly in the name of God. But the origin of jihad actually lies in conflicts among Muslims — not between Muslims and non-Muslims. The jihadists argue that they base themselves on the Quran — the holy book Muslims consider to be the word of God. But on Earth, their spiritual forefather is Ibn Taymiyyah, a religious scholar born in the mid-13th century in what is now Iraq, who advocated rebelling against the invading Mongols — even though they had converted to Islam — on the grounds that they were not true Muslims. For many scholars, the notion that some Muslims are not truly Muslims is the key to the jihadist worldview.

“I have not met a former jihadi — or a potential one — who has not memorized Ibn Taymiyyah’s fatwas [religious rulings],” writes Sarah Lawrence College’s Gerges.

Taymiyyah was writing at a time when Islam was already some 600 years old and a major religious and political power. Islam had spread rapidly throughout the Middle East after the Prophet Muhammad was born in about 570 in the Arabian Peninsula city of Mecca. He began preaching after claiming a visit from the angel Gabriel, and subsequent revelations were compiled into the Quran.

The Muslim faith springs from its predecessor monotheistic religions, Judaism and Christianity. Muslims believe these religions were also divinely inspired, but that only Islam embodies God’s final revelations.

Muhammad eventually overcame opposition from tribal leaders to establish the new religion — which means “submission to God” — in much of Arabia, among its previously polytheistic inhabitants. Islam then began to expand beyond the peninsula after Muhammad died. As it spread, a succession crisis developed between members of the powerful ruling caste — the Umayyad tribe — and partisans of Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law, Ali ibn Abi Talib. In 656 Ali finally became Caliph — leader of both state and religion — after his Umayyad predecessor was assassinated. The two events intensified the conflict, leading to civil war.

At that point the Umayyads were in the majority, and Ali's followers — or his “shiah” (the ancestors of today's Shiites) — were in the minority. Then when Ali was assassinated in 661, the Umayyads returned to power with Damascus as their capital.

The Shiites' status as an aggrieved minority dates from these 7th-century events.

Although the Quran calls Jews and Christians by the respectful title “people of the Book,” Muslim and Christian rulers clashed repeatedly through the ages, the echoes of which can be heard in jihadists' epithet “crusaders” when referring to Western military forces.

In 1096, the soldiers of the first Christian Crusade arrived in what is today's Lebanon and Syria to reconquer Jerusalem and nearby biblical lands from the Muslims. But the principalities they set up — in modern-day Libya, Turkey and Jerusalem — did not last. By 1193, Muslim forces had retaken Jerusalem and nearly all Christian-held territory.

Eventually, the Ottoman Empire arose — an Islamic Caliphate, centered in Turkey and stretching from North Africa on the west to the Middle East on the south and east. The empire was a major world power by the end of the 16th century, having advanced into the Balkans and Central Europe and spread Islam as far east as modern-day Indonesia. Culturally and politically, Ottoman civilization stood out for its system of rights and privileges for Christian and Jewish minorities, as well as for its vast intellectual accomplishments, especially in mathematics, science and architecture — following in the footsteps of the earlier Arab Caliphate, based in Baghdad. But Europe surged ahead, especially with the conquest of the Americas and parts of Asia. The beginning of the Ottoman decline was first seen on the battlefield,
where a second attempt to conquer Vienna failed in 1683.

In the late 19th century, the Russian, British and French empires seized chunks of Ottoman territory in Central Asia and North Africa. World War I saw the Ottoman Empire's final collapse, speeded along by a British-supported “Arab revolt.” Indeed, even before the war ended, its ultimate victors had divvied up the empire, with Britain and France taking most of it.

Britain's territory included Palestine. In 1917, a year before the war's end, British Foreign Secretary Lord Arthur Balfour promised a “homeland for the Jewish people” in Palestine, where the rights of non-Jews would not be prejudiced. The declaration helped set the stage for the later creation of Israel, which followed the extermination of 6 million European Jews — a genocide unleashed in Christian Europe, not in Islamic lands.

Modern Islamism

While Ibn Taymiyyah is the intellectual forerunner of jihadism, Muhammed ibn Abd al-Wahhab is its founding warrior. In the early 18th century, Wahhab led a revolt against the Ottoman Empire, which he accused of corrupting the purity of Islam, in part by allowing veneration of others — including Muhammed — besides God. Wahhab and his followers also hated Shiites, and their reverence for their holy men, or imams. In 1801, Wahhabis sacked the holy Shiite city of Karbala (in today's Iraq), and killed thousands.

Wahhab's disciples included a tribal leader named Muhammed Ibn Saud. His descendants founded the nation that bears their family's name — and venerates the Wahhabi sect of Islam. Saudi Arabia was created in 1932, after the House of Saud conquered the area, including the territory surrounding Islam's two holiest places, Mecca and Medina.

The doctrinal marriage between Wahhabism and the Saudi monarchy was a purely local matter until 1973. Until then, the Islamic world included a variety of national and religious traditions. But when oil prices skyrocketed, making the Saudi government wealthy, it revved up religious proselytizing in the Muslim world. “The objective was to . . . refine the multitude of voices within the religion down to the single creed of the masters of Mecca,” writes the French scholar Gilles Kepel.

Earlier, in the 1960s and early '70s, the idea of a newly militant form of Islam had already begun resonating among Muslims, particularly in Egypt. One of the major figures behind this “Islamist” intellectual fervor was an Egyptian writer and activist, Sayyid Qutb, who was active in a large, influential, but illegal movement — the Muslim Brotherhood — founded in 1928. The Brotherhood saw Islam as a political and moral force superior both to British colonial domination and to the secular anti-colonialist movement that overthrew the British-puppet monarchy in 1952, led by Gamel Abdel Nasser.

