

How al-Qaida Ends

Audrey Kurth Cronin

The Decline and Demise of Terrorist Groups

The war on terrorism might be perpetual, but the war on al-Qaida will end. Although the al-Qaida network is in many ways distinct from its terrorist predecessors, especially in its protean ability to transform itself from a physical to a virtual organization, it is not completely without precedent. And the challenges of devising an effective response over the long term to a well-established international group are by no means unique. Al-Qaida shares elements of continuity and discontinuity with other terrorist groups, and lessons to be learned from the successes and failures of past and present counterterrorist responses may be applicable to this case. Current research focuses on al-Qaida and its associates, with few serious attempts to analyze them within a broader historical and political context. Yet this context sheds light on crucial assumptions and unanswered questions in the campaign against al-Qaida. What do scholars know about how terrorist movements end? What has worked in previous campaigns? Which of those lessons are relevant to understanding how, and under what circumstances, al-Qaida will end?

Radical Islamists will pose a threat to the United States and its interests for a long time to come. But there is a difference between sporadic and local acts of terrorism by religious extremists and the coordinated growth of al-Qaida, with its signature of meticulous planning, mass casualties, and global reach. A central assumption of early U.S. planning was that the elimination of al-Qaida would bring the war on terrorism (or the global struggle against violent extremism) to an end. Yet al-Qaida itself is a moving target, with experts arguing that it has changed structure and form numerous times. As a result, the strategy to counter this group is composed of tactics such as targeting its leader, Osama bin Laden, and his top lieutenants and denying the organization the ability, finances, and territory to regroup. Similar approaches have been employed against other terrorist organizations, with sharply varied outcomes.

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Careful analysis of comparable situations can shed light on what is required to close out an epoch dominated by al-Qaida terrorism.

Terrorism studies are often event driven, spurred by attacks and the need to analyze and respond more effectively to a specific threat.¹ As a result, the bulk of traditional research on terrorism has been descriptive analysis focused on one group, detailing its organization, structure, tactics, leadership, and so on. True to this pattern, since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, there has been an outpouring of research (bad and good) on al-Qaida, but little attention to analyzing it across functional lines within a wider body of knowledge and research on terrorist groups. To the extent that broader crosscutting research has been done, the weight of it rests on questions of the causes of this threat, as well as the arguably narrow matters of the weapons and methods being used or likely to be used. This agenda reflects the strengths of the established international security and defense community, where there is far more expertise, for example, on nuclear weapons and proliferation than on the Arabic-speaking networks that might use them, on operational methods such as suicide attacks than on the operatives who employ them, and on the causes of wars than on how they end. Yet just as war termination may be more vital in its implications for the international system than how wars begin, the question of how the al-Qaida movement ends may be vital to understanding the strategic implications for the United States, its allies, and the shape of the new era.

The question of how terrorist groups decline is insufficiently studied, and the available research is virtually untapped. Yet it has a raft of implications for the challenges posed by al-Qaida and its associates, as well as for the counter-terrorist policies of the United States and its allies, many of which reflect little awareness or scrutiny of the assumptions upon which they rest. For example, national leaders focus on the capture or death of bin Laden as a central objective in the campaign against al-Qaida.² Past experience with the decapitation of terrorist groups, however, is not seriously examined for insights into this case. Some analysts concentrate on the root causes of terrorism and urge policies that will shift local public support away from al-Qaida, suggesting a long-term approach toward the movement's gradual decline. Experience from cases where populations have become unwilling to support other causes is little

1. On this point, see Frederick Schulze, "Breaking the Cycle: Empirical Research and Postgraduate Studies on Terrorism," in Andrew Silke, ed., *Research on Terrorism: Trends, Achievements, and Failures* (London: Frank Cass, 2004), pp. 161–185.

2. See, for example, "CIA Chief Has 'Excellent Idea' Where bin Laden Is," June 22, 2005, <http://www.cnn.com/2005/US/06/20/goss.bin.laden/index.html>.

tapped, and resulting changes in the behavior of terrorist organizations separated from their constituencies are hardly known. In other cases, the use of force or other repressive measures against terrorist groups has been successful. Yet the conditions under which that approach has succeeded or failed have not been examined for parallels with al-Qaida. Most observers assume that negotiations would never lead to the end of al-Qaida because it has nonnegotiable, apocalyptic demands. But experience with other terrorist groups that had open-ended or evolving demands is little scrutinized. In short, the substantial history of how terrorism declines and ceases has not been analyzed for its potential relevance to al-Qaida.

The argument here is that past experience with the decline of terrorist organizations is vital in dealing with the current threat, and that the United States and its allies must tap into that experience to avoid prior mistakes and to effect al-Qaida's demise. The article proceeds in four sections. The first provides a brief review of previous research on how terrorism declines or ends; the second is an examination of the endings of other relevant terrorist organizations, with an eye toward determining what has worked in previous campaigns and why; the third offers an analysis of al-Qaida's unique characteristics to determine where comparisons with other groups are appropriate and where they are not; and the fourth addresses how what came before has implications for U.S. and allied policy toward al-Qaida today.

Previous Research on How Terrorism Ends

The study of terrorism is often narrowly conceived and full of gaps; it is not surprising, therefore, that the question of how the phenomenon ends is understudied. The vast majority of contemporary research on terrorism has been conducted by scholars who are relatively new to the subject and unaware of the body of work that has gone before: in the 1990s, for example, 83 percent of the articles published in the major journals of terrorism research were produced by individuals writing on the subject for the first time.³ Thus far they have made little effort to build on past conclusions, with only halting and disappointing progress in understanding the phenomenon outside its present political context.⁴ Not unrelated, a crippling aspect of much of the research on

3. Andrew Silke, "The Road Less Travelled: Recent Trends in Terrorism Research," in Silke, *Research on Terrorism*, p. 191.

4. Andrew Silke, "An Introduction to Terrorism Research," in Silke, *Research on Terrorism*, pp. 1–29.

terrorism is its often applied nature; analysts willing to examine more than one group or broader, noncontemporary, conceptual questions are rare.⁵ This is somewhat understandable, given that different groups undertake terrorist acts for different reasons, and it is safer to specialize; efforts to accelerate the demise of al-Qaida, however, require more lateral thinking. The thinness of terrorism studies may be giving way to more sustained substantive research in the post-September 11 world, though it is too early to say whether current attention will persist and mature.

Nonetheless, serious research conducted thus far has produced several overlapping themes and approaches in three areas: the relationship between how a terrorist group begins and ends; the search for predictable cycles or phases of terrorist activity; and the comparison of historical counterterrorism cases.

LINKS BETWEEN BEGINNINGS AND ENDINGS

Hypotheses about how terrorist groups end are frequently connected to the broader body of hypotheses about what causes terrorism.⁶ The assumption is that the origins of terrorism persist throughout the life of terrorist organizations and shed light on sources of their eventual demise. But this is often an oversimplification. Given the close ties between terrorism analysis and government support, when the perception of imminent attacks subsides, support for solid research declines. Work on a declining or defunct terrorist group is therefore typically sparser than is the tackling of its origins and evolution. With such a glaring imbalance in the available research, great care must be taken in generalizing about beginnings and endings of specific terrorist groups.

Recognition of the interplay of internal and external forces in the evolution of terrorism is also crucial. In any given case, the evolution from political awareness to the formation (usually) of a terrorist group to the carrying out of a terrorist attack is a complex process. Some steps in this process may be acci-

5. Silke, *Research on Terrorism*, pp. 208–209.

6. Martha Crenshaw, "How Terrorism Declines," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Spring 1991), p. 73; and Jeffrey Ian Ross and Ted Robert Gurr, "Why Terrorism Subsides: A Comparative Study of Canada and the United States," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (July 1989), pp. 407–408. Examples of articles on the drivers of terrorism include Michael Mousseau, "Market Civilization and Its Clash with Terror," *International Security*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (Winter 2002/03), pp. 5–29; and Audrey Kurth Cronin, "Behind the Curve: Globalization and International Terrorism," *International Security*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (Winter 2002/03), pp. 30–58. See also Charles Knight and Melissa Murphy, and Michael Mousseau, "Correspondence: The Sources of Terrorism," *International Security*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Fall 2003), pp. 192–198.

dental or opportunistic.⁷ Likewise, the process by which a terrorist group declines may be as much determined by innate factors as by external policies or actors.⁸ A group may make a bad decision, engage in a counterproductive strategy, or simply implode. It may also have an innate compulsion to act—for example, it may be driven to engage in terrorist attacks to maintain support, to shore up its organizational integrity, or even to foster its continued existence.⁹

Studies of the causes of terrorism frequently begin with analyses of the role of individual operatives or their leaders. These include examinations of the psychologies of individual terrorists,¹⁰ “profiles” of terrorists (and future terrorists) and their organizations,¹¹ assessments of the conditions that encourage or enable individuals to resort to terrorism,¹² and studies of the distinctive characteristics of terrorist leaders and their followers.¹³ The relationship be-

7. For more on this argument, especially as it relates to the causes of terrorism, see Audrey Kurth Cronin, “Sources of Contemporary Terrorism,” in Cronin and James M. Ludes, eds., *Attacking Terrorism: Elements of a Grand Strategy* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2004), pp. 19–45, especially p. 22.

8. See United States Institute of Peace, “How Terrorism Ends,” Special Report, No. 48 (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, May 25, 1999), especially the overview section written by Martha Crenshaw, pp. 2–4.

9. For example, Bruce Hoffman compares al-Qaida to the archetypal shark that must continue swimming to survive. See, for example, Ann Scott Tyson, “Al-Qaeda Broken, but Dangerous,” *Christian Science Monitor*, June 24, 2002. See also Martha Crenshaw, “Decisions to Use Terrorism: Psychological Constraints on Instrumental Reasoning,” *International Social Movements Research*, Vol. 4 (1992), pp. 29–42.

10. Among numerous sources on these subjects, see Martha Crenshaw, “The Psychology of Terrorism: An Agenda for the Twenty-first Century,” *Political Psychology*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (June 2000), pp. 405–420; Martha Crenshaw, “The Logic of Terrorism,” in Walter Reich, ed., *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind*, 2d ed. (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1998), pp. 7–24; and Jerrold Post, “Terrorist Psycho-Logic,” in Reich, *Origins of Terrorism*, pp. 25–40.

11. This approach is well established in criminology and intelligence analysis. See, for example, Irene Jung Fiala, “Anything New? The Racial Profiling of Terrorists,” *Criminal Justice Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (March 2003), pp. 53–58; Rex A. Hudson, *Who Becomes a Terrorist and Why? The 1999 Government Report on Profiling Terrorists* (Guilford, Conn.: Lyons, 2002); and Paul R. Pillar, “Counterterrorism after al-Qaeda,” *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (Summer 2004), p. 105. As Pillar points out, the Transportation Security Administration already uses profiling to screen airline passengers. *Ibid.*

12. See, for example, Alan Krueger and Jitka Maleckova, “Education, Poverty, Political Violence, and Terrorism: Is There a Causal Connection?” Working Paper, No. 9074 (Cambridge, Mass.: National Bureau of Economic Research, July 2002), p. 2; Alan Richards, *Socio-economic Roots of Radicalism? Towards Explaining the Appeal of Islamic Radicals* (Carlisle, Pa.: Strategic Studies Institute, Army War College, July 2003); Daniel Pipes, “God and Mammon: Does Poverty Cause Militant Islam?” *National Interest*, No. 66 (Winter 2001/2002), pp. 14–21; and Gary T. Dempsey, “Old Folly in a New Disguise: Nation Building to Combat Terrorism,” Policy Analysis Series, No. 429 (Washington, D.C.: Cato Institute, March 21, 2002).

13. See, for example, Leonard Weinberg and William Lee Eubank, “Leaders and Followers in Italian Terrorist Groups,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (April 1989), pp. 156–176.

tween the motivations and characteristics of individual operatives, on the one hand, and the means to end their violent attacks, on the other, is implied but not always obvious.

