



ITAC *Presents*

Trends in Terrorism Series

Terrorism in 2025: *Likely Dimensions and Attributes*

This article was written by the Canadian Centre for Intelligence and Security Studies, The Norman Paterson School of International Affairs, Carleton University.

Publication of this "ITAC Presents" article does not imply ITAC's authentication of the information nor ITAC's endorsement of the author's views.

Summary

The strategic conditions underlying the 9/11 attacks emerged in the late 1970s and the 1980s. They include accelerated globalization, unreformed economies, youthful and bulging populations, religious schooling, and unemployment. All of these conditions are likely to remain in place in 2025. There will be a large and growing pool of unemployed, frustrated, and religiously schooled young men to draw on for terrorist activity.

The more tactical attributes of terrorism in 2025 will have had their roots in the early post-9/11 period. The attacks revealed the powerful economic implications of a terrorist strike. This demonstration, combined with the essential economic underpinnings to terrorists' grievances, means that future targets are likely to be economic. The focus will be on transportation systems, information systems (cyber attack), and especially energy infrastructure and oil. Tankers operating in the world's busiest waterways may be especially attractive targets.

There has been a shift from hard political and military targets to soft targets. The factors that gave rise to this trend, including Al Qaeda's decreased freedom of manoeuvre and new decentralized structure, are likely to persist, and with them the emphasis on soft targets. There is no consensus on whether Iraq is serving to establish a new training ground/launching point for attacks. Iraq, as well as the horn of Africa and the Pakistan-Afghanistan border are areas of high concern but it is unlikely terrorists will become as well established as they were in Afghanistan under the Taliban.

Future attacks are likely to be smaller in size, less meticulously planned, and local rather than transnational in scope. Yet Al Qaeda is proving more resilient than was previously thought, which suggests a major attack involving a significant number of deaths, while unlikely, remains possible.

Most attacks in 2025 will be directed against traditional countries that are trying to modernize or against countries that have close ties to the West. Attacks against the energy infrastructure of oil producing U.S. allies are especially likely. The United States will remain a key target, but striking it directly will be difficult so more attacks are likely to be aimed at Europe. Britain is particularly vulnerable because of its historical ties to Pakistan. There are likely to be terrorist attacks in the oil producing states of Africa and the Caucasus, and in the major shipping routes in Southeast Asia. Oil producing Canada, and emerging globalizers China and India, could be targeted.

The rise in domestic terrorism in a number of Western countries can be attributed to people being caught between traditional and market values and therefore turning to terrorism, and these same people being frustrated by a lack of economic prospects. Such factors cannot change quickly. In 2025 all Western countries will be susceptible to domestic terrorism, but Europe and especially Britain are most likely to be targeted. India is also likely to be a victim of domestic terrorism.

Any weapons of mass destruction (WMD) attack is likely to involve a radiological or low-tech biological weapon, with the goal of eliciting panic among the population, rather than mass casualties. Due to the technical difficulty of launching a WMD attack, terrorists are unlikely to be able to carry out large-scale unconventional attacks. Large conventional bombs are more likely to be used against hard targets like oil refineries or tankers. In all cases the overall goal will be to bring about massive economic disruption to those who are benefiting from accelerated globalization.

Introduction

The strategic conditions for the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States emerged in the late 1970s and the 1980s, some one to two decades before the attacks. Factors surrounding accelerated globalization provided the most important underlying source of the terrorists' grievances, while the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan furnished the training grounds for terrorists to hone their skills to act on these grievances. Meanwhile, accepting that hindsight is always 20/20, actual or planned terrorist attacks in the decade before 9/11 provided "tactical" evidence of "trends [that were] clearly there."

The fact that a roughly two-decade strategic and tactical time line presaged 9/11, indicates that projecting in 2007 what may be the attributes and dimensions of terrorism in 2025 is, while extremely daunting, not an entirely unrealistic task. It requires a two-level focus of analysis. At the strategic level, it is necessary to examine the most important broad underlying sources of contemporary terrorism, and whether these conditions are likely to continue. At the more tactical level, what is required is to project answers to some important questions that emerge from an understanding of these broader strategic conditions.