“The Quran is our constitution,” the Brothers declared.

The Brotherhood and later Islamist and jihadist groups were influenced by a religious doctrine known as *salafiyya*, which refers to the Prophet Muhammed's companions. The term is often used interchangeably with “Wahhabi,” though some scholars argue that some Salafis are more open to the modern world and democratic politics.

In the ensuing decades, the Brotherhood slowly moderated its message and methods, but Qutb went in the opposite direction. Seeing the threat, Nasser cracked down, and Qutb and others were arrested. In 1966, Nasser ordered Qutb executed for subversion.

The following year, Nasser led Egypt and two neighboring Arab countries into the Six Day War with Israel. Israel crushed Egypt, Syria and Jordan. That outcome seemed to prove the Islamists' point: that secular Arab nationalist regimes had grown weak and decadent.

Revolution
By the early 1970s, a population boom, urbanization and the slow decay of nationalist systems in the Middle East provided a perfect setting for the message that failed secular rulers should be overthrown. In Shiite Iran, for instance, Shah (Emperor) Mohammed Reza Pahlavi had alienated the country’s youth and religious leaders by repressing dissent, channeling economic benefits to wealthy friends and allowing large numbers of American military personnel and defense contractors to maintain and operate U.S.-supplied military hardware in Iran.

In 1979, Iran exploded. The shah fled, and power gravitated toward Ayatollah Ruholla Khomeini, a Shiite religious scholar who had been in exile for 15 years in Iraq and France. Khomeini returned to adoring crowds in Tehran on Feb. 1, 1979, and soon assumed total power. Despite the Shiites’ minority position in the Muslim world, the Iranian revolution showed that religion could be harnessed to overthrow an oppressive ruler.

On Oct. 6, 1981, a group of soldiers taking part in a military parade in Cairo turned their guns on Nasser’s successor, President Anwar Al-Sadat, who had signed a peace treaty with Israel and repressed militant Islamists. The leader of the assassination belonged to a jihadist organization inspired by Qutb’s writings.

The soldiers directly involved in the assassination were executed. But almost all other members of the Egyptian jihadist movement were given three-year prison sentences, including al-Zawahiri, who had taken up the jihadist cause as a teenager. A year before the assassination, he had traveled to Pakistan to support the mujahedeen in Afghanistan, who were fighting to expel Soviet forces that had invaded in 1979.

After his release in 1985, al-Zawahiri returned to Afghanistan, where he forged close ties to a young Saudi millionaire who was playing a key role in organizing the non-Afghan volunteers. His name was Osama bin Laden.

**U.S.-Jihadist Alliance**

The United States backed the anti-Soviet resistance in Afghanistan, aiming to inflict a Vietnam-sized defeat on the Soviets. Both the Carter and Reagan administrations worked closely with the Saudi government, which was anxious to provide an escape valve for Saudi youth who might otherwise have focused their anger on the monarchy’s ties to the United States. For decades, the Saudis had been selling oil to the Americans, who provided military protection—a relationship that deepened in the 1990s, after bin Laden returned home following the 1988 Soviet pullout from Afghanistan.

In 1990, Saudi Arabia felt threatened by Iraq’s invasion of neighboring Kuwait. Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein was then considered a secular nationalist. Bin Laden told the Saudi monarchy that he could assemble an army of Afghanistan veterans to push the Iraqis out of Kuwait. But the Saudi government, already lining up U.S. military support, rebuffed him.

But by then bin Laden already saw the United States as a foe. And he and his comrades considered the world’s remaining superpower weaker than most people believed. In the jihadists’ eyes, the overthrow of the shah had proved they wouldn’t fight to keep a key ally in power.

More signs of apparent U.S. vulnerability followed: In 1983, Reagan withdrew U.S. troops from Lebanon after Iranian-supported Hezbollah guerrillas in Beirut carried out suicide attacks on the U.S. Embassy, killing 63, and the U.S. Marine barracks, killing 241. In neither case did the United States strike back. Ten years later, President Clinton pulled U.S. peacekeeping troops out of Somalia after 18 U.S. soldiers were killed during failed efforts to arrest a local warlord. Bin Laden said the fact that the United States did not retaliate showed “how weak, impotent and cowardly the American soldier is.” Later, some al Qaeda members boasted they had trained the Somalis in how to shoot down the U.S. helicopters that were involved in the operation.

**Anti-West Jihad**

Bin Laden’s view of a weak United States led him to argue that jihadists should shift their energies from attacks on
Middle Eastern governments. “In his eyes, the center of political gravity and power lies in Washington and New York, not in Cairo, Riyadh, Baghdad, Amman, Algiers or elsewhere,” writes Gerges.  

The first strike under the new strategy was a 1993 attempt to blow up the World Trade Center. A Kuwaiti-born jihadist of Pakistani ancestry, Ramzi Yousef, masterminded the plot, in which a truck bomb was exploded in the complex’s underground garage. But only six people were killed — not 250,000 as he had hoped.

Although bin Laden never claimed responsibility for that attack, Yousef had trained in Afghan jihadist camps and was the nephew of another terrorist, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, who was later to convince bin Laden to destroy American targets with hijacked aircraft.

Mohammed took the idea to bin Laden in 1996, the same year bin Laden called for the expulsion of Western military forces from Saudi Arabia. Two years later, he took to the world stage again to issue a “Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders.” Bin Laden’s 1998 fatwah declared that killing “Americans and their allies — civilians and military — is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it.” Al-Zawahiri was a co-signer.