Another approach especially favored among terrorism experts is analyzing the organizational dynamics of the group. Important late-twentieth-century research concluded that terrorism is essentially a group activity: by understanding the dynamics of the group, including its shared ideological commitment and group identity, analysts can isolate the means of ending its terrorist attacks.¹⁴ The focus is thus on the dynamics of relationships between members as a way of gaining insight into the vulnerability of the group's hierarchy, the weaknesses of its organizational structure, the group's ideology and worldview, and so on, which in turn potentially sheds light on how a group might unravel. Such research analyzes the behavior of the terrorist group from the perspective of the needs of the organization itself, an approach that was particularly influential in studying the behavior of leftist and ethnonationalist/separatist groups of the 1970s and 1980s.¹⁵

Many analysts, however, question the relevance of this well-established approach in an era of decentralized, nonhierarchical cell structures that are able to exploit information technology and the tools of globalization.¹⁶ The internet is emerging as the critical new dimension of twenty-first-century global terrorism, with websites and electronic bulletin boards spreading ideological messages, perpetuating terrorist networks, providing links between operatives in cyberspace, and sharing violent images to demonstrate ruthlessness and incite followers to action.¹⁷ Likewise, a growing emphasis on individual initiative, the presence of mission-driven organizations operating with an understanding

14. For an organizational analysis of terrorist groups, see David C. Rapoport, ed., *Inside Terrorist Organizations*, 2d ed. (London: Frank Cass, 2001).

15. Martha Crenshaw, "Theories of Terrorism: Instrumental and Organizational Approaches," in Rapoport, *Inside Terrorist Organizations*, pp. 19–27.

16. See, for example, Ian O. Lesser, Bruce Hoffman, John Arquilla, David Ronfeldt, and Michele Zanini, *Countering the New Terrorism* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 1999); John Arquilla and David F. Ronfeldt, eds., *Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime, and Militancy* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 2001); and Ray Takeyh and Nikolas Gvosdev, "Do Terrorist Networks Need a Home?" *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (Summer 2002), pp. 97–108; and Matthew Levitt, "Untangling the Terror Web: Identifying and Counteracting the Phenomenon of Crossover between Terrorist Groups," *SAIS Review*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Winter–Spring 2004), pp. 33–48.

17. Steve Coll and Susan B. Glasser, "Terrorists Turn to the Web as Base of Operations," *Washington Post*, August 7, 2005; Craig Whitlock, "Briton Used Internet as His Bully Pulpit," *Washington Post*, August 8, 2005; and Susan B. Glasser, and Steve Coll, "The Web as Weapon: Zarqawi Intertwines Acts on Ground in Iraq with Propaganda Campaign on the Internet," *Washington Post*, August 9, 2005.

of the commander's intent, and a lack of traditional logistical trails all have implications for analyzing how terrorist groups end. Cells that operate independently are much more difficult to eliminate and can even gain a kind of immortality. Mission-driven groups are designed to be self-perpetuating and may not fit traditional organizational models of how terrorism ends.

The nature of the grievance that drives a terrorist organization has some bearing on the speed and likelihood of its decline.¹⁸ On average, modern terrorist groups do not exist for long. According to David Rapoport, 90 percent of terrorist organizations have a life span of less than one year; and of those that make it to a year, more than half disappear within a decade.¹⁹ Whether an organization supports a left-wing, right-wing, or ethnonationalist/separatist cause appears to matter in determining its life span. Of these three, terrorist groups motivated by ethnonationalist/separatist causes have had the longest average life span; their greater average longevity seems to result, at least in part, from support among the local populace of the same ethnicity for the group's political or territorial objectives.²⁰ It is too soon to compile reliable data on the average life span of contemporary terrorist groups motivated by religion (or at least groups that appeal to religious concepts as a mobilizing force); however, the remarkable staying power of early religious terrorist groups such as the Hindu Thugs, in existence for at least 600 years, would seem to indicate the inherent staying power of sacred or spiritually based motivations.²¹

Finally, because of the degree to which terrorism research has been subsidized by governments and biased by later policy imperatives, the role of

18. United States Institute of Peace, "How Terrorism Ends," p. 1.

19. David C. Rapoport, "Terrorism," in Mary Hawkesworth and Maurice Kogan, eds., *Routledge Encyclopedia of Government and Politics*, Vol. 2 (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 1067. This claim admittedly needs to be updated. A good study of the life span of terrorist organizations, including those that gained purchase in the 1990s, is still waiting to be written.

20. In discussing the longevity of terrorist groups, Martha Crenshaw notes only three significant groups with ethnonationalist ideologies that ceased to exist within ten years of their formation. One of these, the National Organization of Cypriot Fighters (Ethniki Organosis Kyprion Agoniston, or EOKA), disbanded because its goal—the liberation of Cyprus—was achieved. By contrast, a majority of the terrorist groups that she lists as having existed for ten years or longer have recognizable ethnonationalist ideologies, including the Irish Republican Army (in its many forms), Sikh separatist groups, Basque Homeland and Freedom (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna, or ETA), various Palestinian nationalist groups, and the Corsican National Liberation Front. See Crenshaw, "How Terrorism Declines," pp. 69–87.

21. David C. Rapoport, "Fear and Trembling: Terrorism in Three Religious Traditions," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 78, No. 3 (September 1984), pp. 658–677. Rapoport asserts that before the nineteenth century, religion was the only acceptable cause for terrorism, providing a transcendent purpose that rose above the treacherous and petty political concerns of man.

counterterrorism is often overemphasized. With easier access to government data, researchers tend naturally to stress state behavior. The degree to which terrorist groups evolve independent of government action can be underappreciated. The result is a strong bias toward tying the decline of such groups to specific government policies, especially after the fact, even though the relationship between cause and effect may be unclear.²²

CYCLES, STAGES, WAVES, AND PHASES

Some researchers argue that terrorist attacks conform to a temporal pattern that provides insight into increases and decreases in numbers of attacks. Thus another approach to understanding the life span of a terrorist movement is to search for identifiable cycles.

Walter Enders and Todd Sandler assert that long-term analysis of terrorism trends during the late twentieth century indicates that transnational terrorist attacks run in cycles, with peaks approximately every two years. Enders and Sandler's cycles are tracked across terrorist groups worldwide, shedding light on the likelihood of an attack coming from someone somewhere; indeed, before September 11 they correctly predicted enhanced danger of a high-casualty terrorist attack. But like strategic intelligence that provided general but not tactical warning of the September 11 attacks, Enders and Sandler's findings were of limited use in predicting where the attack would occur, by which group, and by what means.²³ The apparent existence of global statistical patterns is interesting, but it provides no insight into the decline of specific terrorist groups. In his attempt to use mathematical analysis to determine risk assessment for al-Qaida attacks, Jonathan Farley likewise concluded that while the connections between cells can be quantitatively modeled, assumptions about how individual cells operate may be wrong.²⁴ The usefulness of statistical models based on a large number of assumptions to determine a specific group's decline is limited.

22. Crenshaw, "How Terrorism Declines," p. 73.

23. Walter Enders and Todd Sandler, "Transnational Terrorism, 1968–2000: Thresholds, Persistence, and Forecasts," *Southern Economic Journal*, Vol. 71, No. 3 (January 2004), pp. 467–482; Todd Sandler, Walter Enders, and Harvey E. Lapan, "Economic Analysis Can Help Fight International Terrorism," *Challenge*, January/February 1991, pp. 10–17; and Walter Enders and Todd Sandler, "Is Transnational Terrorism Becoming More Threatening? A Time-Series Investigation," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 44, No. 3 (June 2000), pp. 307–332.

24. Jonathan David Farley, "Breaking Al-Qaida Cells: A Mathematical Analysis of Counterterrorism Operations (A Guide for Risk Assessment and Decision Making)," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 26, No. 6 (November/December 2003), pp. 399–411. See also Bernard Harris, "Mathematical Methods in Combatting Terrorism," *Risk Analysis*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (August 2004), pp. 985–988.

Other experts have focused on the existence of developmental stages through which all terrorist groups evolve, especially psychological stages of growing alienation or moral disengagement for groups, individuals, or both.²⁵ Leonard Weinberg and Louise Richardson have explored the applicability of a conflict theory framework—including stages of emergence, escalation, and de-escalation—to the life cycles of terrorist groups. They conclude that the framework is useful in examining terrorist groups originating or operating in Western Europe in the late twentieth century, but urge more research in this area to determine whether it is applicable to other places and periods.²⁶

Still other analysts suggest that specific types of groups may possess their own developmental stages. Ehud Sprinzak, for example, argued that right-wing groups exhibit a unique cyclical pattern. Driven by grievances specific to their particular group, members direct their hostility against “enemy” segments of the population defined by who they are—with regard to race, religion, sexual preference, ethnicity, and so on—not by what they do. To the extent that the government then defends the target population, the former also becomes a “legitimate” target. But the cycle of violence reflects underlying factors that may continue to exist, and that can experience periods of flare-up and remission, depending on the degree to which the government is able to bring campaigns of violence under control.²⁷

Other researchers study the evolution of terrorist groups as types of social movements and are intellectual descendants of Ted Robert Gurr.²⁸ The more highly developed literature on social movements posits, for example, that terrorism may appear at the end of a cycle of the rise and fall of movements of mass protest.²⁹ Social movements may just as easily be drawn toward more

25. For example, referring to the case study of the Weathermen, Ehud Sprinzak argues that left-wing groups evolve through three stages: crisis of confidence, conflict of legitimacy, and crisis of legitimacy. See Sprinzak, “The Psychopolitical Formation of Extreme Left Terrorism in a Democracy: The Case of the Weatherman,” in Reich, *Origins of Terrorism*, pp. 65–85. For another argument about the psychological phases for terrorist groups, see Albert Bandura, “Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement,” in Reich, *Origins of Terrorism*, pp. 161–191.

26. Leonard Weinberg and Louise Richardson, “Conflict Theory and the Trajectory of Terrorist Campaigns in Western Europe,” in Silke, *Research on Terrorism*, pp. 138–160.

27. Ehud Sprinzak, “Right-Wing Terrorism in Comparative Perspective: The Case of Split Delegitimation,” in Tore Bjorgo, ed., *Terrorism from the Extreme Right* (London: Frank Cass, 1995), pp. 17–43.

28. Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1970). There is a rich literature from the 1960s and 1970s on political violence, of which terrorism is arguably a subset. Gurr defines political violence as “all collective attacks within a political community against the political regime, its actor—including competing political groups as well as incumbents—or its policies.” *Ibid.*, pp. 3–4.

29. Crenshaw, “How Terrorism Declines,” p. 82. See also John O. Voll, “Bin Laden and the New Age of Global Terrorism,” *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (December 2001), pp. 1–5; and Quintan

positive means, however. Understanding the pattern of mobilization may be important for dissecting the origins of an established group but may not be as revealing of its likely end. On the whole, research on social movements gives more insight into the origins of terrorist groups than it does into their decline.

Finally, Rapoport posits another broad hypothesis on the life cycles of terrorist groups. He argues that over the course of modern history, waves of international terrorist activity last about a generation (approximately forty years). These waves are characterized by expansion and contraction and have an international character, with similar activities in several countries driven by a common ideology. Two factors are critical to Rapoport's waves: (1) a transformation in communication or transportation patterns, and (2) a new doctrine or culture. Yet although a wave is composed of terrorist organizations and their activities, the two need not exist concurrently. Rapoport argues that because most individual organizations have short life spans, they often disappear before the overarching wave loses force. The current wave of jihadist terrorism may be different, however, because unlike earlier waves of the modern era, this one is driven by a religious (not a secular) cause. Rapoport is therefore reluctant to predict its end.³⁰

COMPARATIVE COUNTERTERRORISM CASES

Cyclical hypotheses are notoriously difficult to formulate and difficult to prove; they can require so much generalization and qualification that their relevance to specific groups becomes remote. As with many international security questions, an alternative approach has been to assemble volumes of comparative case studies that draw parallel lessons about terrorist organizations, including how they declined and ended or were defeated.³¹ These, too,

Wiktorowicz, "Framing Jihad: Intra-movement Framing Contests and al-Qaida's Struggle for Sacred Authority," *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 49, Supp. 12 (December 2004), pp. 159–177.

30. David C. Rapoport, "The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism," in Cronin and Ludes, *Attacking Terrorism*, pp. 46–73; and David C. Rapoport, "The Fourth Wave: September 11 in the History of Terrorism," *Current History*, December 2001, pp. 419–424.