The Key Strategic Trend: Accelerated Globalization

Of the many reasons put forward for the current era of Islamic fundamentalist terrorism against the Western world one of the most compelling or explanatory, is accelerated globalization. Globalization can be defined as "growing interconnectedness [as] reflected in the expanded flows of information, technology, capital, goods, services and people throughout the world." The emphasis here is on "accelerated" globalization because globalization is by no means a new phenomenon — it is just that it is now proceeding at a much faster rate than was previously the case. The first great era of globalization was from roughly 1870 to 1914, but with the disruptions of two world wars, the great depression, and the Cold War,

international capital flows as measured by foreign ownership of assets relative to world income, did not return to 1914 levels until 1980. Since then they have increased significantly. Generally speaking, accelerated globalization has been driven by the technological revolution that started in the late 1970s. The sources of contemporary terrorism date from this time period.

Michael Mousseau has drawn out the distinction between "clientalist" and "market" economies and how terrorism can emerge when clientalist economies are bombarded with, but cannot adapt quickly enough to the market forces of globalization. Clientalist economies are based on implied and long-enduring obligations, reciprocity, gift giving, social linkages, ethnicity and kinship. They naturally lend themselves to the creation of in-groups and out-groups. Market economies are based on explicit contracts and statements of self interest among strangers that come to an end when the contract is completed. They naturally lend themselves to the liberal values of individualism, universalism, tolerance, equity, the rule of law and democracy. When a clientalist economy is increasingly exposed to market forces, clientalist linkages start to break down. But cultures change slowly; people experience the breakdown of their traditional forms of interaction, but they do not yet have the new values and beliefs. There is a period of social anarchy; a zero-sum culture emerges as people pursue their own interests without regard to any shared values, either market or clientalist. People deeply resent this new Hobbesian world, caused, in their view, by the growing Westernization or Americanization of their societies. The protection they are granted by virtue of being part of an in-group is fading and they are vulnerable to being enticed by any other in-group system that promises to put an end to insecurity, including religious fundamentalism. In extreme cases the result is the support of terrorism — facilitated by the in-group/out-group values held by clientalist societies. "From the clientalist perspective, all in-group members are privileged and all out-group members are potential enemies or, at best, outsiders unworthy of empathy. This paucity of empathy is necessary for doing harm to, and tolerating the suffering of, all out-group members."

Mousseau's analysis is supported by reports, scholarly articles, and books that implicitly or explicitly find the broad underlying source of contemporary terrorism to be people responding to, or coming to grips with, accelerated globalization and/or modernization. The 9/11 Commission report argues that Usama bin Laden "appeals to people disoriented by cyclonic change as they confront modernity and globalization... For those yearning for a lost sense of order in an older, more tranquil world, he offers his 'Caliphate' as an imagined alternative to today's uncertainty." A report by America's National Intelligence Council points out: "In a rapidly globalizing world...religious entities provide followers with a ready-made community." One scholarly expert on terrorism, noting that terrorism "is as old as human history," argues that the current phase is characterized by "religious fanatics who are the terrorists and the far more politically motivated states, entities, and people who would support them *because they feel powerless and left behind in a globalizing world* [emphasis added]." Another scholar describes the dominant feature of the contemporary and future security environment as being "a saga of individuals, freed from the constraints of tradition and culture and repression, finding their place in a changing, globalizing world." American defense analyst Thomas Barnett predicts more nationalism as globalization proceeds because "globalization empowers the individual at the expense of the collective, and that very American transformation of culture is quite scary for traditional societies."

Conflict is likely to be the outward expression of the psychological impact of globalization on traditional societies. "When a massive, accelerating, and disorienting process of modernization creates enormous social discord around the world, that search for identity and dignity can and will generate conflict." Barnett gives the geographic boundaries of these conflicts. He argues they will take place within the "non-integrating gap" of countries that, in contrast to the "functioning core" of states that are progressively integrating their national economies into the world economy, remain fundamentally disconnected from globalization's "expanding web of connectivity." For Barnett, the functioning core of

states encompasses roughly two-thirds of the world's population, including North America, Europe, Russia, China and India, while the non-integrating gap comprises most of Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia.