Some six months later, on Aug. 7, 1998, suicide truck-bombers unmistakably tied to al Qaeda simultaneously struck the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, killing 226, including 12 Americans. In October 2000, al Qaeda operatives maneuvered an explosives-filled small boat alongside the U.S.S. Cole, a Navy destroyer in port in Yemen, blasting a hole in the hull and killing 17 sailors.

Bin Laden became a bigger American target than ever. The attack intensified efforts in the Clinton administration to track down bin Laden and kidnap or kill him.

Current Situation

Goodbye ‘Londonistan’

For decades, London had been a world center for Muslim political dissidents and radicals of all stripes, including jihadists. Part of a much larger immigrant Muslim population, the activists operated so freely that many British security officials, politicians and journalists came up with the sardonic nickname “Londonistan.” It was meant to convey the notion that a virtual separate state had arisen on British soil.

The recent terrorist bombings in London have led British authorities to rethink the asylum and free speech policies that made London a magnet for jihadist preachers and organizers, who used the United Kingdom as a base of operations and recruiting center. Some had enjoyed years of notoriety, including: Abu Hamza (Mustafa Kamel Mustafa), a one-handed, one-eyed Egyptian-born jihad supporter who had been a prayer leader at London’s Finsbury Park mosque; Omar Mohammed bin Bakri, a Syrian-born minister who also preached at Finsbury Park; and Yasser Sirri, an Egyptian-born activist whose Islamic Observation Center monitored the “holy struggle” against Western-allied Arab regimes.

Although the July 7 bombings recharged the long-running debate over British asylum and free-speech policies, British authorities actually had started pulling up the red carpet following the 9/11 attacks against the United States. The government lifted a ban on extradition, which allowed the United States to press for delivery of Saudi Arabia-born Khalid al-Fawwaz, who ran a London office for bin Laden and is accused in an American indictment of participating in the 1998 embassy bombings in Africa.

But after July 7, Prime Minister Tony Blair called for further measures. A Blair bill now before Parliament would define “encouragement” and “glorification” of terrorism as crimes, along with distribution of terrorist publications. It would also allow police to detain a suspect up to 90 days before filing charges.

“Someone who comes into our country, and maybe seeks refuge here . . . we say if, when you are here, you want to
stay here, play by the rules, play fair, don't start inciting people to go and kill other innocent people in Britain,” Blair said in defense of his proposal.  

A member of Britain's House of Lords, Baron Desmond Ackner, a former judge, was one of several critics of the measure from within the political establishment. “I get the impression we are taking this too far, that there is a great risk that freedom of speech is going to be curtailed,” he said in Parliament.  

However, some experts on terrorism sided with Blair. “Thank God” for Blair's proposal, says Yosri Fouda, a London-based producer and anchor for “Top Secret,” an investigative program on the Al Jazeera network. “I've been calling for a long time to prosecute anyone who would call for hate. These are the kinds of people who hijacked Islam.”

Britain is considered the most tolerant country in Europe when it comes to Islamist preachers and activists, but terrorists have found havens elsewhere in Europe as well. Key members of the 9/11 attack squad came together as students in Hamburg, Germany. In Spain, authorities arrested 24 people after 9/11 on charges of working with al Qaeda, in some cases allegedly helping organize the attacks. On Sept. 26, 2005, one of the men was sentenced to 27 years in prison for conspiring with the 9/11 terrorists. Six of the accused were acquitted on all charges. A month earlier, a German court convicted a Moroccan, Mourir el-Motassadeq, of belonging to the “Hamburg cell” of al Qaeda from which the 9/11 plotters emerged. He was acquitted, however, of helping organize the attacks.

Sleeper Cells?

The jihadist trail through Europe doesn't seem, so far, to continue in the United States. Despite administration assertions after the 9/11 attacks that “sleeper cells” embedded in America were awaiting the moment to strike again, evidence of such cells has been sparse. In Europe, however, there is widespread fear that segregated, sometimes impoverished immigrant communities have been breeding alienation and resentment in their youth — some of whom have been turning to jihadism.

“He was an average, second-generation immigrant,” a member of Parliament in the Netherlands said of Dutch-born Mohammed Bouyeri, a 27-year-old of Moroccan origin who slit the throat of a filmmaker, Theo Van Gogh — apparently trying behead him — for making a movie that portrayed Islam as oppressive to women. In July Bouyeri received a life sentence for the murder. “I should cut everyone's head off who insults Allah or his prophet,” Bouyeri said.

With few known exceptions, the United States seems less prone to generating homegrown jihadists. “The American dream is part of the reason,” says former CIA officer Sageman, referring to the greater opportunities for economic and social mobility for immigrants in the United States. “Europe needs to be a little more accepting of foreigners.”

But the Nixon Center's Leiken warns that Europe's problem could draw closer to American shores. “Like a thief in the night who tries each door, we must assume al Qaeda will probe all our borders,” he writes. “But when the front door is ajar, the thief will walk right in. With the VWP [visa waiver program] that door is wide open for European Muslim citizens.” Under the program, reciprocal agreements among the United States and Western European and Scandinavian countries allow Europeans to travel to the States without visas, and vice versa.

In fact, at least one terrorist already had tried the visa waiver route. Zacarias Moussaoui, the Frenchman of Algerian origin who pleaded guilty in April to being part of the 9/11 plot, entered the United States without a visa, thanks to his French passport.

Visitors still face screening by immigration inspectors. But a well-trained terrorist who hasn't appeared on any blacklists could enter the United States simply by buying an airline ticket. As of January 2005, citizens from “visa-waiver” countries must have computer-readable passports.
Some immigration specialists say the waivers endanger national security and call for their abolition. “I do not believe that requiring visitors who seek entry into our country to first obtain a visa is an unreasonable burden,” Michael Cutler, a retired senior special agent with the former Immigration and Naturalization Service, wrote on the “Counterterrorism Blog” Web site maintained by several terrorism specialists. “It is time to eliminate the visa waiver program and do what any sensible homeowner would do before opening the door to a visitor — make certain that he or she knows who they are letting in.”