31. The best of these is Martha Crenshaw's edited book *Terrorism in Context* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), because it examines both the evolution of terrorist organizations and the counterterrorist techniques used against them. It explains terrorism as part of broader processes of political and social change. Reflecting its own historical context, however, there is a strong bias toward left-wing and ethnonationalist/separatist groups. In the wake of September 11, Yonah Alexander produced an edited volume of comparative case studies, *Combating Terrorism: Strategies of Ten Countries* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), which emphasizes counterterrorist techniques used mainly against European groups. Another promising study is Robert J. Art and Louise Richardson, *Democracy and Terrorism: Lessons from the Past* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, forthcoming).

present a host of challenges. First, terrorism studies often look primarily at the attributes of a particular group or at the counterterrorist policies of a state. Rarely are both equally well considered. Because of the heavy state interest in combating terrorism, the emphasis is understandably on a comparison of counterterrorist techniques used by states over the life span of each group, with policy implications for current challenges. Second, with their focus on a relatively narrow functional question, comparative terrorism cases can fall victim to superficiality: regional experts can be reluctant to cede ground to strategic studies experts whom they consider interlopers in their geographic/linguistic/cultural ambit. For this reason, many comparative studies are published as edited collections of articles by regional experts, but these in turn can fail to control relevant variables and to coalesce on a central theme. Third, access to data is a big problem: conducting primary research on contemporary terrorist groups is difficult because making contact with operatives or their targets can be dangerous for both the researchers and their contacts. In addition, governments may restrict access to relevant written sources.³² Fourth, because of the political nature of terrorism, researchers operate at the intersections of sensitive ideas; maintaining objectivity in studying behavior that is deliberately designed to shock can prove challenging. Finally, studying this phenomenon over a range of terrorist groups in different cultural, historical, and political contexts requires generalization and risks the introduction of distortions when making comparisons.³³ The best case studies are usually completed years after a group has ceased to exist; as a result, their applicability to current challenges is limited. For any given group, it is vital to identify characteristics that distinguish it from its predecessors and those that do not.

How Other Terrorist Groups Have Ended

There are at least seven broad explanations for, or critical elements in, the decline and ending of terrorist groups in the modern era: (1) capture or killing of the leader, (2) failure to transition to the next generation, (3) achievement of the group's aims, (4) transition to a legitimate political process, (5) undermin-

32. Crenshaw, "How Terrorism Declines," p. 70.

33. Crenshaw, "Thoughts on Relating Terrorism to Historical Contexts," in Crenshaw, *Terrorism in Context*, pp. 3–24. One interesting comparative study of terrorist groups in two countries, Canada and the United States, concluded that four factors led to terrorism's decline: preemption, deterrence, burnout, and backlash. Its applicability was limited by the small number of cases, however. Jeffrey Ian Ross and Ted Robert Gurr, "Why Terrorism Subsides: A Comparative Study of Canada and the United States," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (July 1989), pp. 405–426.

ing of popular support, (6) repression, and (7) transition from terrorism to other forms of violence. The relevant factors can be both internal and external: terrorist groups implode for reasons that may or may not be related to measures taken against them. Nor are they necessarily separate and distinct. Indeed individual case studies of terrorist groups often reveal that more than one dynamic was responsible for their decline. The typical focus on government counterterrorist measures slights the capabilities and dynamics of the group itself and is frequently misguided; even among groups that decline in response to counterterrorist campaigns, the picture remains complex.³⁴ Counterterrorist techniques are often best used in combination, and methods can overlap: frequently more than one technique has been employed to respond to a given group at different times. The goal here is to focus on the historical experience of previous groups and study the commonalities, in both the internal and external variables, so as to determine aspects of the processes of terrorist decline that are relevant to al-Qaida. Although listing these seven key factors separately is admittedly artificial, they are analyzed consecutively for the sake of argument and convenience (see Table 1).

CAPTURE OR KILLING OF THE LEADER

The effects of capturing or killing a terrorist leader have varied greatly depending on variables such as the structure of the organization, whether the leader created a cult of personality, and the presence of a viable successor. Regardless of whether the removal of a leader results in the demise of the terrorist group, the event normally provides critical insight into the depth and nature of the group's popular support and usually represents a turning point. Recent examples of groups that were either destroyed or deeply wounded by the capture of a charismatic leader include Peru's Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso), the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), the Real Irish Republican Army (RIRA), and Japan's Aum Shinrikyo. The U.S. government designates all four as "foreign terrorist organizations."³⁵

34. Crenshaw argues that the decline of terrorism results from the interplay of three factors: the government's response, the choices of the terrorist group, and the organization's resources. See Crenshaw, "How Terrorism Declines," p. 80. In another article, she further explores the internal and external factors, pointing to how government strategies such as deterrence, enhanced defense, and negotiations interact with terrorist group success, organizational breakdown, dwindling support, and new alternatives for terrorist organizations. See United States Institute of Peace, "How Terrorism Ends," pp. 2–5.

35. See the annual U.S. Department of State *Country Reports on Terrorism* (which, beginning in 2004, replaced *Patterns of Global Terrorism*) at <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/crt>. In 2003 the PKK was renamed Kongra-Gel, which continues to be a designated group.

Table 1. How Terrorist Groups Decline and End

Key Factors ^a	Notable Historical Examples ^b
Capture/Kill leader(s)	Shining Path Kurdistan Workers' Party Real Irish Republican Army Aum Shinrikyo
Unsuccessful generational transition	Red Brigades Second of June Movement Weather Underground Baader-Meinhof group (Red Army Faction) The Order Aryan Resistance Army
Achievement of the cause	Irgun/Stern Gang African National Congress
Transition to a legitimate political process/negotiations	Provisional Irish Republican Army Palestinian Liberation Organization Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam ^c Moro Islamic Liberation Front
Loss of popular support	Real Irish Republican Army Basque Homeland and Freedom (ETA) Shining Path
Repression	People's Will Shining Path Kurdistan Workers' Party
Transition out of terrorism:	
toward criminality	Abu Sayyaf Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia
toward full insurgency	Khmer Rouge Guatemalan Labor Party/Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unit Communist Party of Nepal-Maoists Kashmiri separatist groups (e.g., Lashkar-e-Toiba and Hizbul Mujahideen) Armed Islamic Group (Algeria)

^a The factors listed here are not mutually exclusive and can be found in combination.

^b These are illustrative examples, not a comprehensive list.

^c This peace process is threatened by renewed violence as this article goes to press.

Shining Path's former leader, Manuel Rubén Abimael Guzmán Reynoso (aka Guzmán), was a highly charismatic philosophy professor who built a powerful Marxist movement through a brutal campaign of executing peasant leaders in Peru's rural areas during the 1980s and early 1990s. Somewhat ironically, Shining Path, which was founded in the late 1960s, began to engage in violence just after the government undertook extensive land reform and restored

democracy to the country; the earliest attacks involved the burning of rural ballot boxes in the 1980 presidential election.³⁶ Increased popular access to a university education helped Guzmán radicalize a growing cadre of impressionable young followers. He consolidated his power in part by expelling or executing dissenters, resulting in unquestioned obedience but also a highly individualistic leadership. By the early 1990s, Shining Path had pushed Peru into a state of near anarchy. Guzmán's capture on September 12, 1992, however, including images of the former leader behind bars recanting and asking his followers to lay down their arms, dealt the group a crushing blow.³⁷

The Kurdistan Workers' Party, an ethnonationalist/separatist group founded in 1974 and dedicated to the establishment of a Kurdish state, also suffered the capture of its charismatic leader, Abdullah Ocalan.³⁸ Beginning in 1984, the group launched a violent campaign against the Turkish government that claimed as many as 35,000 lives. Ocalan was apprehended in early 1999 in Kenya (apparently as a result of a tip from U.S. intelligence) and returned to Turkey, where a court sentenced him to death.³⁹ On the day of sentencing, riots and demonstrations broke out among Kurdish populations throughout Europe. Ocalan, whose sentence was later commuted to life imprisonment, advised his followers to refrain from violence.⁴⁰ Renamed the Kurdistan Freedom and Democracy Congress (KADEK) and then Kongra-Gel, the group remains on the U.S. terrorist list; however, it has subsequently engaged mainly in political activities on behalf of the Kurds.⁴¹

36. Audrey Kurth Cronin, Huda Aden, Adam Frost, and Benjamin Jones, *Foreign Terrorist Organizations*, CRS Report for Congress (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, February 6, 2004), pp. 103–105, Order Code RL32223.

37. Guzmán was sentenced to life in prison in 1992, but the trial was later ruled unconstitutional; he is scheduled to be retried (for a second time). His successor, Oscar Ramírez Duran, also known as Feliciano, continued to direct the movement after Guzmán's capture; but as mentioned earlier, the group's membership sharply plummeted. The State Department has estimated its strength at between 400 and 500 members, down from as many as 10,000 in the late 1980s and early 1990s. See U.S. Department of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism, 2003*, April 2004, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/31912.pdf>. Duran was likewise captured in July 1999. Some analysts worry that the group may resurge, with notable attacks in 2002 and 2003. See Cronin et al., *Foreign Terrorist Organizations*, p. 103. Although possible, resurgence on a large scale is unlikely: the capture of Guzmán was clearly a watershed. See also Art and Richardson, *Democracy and Counterterrorism*.

38. For an explanation of the meaning of this term and other main typologies of terrorism, see Cronin, "Behind the Curve," pp. 39–42.

39. "U.S. Welcomes Ocalan Capture," *Agence France-Presse*, February 16, 1999. Ocalan's sentence was later commuted to life in prison.

40. "Turkey Lifts Ocalan Death Sentence," *BBC News*, October 3, 2002, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/2296679.stm>.

41. Cronin et al., *Foreign Terrorist Organizations*, pp. 53–55.

The Real Irish Republican Army is a splinter group of the Provisional Irish Republican Army that split off in 1997 after refusing to participate in the peace process. It conducted a series of attacks in 1998, including the notorious Omagh bombing, which killed 29 people (including 9 children) and injured more than 200. The Northern Irish community reacted with such outrage that the group declared a cease-fire and claimed that its killing of civilians was inadvertent. In 2000 the RIRA resumed attacks in London and Northern Ireland, focusing exclusively on government and military targets. In March 2001 authorities arrested the group's leader, Michael McKevitt. From an Irish prison, he and forty other imprisoned members declared that further armed resistance was futile and that the RIRA was "at an end." The group currently has between 100 and 200 active members and continues to carry out attacks; nevertheless, its activities have significantly declined since McKevitt's arrest.⁴²

Aum Shinrikyo (now known as "Aleph") is essentially a religious cult founded in 1987 by Shoko Asahara, a half-blind Japanese mystic. Asahara claimed that the world was approaching the apocalypse and used an eclectic blend of Tibetan Buddhist, Hindu, Taoist, and Christian thought to attract an international following, primarily in Japan but also in Australia, Germany, Russia, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, and the United States. Asahara declared that the United States would soon initiate Armageddon by starting World War III against Japan and called on the group's members to take extraordinary measures in preparation for the attack. The notable aspects of this group are its international reach and its use of so-called weapons of mass destruction, particularly anthrax and sarin gas. In March 1995, members of Aum Shinrikyo released sarin gas in the Tokyo subway, resulting in the deaths of 12 people and injuries to another 5,000. Asahara was arrested in May 1995 and sentenced to death in February 2004. The group has shrunk from approximately 45,000 members worldwide in 1995 to fewer than 1,000, many of whom live in Russia.⁴³

These are just a few of the contemporary cases where the capture or killing of the leader of a terrorist organization proved to be an important element in the organization's decline. Other examples include the arrest of leaders in groups as diverse as France's Direct Action (Action Directe); El Salvador's

42. *Ibid.*, pp. 88–89; and U.S. Department of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism*, 2003.

43. Cronin et al., *Foreign Terrorist Organizations*, pp. 17–19; and U.S. Department of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism*, 2003. According to the State Department, in July 2001 a small group of Aum members was arrested in Russia before it could follow through with its plan to set off bombs near the Imperial Palace in Tokyo, free Asahara, and smuggle him into Russia.

People's Liberation Forces (Fuerzas Populares de Liberación); and the U.S. group known as the Covenant, the Sword, and the Arm of the Lord.⁴⁴ From a counterterrorism perspective, the killing of a terrorist leader may backfire by creating increased publicity for the group's cause and perhaps making the leader a martyr who will attract new members to the organization (or even subsequent organizations). Che Guevara is the most famous example of this phenomenon.⁴⁵ There is some reason to believe that arresting a leader is more effective in damaging a group than is killing or assassinating him.⁴⁶ But even a humiliating arrest can backfire if the incarcerated leader continues to communicate with his group. Sheikh Omar Abd al-Rahman (the so-called Blind Sheikh), convicted of conspiracy in the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center, is a notable example.⁴⁷ In other cases, imprisoned leaders may prompt further violence by group members trying to free them (e.g., the Baader-Meinhof group and, again, al-Rahman).⁴⁸ Thus, if a leader is captured and jailed, undermining his credibility and cutting off inflammatory communications are critical to demoralizing his following.

44. Direct Action's four principal leaders, Joelle Aubron, Georges Cipriani, Nathalie Menigon, and Jean-Marc Rouillan, were arrested in February 1987, followed shortly thereafter by Max Frerot, effectively dismantling the leadership of the group and putting an end to its activities. Members of the People's Liberation Forces killed their own deputy leader when she appeared to be interested in negotiating with the Salvadoran government; the leader of the group, Salvador Cayetano Carpio, committed suicide shortly thereafter, resulting in the disintegration of the group and essentially its absorption into a larger organization, the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front. After a four-day siege of their compound in April 1985, eight leaders of the Covenant, the Sword, and the Arm of the Lord were arrested and imprisoned, effectively ending the group. The Chilean group Manuel Rodríguez Patriotic Front Dissidents essentially ceased to exist because of the arrest of its key leaders in the 1990s. The latter reached a peace agreement with the Salvadoran government in 1991. See the MIPT Terrorism Knowledge Base, a database of domestic and international terrorist organizations, at <http://www.tkb.org>.

45. Che Guevara was captured and killed by the Bolivian army in October 1967 and subsequently became a legendary figure who inspired leftist and separatist groups in Latin America and throughout the world. Leila Ali Khaled of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine carried the book *My Friend Che* with her when she hijacked TWA flight 840 in August 1969. In the United States, the Weathermen also organized massive protests on the second anniversary of Che's death. Harvey Kushner, *Encyclopedia of Terrorism* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 2003), pp. 155–156, 372, 406.

46. I am grateful to Mia Bloom for sharing this observation.

47. Sheikh Omar is the leader of the Egyptian al-Gama al-Islamiya, which is closely tied with Egyptian Islamic Jihad. Although imprisoned for life in the United States, he has continued to call on his followers to engage in violence, especially against Jews. He was also convicted for plotting to bomb the Holland and Lincoln Tunnels and the United Nations building and to assassinate Senator Alphonse D'Amato and UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali. See, for example, Anonymous, *Through Our Enemies' Eyes: Osama bin Laden, Radical Islam, and the Future of America* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's 2002), p. 274.

48. Members of the Baader-Meinhof group engaged in violence during numerous attempts to free their imprisoned comrades, for example. The Blind Sheikh has also prompted violence aimed at his release. *Ibid.*

INABILITY TO PASS THE CAUSE ON TO THE NEXT GENERATION

The concept of the failure to transition to the next generation is closely related to theories that posit that terrorist violence is associated with the rise and fall of generations, but here it is applied to individual case studies. As mentioned above, the nature of the group's ideology seems to have relevance to the cross-generational staying power of that group. The left-wing/anarchistic groups of the 1970s, for example, were notorious for their inability to articulate a clear vision of their goals that could be handed down to successors after the first generation of radical leaders departed or were eliminated.⁴⁹ The Red Brigades, the Second of June Movement, the Japanese Red Army, the Weather Underground Organization/Weathermen, the Symbionese Liberation Army, and the Baader-Meinhof group are all examples of extremely dangerous, violent groups in which a leftist/anarchist ideology became bankrupt, leaving no possibility to transition to a second generation.⁵⁰

Right-wing groups, which draw their inspiration from fascist or racist concepts, can also have difficulty persisting over generations, though, as Martha Crenshaw observes, this may reflect the challenges of tracking them over time rather than their actual disintegration.⁵¹ Examples include the numerous neo-Nazi groups in the United States and elsewhere.⁵² Still, the racist causes of many of these groups can persist long after the disappearance of the group itself; their movement underground,⁵³ or their reemergence under a different name or structure, is common.⁵⁴ Extensive examinations by academic experts and the Federal Bureau of Investigation of right-wing groups in the United States during the 1990s, especially after the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, revealed their tendency to operate according to a common *modus operandi*, ideology, or intent; this includes the so-called leaderless resistance, which involves individual operatives or small cells functioning independently in

49. For an explanation of the major types of terrorist organizations, see Cronin, "Behind the Curve," pp. 39–42.

50. The Red Army Faction, a successor of the Baader-Meinhof group, arguably continued for some years and transitioned to what it called its "third generation," with claims of attacks in the name of the RAF during the 1980s and early 1990s. The degree to which it truly was the same group is debatable. In any case, the dissolution of the Soviet Union severely undermined its ideology. See entry in MIPT Terrorism Knowledge Base.

51. Crenshaw, "How Terrorism Declines," p. 78. On right-wing groups, see Cronin, "Behind the Curve," pp. 39–42.

52. These include the Christian Patriots, the Aryan Nations, the Ku Klux Klan, and The Order (a short-lived faction of Aryan Nations) in the United States, as well as the Anti-Zionist Movement in Italy and the National Warriors of South Africa.

53. In the United States, the Ku Klux Klan is a notable example.

54. Some groups, such as The Order (active between 1982 and 1984), have been idolized by their admirers and continue to exercise influence.

pursuit of an understood purpose.⁵⁵ Such organizational decentralization complicates conclusions about beginnings and endings of right-wing groups, but it may also militate against truly effective generational transition. Furthermore, to support their activities, some right-wing groups engage in criminal behavior such as the robbing of banks and armored cars, racketeering, and counterfeiting, which, in the United States, has provided evidence trails for federal authorities and undermined group longevity.

The internal process that occurs during the transition from first- to second-generation terrorist leaders is very sensitive. Failure to pass the legacy to a new generation is a common historical explanation for a terrorist group's decline or end.

ACHIEVEMENT OF THE CAUSE

Some terrorist organizations cease to exist once they have fulfilled their original objective. Two examples are the Irgun Zvai Leumi (National Military Organization, also known either by its Hebrew acronym ETZEL or simply as Irgun), founded in 1931 to protect Jews with force and to advance the cause of an independent Jewish state, and the African National Congress (ANC). As head of the Irgun, Menachem Begin, who would later become prime minister of Israel, ordered the 1946 bombing of the King David Hotel, headquarters of British rule in Palestine. The attack killed 92 people and hastened Britain's withdrawal. Irgun disbanded with the creation of the state of Israel, when its members transitioned to participation in the new government. The ANC was created in 1912 and turned to terrorist tactics in the 1960s. Its attacks were met with an extremely violent campaign of right-wing counterstrikes as the apartheid regime began to wane.⁵⁶ ANC leader Nelson Mandela, imprisoned for terrorist acts from 1964 to 1990, was elected South Africa's first president following the end of apartheid.⁵⁷ The last ANC attack occurred in 1989, and the organization became a legal political actor in 1990, having achieved its objective of ending the apartheid regime.

Walter Laqueur divides terrorist groups that attained their objectives into

55. The concept of "leaderless existence" apparently originated with Col. Ulius Louis Amoss, who wrote an essay with this as the title in 1962. It was later popularized by Louis R. Beam Jr., Aryan Nations leader and former Texas Ku Klux Klan Grand Dragon leader. See Beam, "Leaderless Resistance," *The Seditonist*, No. 12 (February 1992).

56. During much of this period, the African National Congress was labeled a terrorist organization by the U.S. Department of Defense but not by the U.S. State Department.

57. The South-West African People's Organization underwent a similar transition: from orchestrating bombings in banks, stores, schools, and service stations to governing Namibia.

three categories: (1) those with narrow, clearly defined aims that were realistically attainable; (2) those with powerful outside protectors; and (3) those facing imperial powers that were no longer willing or able to hold on to their colonies or protectorates.⁵⁸ In the context of twenty-first-century terrorism, additional categories are possible. Although it happens in a minority of cases, using terrorism to achieve an aim does sometimes succeed; to recognize this reality is not to condone the tactic and may even be a prerequisite to effectively countering it.

NEGOTIATIONS TOWARD A LEGITIMATE POLITICAL PROCESS

The opening of negotiations can be a catalyst for the decline or end of terrorist groups, potentially engendering a range of effects. Groups have transitioned to political legitimacy and away from terrorist behavior after the formal opening of a political process. Examples include the Provisional Irish Republican Army, whose participation in the multiparty talks with the British and Irish governments was crucial to the 1998 Good Friday agreement; the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which entered a peace process with Israel during the 1990s; and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE, or Tamil Tigers), which began talks with the Sri Lankan government, brokered by the Norwegian government, in 2002.⁵⁹ But the typical scenario for a terrorist group's decline is usually much more complicated than simply the pursuit or achievement of a negotiated agreement.

Despite the successful negotiated outcomes that can result between the major parties, a common effect of political processes is the splintering of groups into factions that support the negotiations (or their outcome) and those that do not. For example, the IRA splintered into the Real Irish Republican Army;⁶⁰ and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and PFLP–General Command (GC) split with the PLO over the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. From a counterterrorist perspective, dividing groups can be a purpose of the negotiations process, as it isolates and potentially strangles the most radical factions. But such splinter-

58. For example, among those that had outside protectors, Laqueur includes the Palestinian Arab groups and the Croatian Ustasha. For those facing imperial powers not able to hold on to colonies, he includes the IRA (Britain and Ireland after World War I), the Irgun (Britain and the Palestine Mandate after World War II), and the EOKA (Britain and Cyprus, also after World War II). Walter Laqueur, *Terrorism* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977), p. 118.

59. The talks have stopped and started several times, and at this writing are threatened by renewed violence; however, it looks as if they will result in limited Tamil autonomy.

60. Other splinter groups include the Continuity IRA and the Irish National Liberation Army.

ing can also occur on the “status quo” (or, usually, pro-government) side, as happened in South Africa (with the Afrikaner white power group Farmers’ Force, or Boermag) and in Northern Ireland (with the Ulster Volunteer Force). Governments confront huge difficulties when negotiating with organizations against which they are still fighting in either a counterterrorism campaign or a traditional war.⁶¹ The most extreme case of counterproductive splintering of status quo factions is Colombia, where the signing of the peace accords between the Colombian government and the Popular Liberation Army (Ejército Popular de Liberación, or EPL) in 1984 resulted in the formation of right-wing paramilitary groups that disagreed with the granting of political status to the EPL. Before long, leftist groups, paramilitary units, and the Colombian army stepped up their attacks, unraveling the peace, increasing the violence, and further fractionating the political actors. Worse, splinter groups are often more violent than the “mother” organization, responding to the imperative to demonstrate their existence and signal their dissent. Splinter groups can be seen as engaging in a new “layer” of terrorism with respect to the original group or their own government. This can also be the case, for example, when groups enter elections and take on a governing role. In such situations, the long-term goal (a viable political outcome) and the short-term goal (the reduction in violence) may be at odds.⁶²

A wide range of variables can determine the broader outcome of negotiations to end terrorism, including the nature of the organization of the group (with hierarchical groups having an advantage over groups that cannot control their members’ actions), the nature of the leadership of the group (where groups with strong leaders have an advantage over those that are decentralized), and the nature of public support for the cause (where groups with ambivalent constituencies may be more likely to compromise). There must also be negotiable aims, which are more likely to exist with territorially based groups than with those that follow left-wing, right-wing, or religious/spiritualist ideologies. Determining the degree to which opening a political dialogue with a terrorist group is a likely avenue for the decline of the group and a reduction in violence is a highly differentiated calculation.

Negotiations, however, need not be a formalized process and need not occur

61. For a discussion of this problem, see Fred Charles Ilké, *Every War Must End*, 2d ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), pp. 84–105.