A trio of experts from the Migration Policy Institute, a Washington-based nonpartisan think tank, argues instead that participation in the waiver program should be conditioned on sharing terrorism intelligence.

For his part, Leiken favors measures short of abolishing the waivers. He proposes that European travelers submit their passport information when buying tickets, which would give U.S. authorities time to run their names through terrorist databases. Abolishing the waivers, he writes, “would exact steep bureaucratic and diplomatic costs and rile the United States’ remaining European friends.”

**Saudi Succession**

Saudi Arabia has been in the anti-terrorism spotlight since Sept. 11, 2001. Fifteen of the 19 hijackers were Saudis, and a steady stream of investigations has concluded that the kingdom’s missionary campaign for Wahhabi Islam had helped create the religious/political ideology that gave rise to modern jihadism.

In fact, the impetus from Saudi Arabia may have been more than ideological. A task force of the New York-based Council on Foreign Relations, a think tank heavy with former United States officials, reported in 2002 that “for years, individuals and charities based in Saudi Arabia have been the most important source of funds for al Qaeda; and, for years, Saudi officials have turned a blind eye to this problem.”

But Saudi Arabia is now in the hands of a new leader generally viewed as a moderate and a reformer. King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz took the throne in August, following the death of his brother, King Fahd bin Abdul Aziz, on Aug. 1. For some of the monarchy’s critics, the succession makes possible a loosening of the centuries-old ties between Wahhabism and the Saudi state.

The effect on the jihadist movement could be important. A Saudi lawyer who follows the movement said its doctrine is a product of Wahhabi teachings. Abdel Rahem al-Lahem told an interviewer that Wahhabis believe in striking the first blow against an enemy, whereas other schools of Islam hold that Muslims should fight only after being attacked. A wave of jihadist attacks in Saudi Arabia in which foreigners were targeted but Saudis and other Muslims died has weakened allegiance to the Wahhabi concept of jihad.

To be sure, the Saudi government has always rejected the idea that al Qaeda doctrine is a product of Wahhabism. In 2004, Saudi Foreign Minister Saud Al Faisal said bin Laden’s ideology “was ingrained in him by this radicalized cult of the Muslim Brotherhood” — a reference to the Egyptian jihadist movement. “It is not the teaching of the Wahhabi reform movement or any other school indigenous to Saudi Arabia that [caused] his metamorphosis.”

Still, observers hope a reformist monarchy could weaken any ties between Wahhabism and jihadism. Stephen Schwartz, an American journalist and executive director of the Center for Islamic Pluralism, which opposes radical Islam, wrote the first English-language book to describe links between Wahhabism and jihadist terror. He saw a sign of hope in statements by a Saudi state cleric, Sheikh Abd Al-Muhsin Al-Abika, condemning al Qaeda terror and calling on bin Laden to surrender and repent. Schwartz, a Sufi Muslim, argued that King Abdullah could propel a Saudi shift along the lines of post-dictatorship transitions in central and Eastern Europe, Asia and Latin America.

“Abdullah may have just the necessary window to being a transition to normality for his country,” Schwartz wrote, “from its present standing as the richest but most backward ideological state in the world, a kind of Middle Eastern
Chanting “death to America,” citizens demonstrate in support of terrorist Osama bin Laden outside a mosque in Tripoli, Lebanon, a month after the Sept. 11, 2001, attack on the United States.

Support for anti-Western jihadists appears to be slipping among the world’s 1.3 billion Muslims.

Other Saudi-watchers are less optimistic. Saudi political-reform advocate Al-Ahmed, of the Institute for Gulf Affairs, has said that Abdullah’s reform credentials have been overstated. “Now that he is king,” he wrote, “it is time to test the much-touted ‘reformer.’”

Another Saudi-born analyst, Mai Yamani, a research fellow at the Royal Institute of International Affairs in London, described the reformers led by Abdullah as “the acceptable face of the Saudi dictatorship internationally.” But in reality, the “hard-line Wahhabi camp . . . controls the security forces, the judiciary system and the real levers of domestic power.”

* Moussaoui is awaiting sentencing, which is tentatively scheduled for early in 2006. Federal prosecutors are seeking the death penalty.

**Outlook**

**Limited Support**

Terrorism experts say another strike in the United States is inevitable. Al Qaeda leaders are planning “to undertake in the future a large strategic strike against the United States,” says Ranstorp, of Sweden’s Center for Asymmetric Threat Studies. “This is a long-term project. What they set in motion on 9/11 was a movement that relies as much on violence as on psychological warfare.”

On the other hand, virtually no one sees the jihadists as having gained great support in the worldwide Muslim community. A recent Pew Research Center survey in Muslim countries found varying degrees of support. In Jordan, 57 percent of the respondents considered suicide bombings and other violent actions to be justifiable in defending Islam. But in Pakistan, upholders of that view declined from 41 percent to 25 percent over the past three years. In Turkey and Morocco, no more than 15 percent of respondents supported violence against civilians.

The attitudes of Muslim youth born and raised in Europe have been attracting the most concern, given Europe’s importance as a recruiting ground and a theater of jihadist operations.

“The conflict in Iraq fuels feelings of hatred toward the West among radical and radicalizing Muslims,” the Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD) concluded in a 2002 report whose conclusions are still widely accepted in Europe. “It is possible that, as the conflict continues and more radicalized Muslims join the jihad in Iraq, they will eventually return as trained and experienced fighters. . . . It is also possible that they will become active recruiters of new jihadists in Europe.”