62. Negotiations, however, complicate a terrorist organization’s efforts to perpetuate its own absolutist perspective in justifying the use of terrorist violence. See Adrian Guelke, *The Age of Terrorism and the International Political System* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998), pp. 162–181.

only with the leadership of a group. Arguably, a form of negotiation with a terrorist organization, or more precisely with its members, is the offer of amnesty to those willing to stop engaging in violence and come forth with information about their fellow operatives. The classic case of a successful amnesty is the Italian government's 1979 and 1982 repentance legislation and the Red Brigades.⁶³ In another case, the government of Alberto Fujimori in Peru offered amnesty to members of Shining Path, both after Guzmán's capture and during the waning days of the group. As Robert Art and Louise Richardson point out in their comparative study of state counterterrorism policies, an amnesty may be most successful when an organization is facing defeat and its members have an incentive to seek a way out of what they see as a losing cause.⁶⁴

DIMINISHMENT OF POPULAR SUPPORT

Terrorist groups are strategic actors that usually deliberate about their targets and calculate the effects of attacks on their constituent populations. Miscalculations, however, can undermine a group's cause, resulting in plummeting popular support and even its demise. Terrorist groups generally cannot survive without either active or passive support from a surrounding population. Examples of active support include hiding members, raising money, and, especially, joining the organization. Passive support, as the term implies, is more diffuse and includes actions such as ignoring obvious signs of terrorist group activity, declining to cooperate with police investigations, sending money to organizations that act as fronts for the group, and expressing support for the group's objectives.

Popular support for a terrorist group can dissipate for a number of reasons. First, people who are not especially interested in its political aims may fear government counteraction. Apathy is a powerful force; all else being equal, most people naturally prefer to carry on their daily lives without the threat of being targeted by counterterrorism laws, regulations, sanctions, and raids. Sometimes even highly radicalized populations can pull back active or passive

63. Franco Ferracuti, "Ideology and Repentance: Terrorism in Italy," in Reich, *Origins of Terrorism*, pp. 59–64; and Leonard Weinberg, "Italy and the Red Brigades," in Art and Richardson, *Democracy and Counterterrorism*.

64. Other examples cited by Art and Richardson include amnesties or other incentives given to members of the ETA, the Shining Path, the FALN, the IRA, and the Tamil Tigers, with degrees of success related to whether members of a group perceived it as likely to prevail. See "Conclusion," in Art and Richardson, *Democracy and Counterterrorism*.

support for a group, especially if the government engages in strong repressive measures and people simply become exhausted. The apparent loss of local popular support for Chechen terrorist groups is a good example.

Second, the government may offer supporters of a terrorist group a better alternative. Reform movements, increased spending, and creation of jobs in underserved areas are all tactics that can undermine the sources of terrorist violence. They can also result, however, in increased instability and a heightened sense of opportunity—situations that in the past have led to more terrorist acts. Evidence suggests that the extent to which societal conditions lead to a sense of “indignation” or frustrated ambition among certain segments of society during a period of transition might be a crucial factor for the decision to turn to terrorist violence. Sometimes terrorist attacks are seen as an effort to nudge the flow of history further in one’s direction.⁶⁵

Third, populations can become uninterested in the ideology or objectives of a terrorist group; events can evolve independently such that the group’s aims become outdated or irrelevant. A sense of historical ripeness or opportunity may have been lost. Examples include many of the Marxist groups inspired by communist ideology and supported by the Soviet Union. This is arguably a major reason why the nature of international terrorism has evolved beyond primary reliance on state sponsorship toward a broader range of criminal or entrepreneurial behavior.

Fourth, a terrorist group’s attacks can cause revulsion among its actual or potential public constituency.⁶⁶ This is a historically common strategic error and can cause the group to implode. Independent of the counterterrorist activity of a government, a terrorist group may choose a target that a wide range of its constituents consider illegitimate. This occurred, for example, with the Omagh bombing. Despite hasty subsequent statements by RIRA leaders that they did not intend to kill innocent civilians, the group never recovered in the eyes of the community.⁶⁷ Other examples of strategic miscalculation abound.

65. Peter A. Lupsha, “Explanation of Political Violence: Some Psychological Theories versus Indignation,” *Politics and Society*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Fall 1971), pp. 89–104; and Luigi Bonanate, “Some Unanticipated Consequences of Terrorism,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (May 1979), pp. 197–211.

66. Terrorist operations, albeit shocking and tragic, at least as often increase the level of public support for the cause and indeed are designed to do so. Examples include the PLO, the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization, the IRA, and nineteenth-century Russian terrorist groups. See Laqueur, *Terrorism*.

67. See Sean Boyne, “The Real IRA: After Omagh, What Now?” *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, October 1998, http://www.janes.com/regional_news/europe/news/jir/jir980824_1_n.shtml.

In February 1970 the PFLP-GC sabotaged a Swissair plane en route to Tel Aviv, resulting in the deaths of all 47 passengers, 15 of whom were Israelis. The PFLP-GC at first took responsibility but then tried unsuccessfully to retract its claim when popular revulsion began to surface.⁶⁸ Similarly, there has been revulsion among the Basque population in Spain to attacks by the separatist group Basque Fatherland and Liberty (Euzkadi Ta Askatasuna, or ETA), which some observers credit with the declining popularity of the group.⁶⁹ Public revulsion was a factor in the undermining of support for Sikh separatism in India, a movement directed at establishing an independent state of Khalistan that killed tens of thousands between 1981 and 1995 and was responsible for the assassination of Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on October 31, 1984.⁷⁰

Popular revulsion against terrorist attacks can have immediate effects. Arguably the most well developed and broadly based conduit for resource collection in the world is the connection between the Tamil Tigers and the dispersed Tamil diaspora. The LTTE's desire to avoid the "terrorist organization" label in the post-September 11 world and shore up its base of popular support was an element in the group's December 2001 decision to pursue a negotiated solution.⁷¹ Likewise, a state-sponsored terrorist group can lose support when the state decides that it is no longer interested in using terrorism, responds to pressure from other states, has more important competing goals, or loses the ability to continue its support.⁷² Libya's expulsion of the Palestinian terrorist Abu Nidal and cutting off of support to Palestinian groups such as the Palestine Islamic Jihad and the PFLP-GC are notable examples.

68. MIPT database incident profile, <http://64.233.167.104/search?q?cache:vBXLiW4gwek:www.tkb.org/Incident.jsp%3FincID%3D372+popular+revulsion+terrorist+group&hl=en>. The PFLP-GC has ties with Syria and Libya and may have had a role in the bombing of Pan Am 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland. See Cronin et al., *Foreign Terrorist Organizations*, pp. 80–82; and Kenneth Katzman, *The PLO and Its Factions*, CRS Report for Congress (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, June 10, 2002), Order Code RS21235. The state sponsorship of this group from the 1980s may have reduced its dependency on a local constituency.

69. See, for example, Goldie Shabad and Francisco José Llera Ramo, "Political Violence in a Democratic State: Basque Terrorism in Spain," in Crenshaw, *Terrorism in Context*, pp. 410–469, especially pp. 455–462.

70. Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 84–101. See also C. Christine Fair, "Diaspora Involvement in Insurgencies: Insights from the Khalistan and Tamil Eelam Movements," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Spring 2005), pp. 125–156.

71. Fair, "Diaspora Involvement in Insurgencies."

72. For more on state sponsorship, see Daniel Byman, *Deadly Connections: States That Sponsor Terrorism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

MILITARY FORCE AND THE REPRESSION OF TERRORIST GROUPS

The use of military force has hastened the decline or ended a number of terrorist groups, including the late-nineteenth-century Russian group Narodnaya Volya, Shining Path, and the Kurdistan Workers' Party. From the state's perspective, military force offers a readily available means that is under its control. Although terrorism is indeed arguably a form of war, terrorists use asymmetrical violence, by definition, because they are unable or unwilling to meet a status quo government on the battlefield. Shifting the violence to a form that is familiar and probably advantageous for the state is an understandable response. In some circumstances, it is also successful. Historically, military force has taken two forms: intervention, when the threat is located mainly beyond the borders of the target state (as with Israel's 1982 involvement in Lebanon); or repression, when the threat is considered mainly a domestic one (as with the PKK). More typically, the state will use some combination of the two (as in Colombia).⁷³

The effects of the use of repressive military force in some cases may prove to be temporary or counterproductive; in other cases, it may result in the export of the problem to another country. The classic contemporary case is the Russian counterterrorism campaign in Chechnya.⁷⁴ Russian involvement in the second Chechen war appears to have produced a transition in the Chechen resistance, with more terrorist attacks in the rest of Russia, greater reliance on suicide bombers, and the growing influence of militant Islamic fighters. To the extent that the Chechens originally engaged in a classic insurgency rather than in terrorism, they have since 2002 altered their tactics toward increasing attacks on Russian civilians. The strong repressive response by the Russian government has apparently facilitated the spread of the conflict to neighboring areas, including Ingushetia and Dagestan. And there seems to be no end in sight, given the increasing radicalization and identification of some Chechen factions with the al-Qaida movement.⁷⁵

73. On intervention, see Adam Roberts, "The 'War on Terror' in Historical Perspective," *Survival*, Vol. 47, No. 2 (Summer 2005), pp. 115–121.

74. For recent work on this subject, see Mark Kramer, "The Perils of Counterinsurgency: Russia's War in Chechnya," *International Security*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (Winter 2004/05), pp. 5–63; and Mark Kramer, "Guerrilla Warfare, Counterinsurgency, and Terrorism in the North Caucasus: The Military Dimension of the Russian-Chechen Conflict," *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 57, No. 2 (March 2005), pp. 209–290.

75. The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) claims that Russian forces suffered 4,749 casualties between August 2002 and August 2003, the highest figure since the second Chechen conflict began in 1999. International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance, 2003/2004* (London: IISS, 2003), pp. 86–87. For more on the Chechen case, see Audrey Kurth Cronin, "Russia and Chechnya," in Art and Richardson, *Democracy and Counterterrorism*.

Democracies or liberal governments face particular difficulties in repressing terrorist groups. Because military or police action requires a target, the use of force against operatives works best in situations where members of the organization can be separated from the general population. This essentially forces “profiling” or some method of distinguishing members from nonmembers—always a sensitive issue, particularly when the only available means of discrimination relate to how members are defined (race, age, religion, nationality, etc.) rather than to what they do (or are planning to do). Excellent intelligence is essential for the latter (especially in advance of an attack), but even in the best of situations, it is typically scarce. Repressive measures also carry high resource and opportunity costs. Long-term repressive measures against suspected operatives may challenge civil liberties and human rights, undermine domestic support, polarize political parties, and strain the fabric of the state itself, further undercutting the state’s ability to respond effectively to future terrorist attacks.

TRANSITION TO ANOTHER MODUS OPERANDI

In some cases, groups can move from the use of terrorism toward either criminal behavior or more classic conventional warfare. The transition to criminal behavior implies a shift away from a primary emphasis on collecting resources as a means of pursuing political ends toward acquiring material goods and profit that become ends in themselves. Groups that have undertaken such transitions in recent years include Abu Sayyaf in the Philippines and arguably all of the major so-called narco-terrorist groups in Colombia.⁷⁶ Beginning in 2000, Abu Sayyaf shifted its focus from bombings and targeted executions to the taking of foreign hostages and their exchange for millions of dollars in ransom.⁷⁷ The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia uses a variety of mechanisms to raise funds—including kidnapping for ransom, extortion, and especially drug trafficking—running operations that yield as much as \$1 billion annually.⁷⁸

Terrorist groups can also escalate to insurgency or even conventional war, especially if they enjoy state support. Notable examples include the Kashmiri separatist groups, the Khmer Rouge, and the Communist Party of Nepal—

76. These would include the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, the National Liberation Army, and the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia.

77. See Larry Niksch, *Abu Sayyaf: Target of Philippine-U.S. Antiterrorism Cooperation*, CRS Report for Congress (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, updated April 8, 2003), Order Code RL31265; and Cronin et al., *Foreign Terrorist Organizations*, pp. 4–7.

78. Cronin et al., *Foreign Terrorist Organizations*, p. 92.

Maoists. Transitions in and out of insurgency are especially common among ethnonationalist/separatist groups, whose connection to a particular territory and grounding in an ethnic population provide a natural base; in these situations, the evolution involves changes in size or type of operations (do they operate as a military unit and attack mainly other military targets?) and whether or not the organization holds territory (even temporarily). Terrorism and insurgency are not the same, but they are related. Very weak, territorially based movements may use terrorist attacks and transition to insurgency when they gain strength, especially when their enemy is a state government (as was the case for most groups in the twentieth century). One example is Algeria's Armed Islamic Group, which massacred tens of thousands of civilians in the civil war that followed the Islamic Salvation Front's victory in the 1991 parliamentary elections. The key in understanding the relationship between the two tactics is to analyze the group's motivation, its attraction to a particular constituency, its strength, and the degree to which its goals are associated with control of a piece of territory. Transitions to full-blown conventional war, on the other hand, can occur when the group is able to control the behavior of a state according to its own interests, or even when an act of terrorism has completely unintended consequences.⁷⁹

Is al-Qaida Unique among Terrorist Organizations?

Four characteristics distinguish al-Qaida from its predecessors in either nature or degree: its fluid organization, recruitment methods, funding, and means of communication.

FLUID ORGANIZATION

The al-Qaida of September 2001 no longer exists. As a result of the war on terrorism, it has evolved into an increasingly diffuse network of affiliated groups, driven by the worldview that al-Qaida represents. In deciding in 1996 to be, essentially, a "visible" organization, running training camps and occupying territory in Afghanistan, al-Qaida may have made an important tactical error; this, in part, explains the immediate success of the U.S.-led coalition's war

79. As Adam Roberts notes, the outbreak of World War I is a principal example: the Bosnian-Serb student who killed Archduke Franz Ferdinand in July 1914 had no intention of setting off an international cataclysm. See Ratko Parezanin, *Mlada Bosna I prvi svetski rat* [Young Bosnia and the First World War] (Munich: Iskra, 1974), cited in Roberts, "The 'War on Terror' in Historical Perspective," p. 107 n. 15.

in Afghanistan.⁸⁰ Since then, it has begun to resemble more closely a “global jihad movement,” increasingly consisting of web-directed and cyber-linked groups and ad hoc cells.⁸¹ In its evolution, al-Qaida has demonstrated an unusual resilience and international reach. It has become, in the words of Porter Goss, “only one facet of the threat from a broader Sunni jihadist movement.”⁸² No previous terrorist organization has exhibited the complexity, agility, and global reach of al-Qaida, with its fluid operational style based increasingly on a common mission statement and objectives, rather than on standard operating procedures and an organizational structure.⁸³

Al-Qaida has been the focal point of a hybrid terrorist coalition for some time, with ties to inspired freelancers and other terrorist organizations both old and new.⁸⁴ Some observers argue that considering al-Qaida an organization is misleading; rather it is more like a nebula of independent entities (including loosely associated individuals) that share an ideology and cooperate with each other.⁸⁵ The original umbrella group, the International Islamic Front for Jihad against Jews and Crusaders, formed in 1998, included not only al-Qaida but also groups from Algeria, Bangladesh, Egypt, and Pakistan. A sampling of groups that are connected in some way includes the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (Philippines), Jemaah Islamiyah (Southeast Asia), Egyptian Islamic Jihad (which merged with al-Qaida in 2001), al-Ansar Mujahidin (Chechnya), al-Gama’*a* al-Islamiyya (primarily Egypt, but has a worldwide presence), Abu Sayyaf (Philippines), the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, the Salafist Group for Call and Combat (Algeria), and Harakat ul-Mujahidin (Pakistan/Kashmir). Some experts see al-Qaida’s increased reliance on connections to other groups as a sign of weakness; others see it as a worrisome indicator of growing strength, especially with groups that formerly focused on local

80. Rapoport, “The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism,” p. 66.

81. Coll and Glasser, “Terrorists Turn to the Web as Base of Operations.”

82. Porter J. Goss, director of central intelligence, testimony before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, “Global Intelligence Challenges, 2005: Meeting Long-Term Challenges with a Long-Term Strategy,” 109th Cong., 2d sess., February 16, 2005, http://www.cia.gov/cia/public_affairs/speeches/2004/Goss_testimony_02162005.html.

83. Possible exceptions include the international anarchist movement, which was confined to Russia, Europe, and the United States.

84. David Johnston, Don Van Natta Jr., and Judith Miller, “Qaida’s New Links Increase Threats from Far-Flung Sites,” *New York Times*, June 16, 2002. Many commentators have pointed out that al-Qaida is translated as “the base,” “the foundation,” or even “the method.” It was not intended at its founding to be a single structure.

85. Xavier Raufer, “Al-Qaeda: A Different Diagnosis,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 26, No. 6 (November/December 2003), pp. 391–398.

issues and now display evidence of convergence on al-Qaida's Salafist, anti-U.S., anti-West agenda.⁸⁶

The nature, size, structure, and reach of the coalition have long been subject to debate. Despite claims of some Western experts, no one knows how many members al-Qaida has currently or had in the past. U.S. intelligence sources place the number of individuals who underwent training in camps in Afghanistan from 1996 through the fall of 2001 at between 10,000 and 20,000;⁸⁷ the figure is inexact, in part, because of disagreement over the total number of such camps and because not all attendees became members.⁸⁸ The International Institute for Strategic Studies in 2004 estimated that 2,000 al-Qaida operatives had been captured or killed and that a pool of 18,000 potential al-Qaida operatives remained.⁸⁹ These numbers can be misleading, however: it would be a mistake to think of al-Qaida as a conventional force, because even a few trained fighters can mobilize many willing foot soldiers as martyrs.

METHODS OF RECRUITMENT

The staying power of al-Qaida is at least in part related to the way the group has perpetuated itself; in many senses, al-Qaida is closer to a social movement than a terrorist group.⁹⁰ Involvement in the movement has come not from pressure by senior al-Qaida members but mainly from local volunteers competing to win a chance to train or participate in some fashion.⁹¹ The process seems to be more a matter of "joining" than being recruited,⁹² and thus the tra-

86. For an early analysis of the arguments of both sides, see Audrey Kurth Cronin, *Al-Qaeda after the Iraq Conflict*, CRS Report for Congress (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, May 23, 2003), Order Code RS21529.

87. Central Intelligence Agency, "Afghanistan: An Incubator for International Terrorism," CTC 01-40004, March 27, 2001; and Central Intelligence Agency, "Al-Qa'ida Still Well Positioned to Recruit Terrorists," July 1, 2002, p. 1, both cited in *Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004), p. 67 n. 78.

88. Anonymous, *Through Our Enemies' Eyes*, especially pp. 126, 130-131; Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), especially p. 121; and David Johnson and Don Van Natta Jr., "U.S. Officials See Signs of a Revived al-Qaida," *New York Times*, May 17, 2003.

89. International Institute for Strategic Studies, *Strategic Survey, 2003/4* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 6.

90. See also "The Worldwide Threat, 2004: Challenges in a Changing Global Context," testimony of Director of Central Intelligence George J. Tenet before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, 108th Cong., 2d sess., February 24, 2004, http://www.cia.gov/cia/public_affairs/speeches/2004/dci_speech_02142004.html.

91. According to Sageman's analysis, operatives have gathered in regional clusters, which he labels "the central staff of al-Qaida," "the Southeast Asian cluster," "the Maghreb cluster," and "the core Arab cluster." Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*.

92. Ibid.; and Jeffrey Cozzens, "Islamist Groups Develop New Recruiting Strategies," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, February 1, 2005.

ditional organizational approach to analyzing this group is misguided. But the draw of al-Qaida should also not be overstated: in the evolving pattern of associations, attraction to the mission or ideology seems to have been a necessary but not sufficient condition. Exposure to an ideology is not enough, as reflected in the general failure of al-Qaida to recruit members in Afghanistan and Sudan, where its headquarters were once located.⁹³ As psychiatrist Marc Sageman illustrates, social bonds, not ideology, apparently play a more important role in al-Qaida's patterns of global organization.⁹⁴

Sageman's study of established links among identified al-Qaida operatives indicates that they joined the organization mainly because of ties of kinship and friendship, facilitated by what he calls a "bridging person" or entry point, perpetuated in a series of local clusters in the Maghreb and Southeast Asia, for example. In recent years, operatives have been connected to al-Qaida and its agenda in an even more informal way, having apparently not gone to camps or had much formal training: examples include those engaged in the London bombings of July 7 and 21, 2005, the Istanbul attacks of November 15 and 20, 2003, and the Casablanca attacks of May 16, 2003.⁹⁵ This loose connectedness is not an accident: bin Laden describes al-Qaida as "the vanguard of the Muslim nation" and does not claim to exercise command and control over his followers.⁹⁶ Although many groups boast of a connection to al-Qaida's ideology, there are often no logistical trails and thus no links for traditional intelligence methods to examine.⁹⁷ This explains, for example, the tremendous difficulty in establishing connections between a radical mosque, bombers, bomb makers, supporters, and al-Qaida in advance of an attack (not to mention after an attack).

Another concern has been the parallel development of Salafist networks apparently drawing European Muslims into combat against Western forces in Iraq. The European Union's counterterrorism coordinator, Gijs de Vries, for example, has cautioned that these battle-hardened veterans of the Iraq conflict

93. Sageman, *Understanding Terrorist Networks*, p. 119. Sageman's book analyzes the patterns of growth of cells involved in past attacks, including vigorous refutation of the thesis that exposure to ideology alone explains the growth of al-Qaida.

94. *Ibid.*, p. 178.

95. Jack Kalpakian, "Building the Human Bomb: The Case of the 16 May 2003 Attacks in Casablanca," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (March–April 2005), pp. 113–127.

96. Al Jazeera TV, September 10, 2003, cited in Michael Scheuer, "Coalition Warfare: How al-Qaeda Uses the World Islamic Front against Crusaders and Jews, Part I," *Terrorism Focus*, Vol. 2, No. 7, March 31, 2005, <http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2369530>.

97. Paul Pillar, "Counterterrorism after al-Qaida," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (Summer 2004), pp. 101–113.

will return to attack Western targets in Europe. The Ansar al-Islam plot to attack the 2004 NATO summit in Turkey was, according to Turkish sources, developed in part by operatives who had fought in Iraq.⁹⁸ A proportion of those recently drawn to the al-Qaida movement joined after receiving a Salafist message disseminated over the internet. Such direct messages normally do not pass through the traditional process of vetting by an imam. European counterterrorism officials thus worry about members of an alienated diaspora—sometimes second- and third-generation immigrants—who may be vulnerable to the message because they are not thoroughly trained in fundamental concepts of Islam, are alienated from their parents, and feel isolated in the communities in which they find themselves. The impulse to join the movement arises from a desire to belong to a group in a context where the operative is excluded from, repulsed by, or incapable of successful integration into a Western community.⁹⁹

Thus, with al-Qaida, the twentieth-century focus on structure and function is neither timely nor sufficient. Tracing the command and control relationships in such a dramatically changing movement is enormously difficult,¹⁰⁰ which makes comparisons with earlier, more traditional terrorist groups harder but by no means impossible; one detects parallels, for example, between al-Qaida and the global terrorist movements that developed in the late nineteenth century, including anarchist and social revolutionary groups.¹⁰¹

MEANS OF SUPPORT

Financial support of al-Qaida has ranged from money channeled through charitable organizations to grants given to local terrorist groups that present promising plans for attacks that serve al-Qaida's general goals.¹⁰² The majority of its operations have relied at most on a small amount of seed money provided by the organization, supplemented by operatives engaged in petty crime and fraud.¹⁰³ Indeed, beginning in 2003, many terrorism experts agreed that al-Qaida could best be described as a franchise organization with a

98. Cozzens, "Islamist Groups Develop New Recruiting Strategies."

99. Sageman, *Understanding Terrorist Networks*, especially p. 92.

100. On this point, see Bruce Hoffman, "The Changing Face of al-Qaida and the Global War on Terrorism," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 27, No. 6 (December 2004), p. 556.

101. On this subject, see Laqueur, *Terrorism*, especially pp. 3–20; and James Joll, *The Second International, 1889–1914* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1955).

102. Bruce Hoffman, "The Leadership Secrets of Osama bin Laden: The Terrorist as CEO," *Atlantic Monthly*, April 2003, pp. 26–27.

103. Sageman, *Understanding Terrorist Networks*, pp. 50–51.

marketable “brand.”¹⁰⁴ Relatively little money is required for most al-Qaida-associated attacks. As the International Institute for Strategic Studies points out, the 2002 Bali bombing cost less than \$35,000, the 2000 USS *Cole* operation about \$50,000, and the September 11 attacks less than \$500,000.¹⁰⁵

Another element of support has been the many autonomous businesses owned or controlled by al-Qaida; at one point, bin Laden was reputed to own or control approximately eighty companies around the world. Many of these legitimately continue to earn a profit, providing a self-sustaining source for the movement. International counterterrorism efforts to control al-Qaida financing have reaped at least \$147 million in frozen assets.¹⁰⁶ Still, cutting the financial lifeline of an agile and low-cost movement that has reportedly amassed billions of dollars and needs few resources to carry out attacks remains a formidable undertaking.