In the United States, meanwhile, a federal indictment in August charged four Los Angeles men with planning attacks on military and Jewish targets in the name of jihad. One allegedly founded a jihadist cell in 1997 while incarcerated at California’s Folsom prison. “This summer, Americans watched so-called homegrown terrorists unleash multiple bombings in the city of London,” U.S. Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales said in announcing the indictments. “Some in this country may have mistakenly believed that it could not happen here. Today we have chilling evidence that it is possible.”

Steve J. Martin, an Austin, Texas-based consultant on prison litigation and court-appointed supervisor for deficient jails across the country, says he has heard no prison officials in any state express concern over radical Islamist organizing. “That doesn’t mean it’s not there, but if it was very much on the radar screen of corrections people I would be picking
something up,” Martin says. “I’m in and around these large facilities all the time.”

In any event, terrorists don’t need many comrades — or a rational cause — to mount major attacks. “For the first time in human history very small groups have, or will have, the potential to cause immense destruction,” writes historian Laqueur. “Today’s terrorists, in their majority, are not diplomats eager to negotiate or to find compromises. And even if some of them would be satisfied with less than total victory and the annihilation of the enemy, there will always be a more radical group eager to continue the struggle.”

**Pro/Con**

**Do jihadists hate America because of its freedoms?**

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<th><strong>PRO</strong></th>
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| Stephen Schwartz  
Executive Director, Center for Islamic Pluralism and Author, The Two Faces of Islam. Written for the CQ Researcher, October 2005 | Michael Scheuer  
Former CIA Bin Laden specialist; Author, Imperial Hubris: Why the West is Losing the War on Terror. Written for the CQ Researcher, October 2005 |

Sunni jihadists do not hate the West; rather, they are contemptuous of the West. This contempt is often aimed less at our freedoms per se than at the triumph of secularism and irreligion, which we in the West tend to equate with freedom. Further, Sunni jihadists, being fundamentalists, are — above all — enemies of pluralism within Islam and in the world at large.

They do not accept the pluralistic shari’a of traditional, conservative and classical Islam; do not accept Islamic spirituality (Sufism); do not recognize that Sunnis and Shiites are both Muslim; and do not maintain the respect for the “People of the Book” (Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians and Hindus) commanded by traditional Islam.

Some Western analysts persistently argue that our policies in the Middle East and elsewhere — rather than these issues — have caused us to be targeted. But Turkey, which opposed the U.S. intervention in Iraq, has been targeted; Morocco and Indonesia have been targeted, and even Saudi Arabia is now experiencing jihadist terror. U.S. policies have little to do with Turkish or Moroccan or Indonesian policies. These countries are targeted because their Islam is pluralistic and non-fundamentalist. Sunni jihadism is motivated by a totalitarian view of the world that hates individual responsibility, public accountability, popular sovereignty and pluralism in general. In this sense, they are fighting a war against the freedoms we cherish. All the rest is incidental.

Unfortunately, this religious totalitarianism originates with a movement that claimed to reform Islam:

Clearly, Jihadists hate and attack America because of U.S. foreign policy in the Muslim world. But long after 9/11, America’s late and tepid response is prolonged by politically correct and cowardly bipartisan leaders who insist the war is about the freedoms we enjoy. The enemy’s core motivations are not mentioned: Unqualified U.S. support for Israel and presence on the Arabian Peninsula, the coddling of Muslim tyrannies, the occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq and the perception that America is attacking Islam.

This assures U.S. defeat, and the leaders hawking it will be judged traitors for knowingly minimizing the size, power and resilience of Osama bin Laden’s forces in order to sidestep radioactive domestic issues, such as ties to Israel and Saudi Arabia, energy policy, borders, immigration and other topics. They also will be judged as killers who sent U.S. military overseas as targets, neutered by rules of engagement meant to curry world opinion and avoid the truth that war is about killing until the enemy surrenders or perishes.

Some Islamist leaders do hate us more than our policies. They consider U.S. society evil because it is not ruled by God. But they know Muslims in general do not yet hate Americans, so their dream of a Caliphate requires that Muslims believe Islam is under U.S. attack.

Thus, our policies give the Islamists a war-winning opportunity: Myriad young Muslims would die to attack U.S. policies — U.S. forces in Iraq or absolute support for Israel — but large numbers would not die to eliminate elections, R-rated movies or after-work Miller
Wahhabism, emerging 250 years ago in the dank backwaters of the most remote and undeveloped area of the Arabian Peninsula, which, at Riyadh, is the heart of today's Saudi Arabia. Wahhabism set out to purge Islam of its civilizational achievements: art, architecture, philosophy, spirituality and compassion in the administration of law. In addition, it exemplified an Islam that had little or no contact with the great non-Muslim civilizations.

Unlike the Ottoman empire, which it fought, it did not govern millions of Christians; in contrast with the Persians, it did not draw on the immense wisdom of the East; and as distinct from the colossally rich Muslim states of India, it did not contend with the immense task of maintaining Muslim rule, by a minority, over millions of Hindus and other non-Muslims. It came from, and embodied, a void and had no incentive to accept anything about the rest of the world. That spirit is the same that inhabits Islamist terrorism today.

drafts. So, protecting the foreign policy status quo and repeating the “It’s our society and values, stupid!” mantra is treasonous: It gives our foes aid, comfort and unlimited manpower.

The Founders taught us to see the world as it is, not as we want it to be. Today’s leaders see the world clearly, but they lie to Americans to protect sacred political cows. George Washington would have said: “They hate us for what we do, because of our policy. Let us fight but also debate a future policy course.” Bush, Kerry and Clinton say: “They hate freedom, are a lunatic fringe, we can arrest them all, cling fast to the past.”

Time will tell how much blood and treasure is spent before Americans see past the traitors to the mortal threat their nation faces — and if they see it before it is too late.

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**Chronology**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1300s-1700s</td>
<td>Religious scholars lay the foundations of modern jihadism; Turks take over the Arab empire, which is then invaded by Western countries.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1300s</td>
<td>Religious scholar Ibn Tamiyyah justifies revolt against Muslim rulers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1400s</td>
<td>Turkish Muslims supplant the Baghdad-based Caliphate and found the Ottoman Empire.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1700s</td>
<td>Muhammed ibn Abd al-Wahhab condemns Shiites and other schools of Islam as heretics.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1800s-1960s</td>
<td>Ottoman Empire falls. Independent countries eventually are established in Middle East.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1916</td>
<td>Britain and France divvy up Ottoman Empire.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>Egyptian activists establish the Muslim Brotherhood.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>U.N. approves founding of Israel.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>Col. Gamel Abdel Nasser overthrows British-puppet monarchy in Egypt.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>Nasser’s government executes Sayyid Qutb, a jihadist activist.</td>
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<td>1967</td>
<td>Israel crushes Arab armies in Six Day War, empowering jihadists.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>Arab oil embargo triggers record oil prices, helping to finance a major Saudi missionary campaign throughout the Muslim world.</td>
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<td>Feb. 1, 1979</td>
<td>Shah Reza Pahlavi flees Iran; exiled Ayatollah Khomeini returns to form a militantly Muslim government.</td>
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<td>1981</td>
<td>Egyptian jihadist soldiers assassinate President Anwar Sadat, retaliating for a 1979 peace accord with Israel.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Saudi exile Osama bin Laden lays the groundwork for al Qaeda, a new global jihad organization.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1990s-2005</td>
<td>Bin Laden identifies United States as main target to attack.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Non-al Qaeda cell in New York and New Jersey bombs World Trade Center, killing six people.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sept. 11, 2001</td>
<td>Al Qaeda hijackers commit deadliest terrorist attacks in history, killing nearly 3,000 in New York City, rural Pennsylvania and at the Pentagon.</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 15, 2002</td>
<td>Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri praise the Sept. 11 attacks in a videotape on Al Jazeera network.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, mastermind of the 9/11 plot, is arrested in Pakistan (March 1) . . . On Aug. 5 Jemaah Islamiya bombs Marriott Hotel in Jakarta, killing 13 . . . . In November four car bombs in Istanbul, Turkey, kill 52 at two synagogues, the British consulate and a British bank.</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 11, 2004</td>
<td>Al Qaeda-linked jihadists blow up four commuter trains in Madrid, killing 191 and wounding 1,900.</td>
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### Short Features

#### Using Modern Technology to Sell Jihadism

The anchorman is masked and his delivery is shaky. At his right hand is a rifle on a tripod; at his left, a Quran. As for the news, most Westerners probably would call it propaganda: Hurricane Katrina is God’s punishment on the United States. Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian president, is an Israeli “puppet” because he is trying to disarm Hamas; terrorist commander Abu Musa al-Zarqawi explains why he’s proud of organizing the killings of Iraqi Shiites.

Welcome to Sout Al-Khaliffa (Voice of the Caliphate), a new Internet video news program. The anchorman’s Egyptian accent is the only hint of where the 16-minute Web cast is based. Its ideological home is much clearer. “This is al Qaeda,” says Ali Al-Ahmed, the Saudi Arabian founder of the Washington-based Institute of Gulf Affairs, a research and advocacy organization that promotes political reform in Saudi Arabia and neighboring countries.

While no one knows if the new show will last, Web-based Jihad seems here to stay. One of the 9/11 attack planners researched flight schools on the Web, and some of the attackers had kept in touch through e-mail and instant messaging. But the Web now offers jihadists far more: a way to keep their ranks unified and to recruit new members.

Young people no longer need guidance from more experienced jihadists, because today “everything is on the Internet,” says Marc Sageman, a psychiatrist who served as a CIA officer assigned to the war in Afghanistan.

For example, a 1,600-page history of jihad, *The International Islamic Resistance Call*, was posted to a Web site in December 2004. The memoir of al Qaeda’s second in command, Ayman al-Zawahiri — “Knights Under the Prophet’s Banner” — is also available via just a few keystrokes. Last year, two online magazines were posted to the Web: Sout
al-Jihad (Voice of Jihad) and Muaskar al-Battar (Camp al-Battar), whose articles included instructions on how to kidnap and murder hostages. And videotapes were posted to the Internet showing the murders of jihadist hostages Daniel Pearl, a Wall Street Journal reporter, in Pakistan in 2002 and of American contractor David Berg in Iraq in 2004.

Jihadism on the Internet has mushroomed in the past decade. When he started monitoring terrorist Web sites seven years ago, Gabriel Weimann — a senior fellow at the United States Institute of Peace — found only 12 such sites. By last year, there were more than 4,000. Among other things, jihadists are using the Web to announce job openings. One al Qaeda-affiliated site has been seeking applications for people to compile news reports from Iraq and other battlefronts. Jihadists bilingual in Arabic and English are also in demand.

The job hunt seems to indicate that the jihadists are planning to beef up their Internet presence. In fact, they have recently begun using English-language videotapes, apparently in an attempt to garner more publicity in the West. Since August, three tapes featuring English-speaking jihadists surfaced on TV networks. One was the posthumous recording by one of the London suicide bombers. Another featured a hooded jihadist with an Australian accent threatening attacks, and the third showed a masked jihadist speaking in an American accent, also threatening attacks to come. Jihadist leaders apparently concluded they’d get “more air time and column inches by using English-speakers,” said a U.S. counterterrorism official.