Choking off funds destined for al-Qaida through regulatory oversight confronts numerous challenges. Formal banking channels are not necessary for many transfers, which instead can occur through informal channels known as “alternative remittance systems,” “informal value transfer systems,” “parallel banking,” or “underground banking.” Examples include the much-discussed *hawala* or *hundi* transfer networks and the Black Market Peso Exchange that operate through family ties or unofficial reciprocal arrangements.¹⁰⁷ Value can be stored in commodities such as diamonds and gold that are moved through areas with partial or problematical state sovereignty. Al-Qaida has also used charities to raise and move funds, with a relatively small proportion of gifts being siphoned off for illegitimate purposes, often without the knowledge of donors.¹⁰⁸ Yet efforts to cut off charitable flows to impoverished areas may

104. See Douglas Farah and Peter Finn, “Terrorism, Inc.: Al-Qaida Franchises Brand of Violence to Groups across World,” *Washington Post*, November 21, 2003; Daniel Benjamin, “Are the Sparks Catching?” *Washington Post*, November 23, 2003; and Sebastian Rotella and Richard C. Paddock, “Experts See Major Shift in al-Qaida’s Strategy,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 19, 2003.

105. International Institute for Strategic Studies, *Strategic Survey*, 2003/4, p. 8.

106. “U.S.: Terror Funding Stymied,” *CBS News*, January 11, 2005, <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2005/01/11/terror/main666168.shtml>.

107. These are methods of transferring value anonymously, without electronic traceability or paper trails. See Rensselaer Lee, *Terrorist Financing: The U.S. and International Response*, CRS Report for Congress (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, December 6, 2002), pp. 11–13, Order Code RL31658.

108. For information on informal financing mechanisms and U.S. efforts to control them, see testimony of Assistant Secretary Juan Carlos Zarate for Terrorist Financing and Financial Crimes, U.S. Department of the Treasury, before the House Financial Services Committee’s Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, 109th Cong., 2d sess., February 16, 2005, <http://www.ustreas.gov/press/releases/js2256.htm>.

harm many genuinely needy recipients and could result in heightened resentment, which in turn may generate additional political support for the movement.¹⁰⁹ Al-Qaida's fiscal autonomy makes the network more autonomous than its late-twentieth-century state-sponsored predecessors.

MEANS OF COMMUNICATION

The al-Qaida movement has successfully used the tools of globalization to enable it to communicate with multiple audiences, including potential new members, new recruits, active supporters, passive sympathizers, neutral observers, enemy governments, and potential victims. These tools include mobile phones, text messaging, instant messaging, and especially websites, email, blogs, and chat rooms, which can be used for administrative tasks, fund-raising, research, and logistical coordination of attacks.¹¹⁰ Although al-Qaida is not the only terrorist group to exploit these means, it is especially adept at doing so.

A crucial facilitator for the perpetuation of the movement is the use of websites both to convey messages, *fatwas*, claims of attacks, and warnings to the American public, as well as to educate future participants, embed instructions to operatives, and rally sympathizers to the cause. The internet is an important factor in building and perpetuating the image of al-Qaida and in maintaining the organization's reputation. It provides easy access to the media, which facilitates al-Qaida's psychological warfare against the West. Indocinating and teaching new recruits is facilitated by the internet, notably through the dissemination of al-Qaida's widely publicized training manual (nicknamed "The Encyclopedia of Jihad") that explains how to organize and run a cell, as well as carry out attacks.¹¹¹ Websites and chat rooms are used to offer practical advice and facilitate the fraternal bonds that are crucial to al-

109. For more on illegal and legal globalized networks of financing, see *Terrorist Financing*, Report of an Independent Task Force Sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, October 2002); *Update on the Global Campaign against Terrorist Financing*, Second Report of an Independent Task Force on Terrorist Financing Sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, June 15, 2004); Loretta Napoleoni, *Modern Jihad: Tracing the Dollars behind the Terror Networks* (London: Pluto, 2003); Douglas Farah, *Blood from Stones: The Secret Financial Network of Terror* (New York: Broadway Books, 2004); and Thomas J. Biersteker and Sue E. Eckert, eds., *Countering the Financing of Global Terrorism* (London: Routledge, forthcoming).

110. For more on this phenomenon, see Cronin, "Behind the Curve," pp. 30–58.

111. For an analysis of current terrorist use of the internet, see Gabriel Weimann, "www.terror.net: How Modern Terrorism Uses the Internet," Special Report, No. 116 (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, March 2004).

Qaida. In a sense, members of the movement no longer need to join an organization at all, for the individual can participate with the stroke of a few keys. The debate over the size, structure, and membership of al-Qaida may be a quaint relic of the twentieth century, displaced by the leveling effects of twenty-first-century technology.

The new means of communication also offer practical advantages. Members of al-Qaida use the web as a vast source of research and data mining to scope out future attack sites or develop new weapons technology at a low cost and a high level of sophistication. On January 15, 2003, for example, U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld quoted an al-Qaida training manual retrieved by American troops in Afghanistan that advised trainees that at least 80 percent of the information needed about the enemy could be collected from open, legal sources.¹¹²

Earlier Terrorist Groups, al-Qaida, and U.S. Policy Implications

Al-Qaida's fluid organization, methods of recruitment, funding, and means of communication distinguish it as an advancement in twenty-first-century terrorist groups. Al-Qaida is a product of the times. Yet it also echoes historical predecessors, expanding on such factors as the international links and ideological drive of nineteenth-century anarchists, the open-ended aims of Aum Shinrikyo, the brilliance in public communications of the early PLO, and the taste for mass casualty attacks of twentieth-century Sikh separatists or Hezbollah. Al-Qaida is an amalgam of old and new, reflecting twenty-first-century advances in means or matters of degree rather than true originality; still, most analysts miss the connections with its predecessors and are blinded by its solipsistic rhetoric. That is a mistake. The pressing challenge is to determine which lessons from the decline of earlier terrorist groups are relevant to al-Qaida and which are not.

First, past experience with terrorism indicates that al-Qaida will not end if Osama bin Laden is killed. There are many other reasons to pursue him, including bringing him to justice, removing his leadership and expertise, and increasing esprit de corps on the Western side (whose credibility is sapped because of bin Laden's enduring elusiveness). The argument that his demise will end al-Qaida is tinged with emotion, not dispassionate analysis. Organi-

112. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

zations that have been crippled by the killing of their leader have been hierarchically structured, reflecting to some degree a cult of personality, and have lacked a viable successor. Al-Qaida meets neither of these criteria: it has a mutable structure with a strong, even increasing, emphasis on individual cells and local initiative. It is not the first organization to operate in this way; and the demise of similar terrorist groups required much more than the death of one person.¹¹³ Unlike the PKK and Shining Path, al-Qaida is not driven by a cult of personality; despite his astonishing popularity, bin Laden has deliberately avoided allowing the movement to revolve around his own persona, preferring instead to keep his personal habits private, to talk of the insignificance of his own fate, and to project the image of a humble man eager to die for his beliefs. As for a viable replacement, bin Laden has often spoken openly of a succession plan, and that plan has to a large degree already taken effect. Furthermore, his capture or killing would produce its own countervailing negative consequences, including (most likely) the creation of a powerful martyr. On balance, the removal of bin Laden would have important potential benefits, but to believe that it would kill al-Qaida is to be ahistorical and naive. That al-Qaida is already dead.

Second, although there was a time when the failure to transition to a new generation might have been a viable finale for al-Qaida, that time is long past. Al-Qaida has transitioned to a second, third, and arguably fourth generation. The reason relates especially to the second distinctive element of al-Qaida: its method of recruitment or, more accurately, its attraction of radicalized followers (both individuals and groups), many of whom in turn are connected to existing local networks. Al-Qaida's spread has been compared to a virus or a bacterium, dispersing its contagion to disparate sites.¹¹⁴ Although this is a seductive analogy, it is also misleading: the perpetuation of al-Qaida is a sentient process involving well-considered marketing strategies and deliberate tactical decisions, not a mindless "disease" process; thinking of it as a "disease" shores up the unfortunate American tendency to avoid analyzing the mentality of the enemy. Al-Qaida is operating with a long-term strategy and is certainly not following the left-wing groups of the 1970s in their failure to articulate a coherent ideological vision or the peripatetic right-wing groups of the twentieth

113. Comparable cell-based "immortal" terrorist networks have included the social revolutionary and anarchist movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I am indebted to Timothy Hoyt for this observation.

114. See, for example, Corine Hegland, "Global Jihad," *National Journal*, May 8, 2004, pp. 1396–1402.

century. It has transitioned beyond its original structure and now represents a multigenerational threat with staying power comparable to the ethnonationalist groups of the twentieth century. Likewise, arguments about whether al-Qaida is best described primarily as an ideology or by its opposition to foreign occupation of Muslim lands are specious: al-Qaida's adherents use both rationales to spread their links. The movement is opportunistic. The challenge for the United States and its allies is to move beyond rigid mind-sets and paradigms, do more in-depth analysis, and be more nimble and strategic in response to al-Qaida's fluid agenda.

The third and fourth models of a terrorist organization's end—achievement of the group's cause and transition toward a political role, negotiations, or amnesty—also bear little relevance to al-Qaida today. It is hard to conceive of al-Qaida fully achieving its aims, in part because those aims have evolved over time, variably including achievement of a pan-Islamic caliphate, the overthrow of non-Islamic regimes, and the expulsion of all infidels from Muslim countries, not to mention support for the Palestinian cause and the killing of Americans and other so-called infidels. Historically, terrorist groups that have achieved their ends have done so by articulating clear, limited objectives. Al-Qaida's goals, at least as articulated over recent years, could not be achieved without overturning an international political and economic system characterized by globalization and predominant U.S. power. As the historical record indicates, negotiations or a transition to a legitimate political process requires feasible terms and a sense of stalemate in the struggle. Also, members of terrorist groups seeking negotiations often have an incentive to find a way out of what they consider a losing cause. None of this describes bin Laden's al-Qaida.

This points to another issue. As al-Qaida has become a hybrid or "virtual organization," rather than a coherent hierarchical organization, swallowing its propaganda and treating it as a unified whole is a mistake. It is possible that bin Laden and his lieutenants have attempted to cobble together such disparate entities (or those entities have opportunistically attached themselves to al-Qaida) that they have stretched beyond the point at which their interests can be represented in this movement. Some of the local groups that have recently claimed an association with al-Qaida have in the past borne more resemblance to ethnonationalist/separatist groups such as the PLO, the IRA, and the LTTE. Examples include local affiliates in Indonesia, Morocco, Tunisia, and Turkey. This is not to argue that these groups' aims are rightful or that their tactics are legitimate. Rather, because of its obsession with the notion of a monolithic al-

Qaida, the United States is glossing over both the extensive local variation within terrorist groups and their different goals; these groups have important points of divergence with al-Qaida's agenda, and the United States does no one any favors by failing to seriously analyze and exploit those local differences (except perhaps al-Qaida).

The U.S. objective must be to enlarge the movement's internal inconsistencies and differences. Al-Qaida's aims have become so sweeping that one might wonder whether they genuinely carry within them the achievement of specific local grievances. There is more hope of ending such groups through traditional methods if they are dealt with using traditional tools, even including, on a case-by-case basis, concessions or negotiations with specific local elements that may have negotiable or justifiable terms (albeit pursued through an illegitimate tactic). The key is to emphasize the differences with al-Qaida's agenda and to drive a wedge between the movement and its recent adherents. The historical record of other terrorist groups indicates that it is a mistake to treat al-Qaida as a monolith, to lionize it as if it is an unprecedented phenomenon with all elements equally committed to its aims, for that eliminates a range of proven counterterrorist tools and techniques for ending it. It is also a mistake to nurture al-Qaida's rallying point, a hatred of Americans and a resentment of U.S. policies (especially in Iraq and between Israel and the Palestinians), thereby conveniently facilitating the glossing over of differences within.