Experts say that without the Internet and Arabic-language 24-hour TV news, the jihadist movement might be only a shadow of itself.

Michael Scheuer, a former top CIA agent, has watched the jihad movement embrace the digital revolution. Between 1985 and 1992 he helped the agency support the Mujahedeen warriors who were fighting Soviet occupation troops in Afghanistan. At the time, “They were almost unaware of the rest of the Muslim world,” Scheuer says. “I don’t think you could have found one in 80 who knew what Palestine was, or Israel.”

But last March, he points out, when the Israelis killed Hamas spiritual leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, spontaneous demonstrations broke out in the Afghan cities of Jalalabad, Kandahar and Herat. “A decade earlier, that would have been unimaginable,” he says. “Bin Laden has the extraordinary good fortune to have arisen and declared war on the United States simultaneously with the advent of Arabic satellite TV and the Internet,” he says.

As jihadists become increasingly reliant on the Web, however, intelligence agencies can use it to keep better tabs on them. The New York Police Department’s intelligence division, for instance, constantly trolls through Web sites and chatrooms. “You know you passed the test when suddenly somebody gives you a password to a chat room you didn’t know existed,” an Egyptian-born New York detective told The New Yorker’s William Finnegan.

An Iranian-born cop said, “You’ll see an offer of a video-clip download. It might be a beheading, or training materials, or proof that someone actually did something.” A second Egyptian-born officer shook his head. “This is not Islam,” he said.


[5] Ibid.

The Rise of Ayman al-Zawahiri

Osama bin Laden may be the world's best-known jihadist, but professional terrorism-watchers believe his chief strategist, Ayman al-Zawahiri, is now the man to study. An Egyptian physician who has spent most of his life in the jihadist movement, he's had a longer and more complicated career than the gaunt Saudi millionaire.

Zawahiri has been taking a bigger place on the world stage of late, making four video or audio statements during the past 13 months. They included a warning to Americans that their choice in the 2004 presidential election would not protect them from future jihadist attacks, a denunciation of U.S. calls for reform in the Middle East and a promise of more attacks like the July 7 mass-transit bombings in London.

Bin Laden made only one appearance during that period, on a video that aired shortly before the U.S. presidential election. "Now the face of al Qaeda is Zawahiri," says Fawaz A. Gerges, a Middle East specialist at Sarah Lawrence College.

For students of jihadism such as Gerges, Zawahiri's rise is something of a scholarly advantage, because he has left a much more detailed paper trail than bin Laden. And Zawahiri's life story is virtually the definitive chronicle of the strategic shift from trying to overthrow Middle Eastern rulers to attacking the United States and former imperial powers.

Born in 1951 to a Cairo family of physicians and religious scholars, the teenage Zawahiri entered the underground Islamist movement aiming to install what the movement viewed as a devout Muslim government. Some Islamists favored revolution, but Zawahiri and others wanted a coup d'état. Though Zawahiri viewed himself as a fulltime warrior, he also completed medical studies and became a surgeon.

After moving to Pakistan to help with the Afghan jihad against the Soviet occupation, Zawahiri decided to concentrate on the United States and other Western powers, largely due to bin Laden's influence. The wealthy Saudi had been raised in Wahhabism, the branch of Islam that insists it is the only true form of the faith. "One would have expected Zawahiri... a fervent believer in attacking ruling Muslim 'renegades,' to sway the attitudes of... bin Laden and slow down the jihadist march against the United States," Gerges writes. But rather than slowing bin Laden's "speeding jihadist caravan, Zawahiri wholeheartedly joined it."

Perhaps the Egyptian played a greater role than the relatively inexperienced bin Laden in building al Qaeda. "The people with Zawahiri had extraordinary capabilities — doctors, engineers, soldiers," said Essam Deraz, an Egyptian who made documentaries about the anti-Soviet war. "They had experience in secret work. They knew how to organize themselves and create cells. And they became the leaders."

Zawahiri and other Egyptian jihadists had been battle-hardened by spending time in prison — and in Zawahiri's case, undergoing torture. "Ayman was beaten all the time — every day," said Montasser al-Zayat, who was imprisoned with Zawahiri following the 1981 assassination of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and wrote a critical biography of his former prison mate. The torturers finally forced Zawahiri to betray a comrade.

By the time Zawahiri left prison, Gerges writes, "a thirst for vengeance took hold of his soul." Although his target at the time was the Egyptian government, Zawahiri seems to have transferred his spirit of vengefulness to the United States. In 1998, following a CIA takedown of an al Qaeda cell that Zawahiri had formed in Albania, Zawahiri told an
Arabic newspaper in London: “We are interested in briefly telling the Americans that their message has been received and that the response, which we hope they will read carefully, is being prepared, because, with God’s help, we will write it in the language that they understand.” The next day, suicide bombers attacked the U.S. embassies in Tanzania and Kenya, killing 224 people.

or Stephen Schwartz, director of the Center for Islamic Pluralism, who authored an early study of Wahhabism, the level of hatred reflected in that statement and others may also represent Zawahiri’s contribution to the Qaeda ideology. “The Egyptians adopted the Wahhabi claims to represent the only genuine Sunni Muslims in the world, and their program for imposition of a strict Islamic state,” Schwartz writes, “but they also expressed a deeper hatred and contempt for Westerners based on their experience with British colonial rule.”

Zawahiri’s own life has given him plenty of opportunity to cultivate those emotions.


Bibliography

Books


Fouda, Yosri, and Nick Fielding, Masterminds of Terror: The Truth Behind the Most Devastating Attack the World Has Ever Seen, Mainstream Publishing, 2003. A top investigative reporter for Al-Jazeera gleaned a detailed account of the 9/11 plot from two al Qaeda masterminds before they were arrested.


Sageman, Marc, *Understanding Terror Networks*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004. The author’s credentials are well suited for analyzing how jihadist cells connect to a larger movement. Sageman, now a psychiatrist, was assigned as a CIA officer to the U.S. support mission to the anti-Soviet Afghanistan jihad.

Scheuer, Michael, *Imperial Hubris: Why the West is Losing the War on Terrorism*, Potomac Books, 2004. Also a CIA veteran of the Afghanistan jihad, Scheuer founded the agency's anti-bin Laden unit. He rips into the official American response to the modern jihadist.


**Articles**


Hayes, Stephen, and Thomas Joscelyn, “The Mother of All Connections; A special report on the new evidence of collaboration between Saddam Hussein's Iraq and Al Qaeda,” *The Weekly Standard*, July 18, 2005. Writers for the neoconservative publication lay out a case that Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda were linked.


**Reports and Studies**


**The Next Step**

**Fighting the Jihadists**

Abu-Nasr, “Yemen Finds Money An Effective Weapon to Reform Terrorists,” *The Houston Chronicle*, May 16, 2004, p. A32. In an unusual effort to fight terrorism, Yemen released 246 suspected terrorists after teaching them that the Quran does not support jihad, hired many of them as civil servants and paid off tribes that sheltered them.
The global jihad movement is made up of largely autonomous groups pursuing their own aims that can only be defeated by mimicking their tactics — supporting long missions by small, mobile military units.

Rand Beers, a top White House counterterrorism advisor, says he recently resigned from his position because the administration's war on terrorism failed to address the root causes of terror.

De Aristegui argues that the Islamic terrorists use a variety of excuses — including the Iraq war — to legitimize their attacks; their ultimate goal is to force democratic societies to surrender to their totalitarian power.

The author of The Continuing Storm: Iraq, Poisonous Weapons and Deterrence argues that U.S. retreat from Iraq will signify weakness and lead to an intensified onslaught from jihadis. The U.S. must establish a democracy in Iraq to conquer the global jihad.

Khalid Sheik Mohammed, al Qaeda's self-described mastermind of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, was captured after evading intelligence officials for years.

Mohammed Sharkawa, a radical Islamist who led Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's operations in Northern Iraq, was captured after luring jihadist suicide bombers and hiring other men to carry out his tasks.

Many scholars say Osama Bin Laden's jihad is not compatible with the Islamic concept.

Religious scholar Reza Aslan says militant Islamic extremists are angered over the Muslim world's inevitable progression toward modernization and are manipulating the Quran to justify their abuse of human rights and democracy.

Marc Sageman, a CIA veteran turned forensic psychiatrist, examined 172 jihadists' cases and concluded that social bonds are more important than religion in molding extremists.

Following the bombings on the London transit system, the author argues that terrorists committed to global jihad are mostly Westernized Muslims living in Europe who felt excluded from Western society.

U.S. officials have begun to focus on the role of radical Wahhabism, the rigid and puritanical form of Islam dominant in Saudi Arabia, in encouraging followers to commit violent acts.

Contacts

Counterterrorism Blog
http://counterterror.typepad.com
A Web log featuring frequent posts by regular contributors, mostly former law enforcement officials and congressional
staffers; also links to news stories and research reports.

**Heritage Foundation**  
214 Massachusetts Ave., N.E., Washington DC 20002  
(202) 546-4400  
www.heritage.org  
A leading conservative think tank that has published studies on various aspects of international terrorism and anti-terrorism measures.

**Institute for Counter-Terrorism**  
The Interdisciplinary Center, P.O. Box 167, Herzlia, 46150, Israel  
www.ict.org.il  
A think tank that offers detailed profiles of terrorist organizations and brief reports on a variety of terrorist-related issues.

**International Crisis Group**  
1629 K Street, N.W., Suite 450, Washington DC 20006  
(202) 785-1601  
www.crisisgroup.org  
A Brussels-based conflict resolution organization that monitors such issues as international terrorism and Islamism, with a series of on-the-ground reports on both topics.

**Middle East Media Research Institute**  
P.O. Box 27837, Washington DC, 20038  
(202) 955-9070  
www.memri.org  
An organization that provides translations from Arabic, Farsi and Hebrew publications and runs the Jihad and Terrorism Studies Project, with translations of al Qaeda communiqués and similar material.

**Rand Corporation**  
Terrorism and Homeland Security Research Area, 1200 South Hayes St., Arlington VA 22202-5050  
(703) 413-1100  
www.rand.org  
A long-established think tank that runs an active terrorism study project (not limited to jihadist-related topics), with numerous publications available online.

**Royal Institute of International Affairs**  
Chatham House, 10 St. James Square, London SW1Y 4LE  
(011- 44) 207 957 5700  
www.riia.org  
Offers a limited but worthwhile series of publications on terrorism-related topics.

**Terrorism Knowledge Base**  
P.O. Box 889, Oklahoma City, OK 73101  
(405) 232.5121  
www.tkb.org/Home.jsp  
Organized by the National Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism — created by survivors of the Oklahoma City bombing of 1995 — the database is a compendium of terrorist attacks (not limited to jihadist attacks) dating back to 1968.

**Footnotes**


[16] Ibid.


[25] Ibid., pp. 145-149.


[28] Lewis, op. cit., p. 211.


[32] Ibid.


[40] Ibid., pp. 407-409, 466-468, 534-537.


[45] Ibid.


[54] Robert S. Leiken, “Europe's Angry Muslims,” *Foreign Affairs*, July-August 2005, p. 120.


[65] Laqueur, *op. cit.*