Fifth, reducing popular support, both active and passive, is an effective means of hastening the demise of some terrorist groups. This technique has received much attention among critics of George W. Bush and his administration's policies, many of whom argue that concentrating on the "roots" of terrorism is a necessary alternative to the current policy of emphasizing military force. This is a superficial argument, however, as it can be countered that a "roots" approach is precisely at the heart of current U.S. policy: the promotion of democracy may be seen as an idealistic effort to provide an alternative to populations in the Muslim world, frustrated by corrupt governance, discrimination, unemployment, and stagnation. But the participants in this debate are missing the point.¹¹⁵ The problem is timing: democratization is a decades-long approach to a short-term and immediate problem whose solution must also be

115. As Jonathan Monten demonstrates, democratization is a long-standing goal of U.S. foreign policy; with respect to terrorism, however, both the "vindicationists" and the "exemplarists" are missing the point. Monten, "The Roots of the Bush Doctrine: Power, Nationalism, and Democracy Promotion in U.S. Strategy," *International Security*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (Spring 2005), pp. 112–156.

measured in months, not just years. The efforts being undertaken are unlikely to have a rapid enough effect to counter the anger, frustration, and sense of humiliation that characterize passive supporters. As for those who actively sustain the movement through terrorist acts, it is obviously a discouraging development that many recent operatives have lived in, or even been natives of, democratic countries—the March 2004 train attacks in Madrid and 2005 bombings in London being notable examples.¹¹⁶

The history of terrorism provides little comfort to those who believe that democratization is a good method to reduce active and passive support for terrorist attacks. There is no evidence that democratization correlates with a reduction in terrorism; in fact, available historical data suggest the opposite. Democratization was arguably the cause of much of the terrorism of the twentieth century. Moreover, democracy in the absence of strong political institutions and civil society could very well bring about radical Islamist governments over which the West would have little influence. There are much worse things than terrorism, and it might continue to be treated as a regrettable but necessary accompaniment to change were it not for two potentially serious developments in the twenty-first century: (1) the use of increasingly destructive weapons that push terrorist attacks well beyond the “nuisance” level, and (2) the growing likelihood that terrorism will lead to future systemic war. In any case, the long-term, idealistic, and otherwise admirable policy of democratization, viewed as “Americanization” in many parts of the world, does not represent a sufficiently targeted response to undercutting popular support for al-Qaida.

There are two vulnerabilities, however, where cutting the links between al-Qaida and its supporters hold promise: its means of funding and its means of communication. Efforts to cut off funding through traditional avenues have had some results. But not nearly enough attention is being paid to twenty-first-century communications, especially al-Qaida’s presence on the internet. The time has come to recognize that the stateless, anarchical realm of cyberspace requires better tools for monitoring, countermeasures, and, potentially, even control. Previous leaps in cross-border communication such as the telegraph, radio, and telephone engendered counteracting developments in

116. Nor will withdrawal from occupation in Iraq and Palestine, for example, solve this problem: al-Qaida-associated suicide attacks in Egypt, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey belie that argument. See Robert A. Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2005).

code breaking, monitoring, interception, and wiretapping. This may seem a heretical suggestion for liberal states, especially for a state founded on the right of free speech; however, the international community will inevitably be driven to take countermeasures in response to future attacks. It is time to devote more resources to addressing this problem now. Western analysts have been misguided in focusing on the potential use of the internet for so-called cyberterrorism (i.e., its use in carrying out attacks); the internet is far more dangerous as a tool to shore up and perpetuate the al-Qaida movement's constituency.¹¹⁷ Preventing or interdicting al-Qaida's ability to disseminate its message and draw adherents into its orbit is crucial. Countering its messages in serious ways, not through the outdated and stilted vehicles of government websites and official statements but through sophisticated alternative sites and images attractive to a new generation, is an urgent priority.

As for the opponent's marketing strategy, al-Qaida and its associates have made serious mistakes of timing, choice of targets, and technique; yet the United States and its allies have done very little to capitalize on them. In particular, the United States tends to act as if al-Qaida is essentially a static enemy that will react to its actions, but then fails to react effectively and strategically to the movement's missteps. The Bali attacks, the May 2003 attacks in Saudi Arabia, the Madrid attacks, the July 2005 London attacks—all were immediately and deliberately trumpeted by al-Qaida associates. Where was the coordinated counterterrorist multimedia response? There is nothing so effective at engendering public revulsion as images of murdered and maimed victims, many of whom resemble family members of would-be recruits, lying on the ground as the result of a terrorist act. Outrage is appropriate. Currently, however, those images are dominated by would-be family members in Iraq, the Palestinian territories, Abu Ghraib, and Guantanamo Bay. The West is completely outflanked on the airwaves, and its countermeasures are virtually nonexistent on the internet. But as the RIRA, PFLP-GC, and ETA cases demonstrate, the al-Qaida movement can undermine itself, if it is given help. A large part of this "war" is arguably being fought not on a battlefield but in cyberspace. The time-honored technique of undermining active and passive support for a terrorist group through in-depth analysis, agile responses to missteps,

117. On the broader significance of using the internet as a means of mobilization, see Audrey Kurth Cronin, "Cyber-mobilization: The New *Levée en Masse*," *Parameters*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Summer 2006), pp. 77–87.

carefully targeted messages, and cutting-edge technological solutions is a top priority.

This is a crucial moment of opportunity. Polls indicate that many of al-Qaida's potential constituents have been deeply repulsed by recent attacks. According to the Pew Global Attitudes Project, publics in many predominantly Muslim states increasingly see Islamic extremism as a threat to their own countries, express less support for terrorism, have less confidence in bin Laden, and reflect a declining belief in the usefulness of suicide attacks.¹¹⁸ In these respects, there is a growing range of commonality in the attitudes of Muslim and non-Muslim publics; yet the United States focuses on itself and does little to nurture cooperation. American public diplomacy is the wrong concept. This is not about the United States and its ideals, values, culture, and image abroad: this is about tapping into a growing international norm against killing innocent civilians—whether, for example, on vacation or on their way to work or school—many of whom are deeply religious and many of whom also happen to be Muslims. If the United States and its allies fail to grasp this concept, to work with local cultures and local people to build on common goals and increase their alienation from this movement, then they will have missed a long-established and promising technique for ending a terrorist group such as al-Qaida.

There is little to say about the sixth factor, the use of military repression, in ending al-Qaida. Even though the U.S. military has made important progress in tracking down and killing senior operatives, the movement's ability to evolve has demonstrated the limits of such action, especially when poorly coordinated with other comparatively underfunded approaches and engaged in by a democracy. Although apparently effective, the Turkish government's repression of the PKK and the Peruvian government's suppression of Shining Path, for example, yield few desirable parallels for the current counterterrorist campaign.

Transitioning out of terrorism and toward either criminality or full insurgency is the final, worrisome historical precedent for al-Qaida. In a sense, the network is already doing both. Efforts to cut off funding through the formal banking system have ironically heightened the incentive and necessity to en-

118. See "Islamic Extremism: Common Concern for Muslim and Western Publics, Support for Terror Wanes among Muslim Publics," July 14, 2005, <http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=248>.

gage in illicit activities, especially narcotics trafficking. With the increasing amount of poppy seed production in Afghanistan, al-Qaida has a natural pipeline to riches. This process is well under way. As for al-Qaida becoming a full insurgency, some analysts believe this has already occurred.¹¹⁹ Certainly to the extent that Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and his associates in Iraq truly represent an arm of the movement (i.e., al-Qaida in Iraq), that transition is likewise well along. The alliance negotiated between bin Laden and al-Zarqawi is another example of an effective strategic and public relations move for both parties, giving new life to the al-Qaida movement at a time when its leaders are clearly on the run and providing legitimacy and fresh recruits for the insurgency in Iraq. As many commentators have observed, Iraq is an ideal focal point and training ground for this putative global insurgency. The glimmer of hope in this scenario, however, is that the foreigners associated with al-Qaida are not tied to the territory of Iraq in the same way the local population is, and the tensions that will arise between those who want a future for the nascent Iraqi state and those who want a proving ground for a largely alien ideology and virtual organization are likely to increase—especially as the victims of the civil war now unfolding there continue increasingly to be Iraqi civilians. The counter to al-Zarqawi's al-Qaida in Iraq, as it is for other areas of the world with local al-Qaida affiliates, is to tap into the long-standing and deep association between peoples and their territory and to exploit the inevitable resentment toward foreign terrorist agendas, while scrupulously ensuring that the United States is not perceived to be part of those agendas.

If the United States continues to treat al-Qaida as if it were utterly unprecedented, as if the decades-long experience with fighting modern terrorism were totally irrelevant, then it will continue to make predictable and avoidable mistakes in responding to this threat. It will also miss important strategic opportunities. That experience points particularly toward dividing new local affiliates from al-Qaida by understanding and exploiting their differences with the movement, rather than treating the movement as a monolith. It is also crucial to more effectively break the political and logistical connections between the movement and its supporters, reinvigorating time-honored counterterrorism tactics targeted at al-Qaida's unique characteristics, including the perpetuation of its message, its funding, and its communications. Al-Qaida continues to exploit what is essentially a civil war within the Muslim world, attracting alien-

119. Among them is Michael Scheuer, author of *Anonymous, Imperial Hubris*.

ated Muslims around the globe to its rage-filled movement. Al-Qaida will end when the West removes itself from the heart of this fight, shores up international norms against terrorism, undermines al-Qaida's ties with its followers, and begins to exploit the movement's abundant missteps.

Conclusion

Major powers regularly relearn a seminal lesson of strategic planning, which is that embarking on a long war or campaign without both a grounding in previous experience and a realistic projection of an end state is folly. This is just as true in response to terrorism as it is with more conventional forms of political violence. Terrorism is an illegitimate tactic that by its very nature is purposefully and ruthlessly employed.¹²⁰ At the heart of a terrorist's plan is seizing and maintaining the initiative. Policymakers who have no concept of a feasible outcome are unlikely to formulate clear steps to reach it, especially once they are compelled by the inexorable action/reaction, offense/defense dynamic that all too often drives terrorism and counterterrorism. Although history does not repeat itself, ignoring history is the surest way for a state to be manipulated by the tactic of terrorism.

At the highest levels, U.S. counterterrorism policy has been formulated organically and instinctively, in reaction to external stimuli or on the basis of unexamined assumptions, with a strong bias toward U.S. exceptionalism. Sound counterterrorism policy should be based on the full range of historical lessons learned about which policies have worked, and under which conditions, to hasten terrorism's decline and demise. Treating al-Qaida as if it were *sui generis* is a mistake. As I have argued here, while there are unique aspects to this threat, there are also connections with earlier threats. Speaking of an unprecedented "jihadist" threat, while arguably resonating in a U.S. domestic context, only perpetuates the image and perverse romanticism of the al-Qaida movement abroad, making its ideology more attractive to potential recruits. Such an approach also further undermines any inclination by the United States to review and understand the relationship between historical instances of terrorism and the contemporary plotting of a strategy for accelerating al-Qaida's demise. In short, formulating U.S. counterterrorism strategy as if no other state has ever faced an analogous threat is a serious blunder.

120. I have dealt at length with the question of the definition of terrorism elsewhere and will not rehash those arguments here. See, for example Cronin, "Behind the Curve," pp. 32–33.

Comparatively speaking, the United States has not had a great deal of experience with terrorism on its territory. In this respect, its response to the shock of al-Qaida's attacks is understandable. But the time for a learning curve is past. Intellectually, it is always much easier to over- or underreact to terrorist attacks than it is to take the initiative and think through the scenarios for how a terrorist group, and a counterterrorist effort, will wind down. Short-term reactive thinking is misguided for two reasons: the extraordinary and expensive effort to end terrorism will be self-perpetuating, and the inept identification of U.S. aims will ensure that the application of means is unfocused and ill informed by past experience. Failing to think through al-Qaida's termination, and how U.S. policy either advances or precludes it, is an error not only for the Bush administration, criticized by some for allegedly wanting an excuse to hype a permanent threat, but also for any administration of either political party that succeeds or replaces it.

Terrorism, like war, never ends; however, individual terrorist campaigns and the groups that wage them always do. A vague U.S. declaration of a war on terrorism has brought with it a vague concept of the closing stages of al-Qaida rather than a compelling road map for how it will be reduced to the level of a minor threat. The only outcome that is inevitable in the current U.S. policy is that militarily focused efforts will end, because of wasteful or counterproductive effort and eventual exhaustion. The threat is real and undeniable, but continuing an ahistorical approach to effecting al-Qaida's end is a recipe for failure, the further alienation of allies, and the squandering of U.S. power.