Will it Continue?

If one accepts that accelerated globalization is a key strategic trend underlying contemporary terrorism, then any prediction as to the attributes and dimensions of terrorism in 2025 must include an assessment of whether and/or to what degree the world's "non-integrating gap" of countries is likely to share in the benefits of globalization over the next two decades. There are two sides to this coin, both of which are addressed in only cursory fashion here, and would benefit from greater analysis by economic and regional experts.

On one side is the degree to which globalization's leaders — the West and increasingly China — are likely to facilitate the ability of developing countries to share in the wealth; that is, whether or not they are likely to pursue protectionist measures. Here, the projections have become less optimistic over time. A 2002 assessment argues that, contrary to the claims of anti-globalization advocates, the current wave of globalization has actually promoted economic equality and reduced poverty around the world. But this view is based primarily on economic growth in China and India, two countries which, as noted earlier, are not (or are no longer) part of the non-integrating gap. African (less South Africa) and Middle Eastern (less Israel) countries remain the poorest and least connected in the world. A 2004 study asserts that growing global interconnectedness due to the information technology revolution is almost certainly irreversible, and that although other aspects of globalization could slow or stop (as in 1914), this is unlikely. Overall, it argues that the world economy will grow significantly in the period to 2020, but that the benefits of globalization won't be global — and "those left behind in the developing world may resent China and India's rise." Finally, a recent scholarly article highlights the "hypocrisy of

U.S. and European governments, which constantly push for greater market access while protecting their own agricultural and light-manufacturing sectors through tariffs." It finds that there will likely be increasing restrictions on the flow of investments, goods and services, and labour between countries in the coming decades as a result of growing protectionist measures, most notably in China and the United States, but also in Europe.

On the other side of the coin, is the degree to which disconnected regions are likely to take measures to become connected. Specifically, argues a U.S. government study, "the gap between the 'haves' and 'have-nots' will widen unless the 'have-not' countries pursue policies that support the application of new technologies — such as good governance, universal education, and market reforms." These three things are in many ways inseparable. The 9/11 Commission report describes how the unprecedented flood of oil wealth in the 1970s and 1980s created societies in the Middle East dependent on government largess, but that diminishing oil revenues in the 1980s combined with significant population growth made these entitlements unsustainable in the 1990s. The result was growing resentment, exacerbated by the fact that these state-centred regimes placed their emphasis on retaining elite control of national wealth, rather than on adopting policies that could foster dynamic economies and generate jobs. Meanwhile, unable to afford to provide state-funded education to the growing population, these countries increasingly left education to private religious schools run by Islamic fundamentalist groups that, apart from radicalizing some of the students, did not teach marketable skills. "By the 1990s," points out the Commission, "high birthrates and declining rates of infant mortality had produced a common problem throughout the Muslim world: a large, steadily increasing population of young men without any reasonable prospect of suitable employment." This is a dangerous situation, notes one scholar, because "the lack of a proper education makes individuals vulnerable to terrorist ideologies... the anger, resentment and frustration of the unemployable make them want to use violence to achieve change."

These trends, which began to emerge some two decades ago, are likely to still be in place two decades from now and therefore to influence the attributes and dimensions of terrorism. In the Middle East, education continues to be provided by religious institutions. Demographically, the region is in the middle of a youth boom with over half the population under the age of 25 and fertility rates about double the Western average. Women are repressed and denied educations, further reducing overall economic productivity. Most, if not all, regimes, "frightened by the winds of change," have not instituted the necessary economic reforms. For at least one scholar, "Arab governments will probably not reform peacefully." The overall impact will be "huge and accelerating numbers of disconnected young males. Ill-educated, unemployed and poor, they have the time, testosterone and grievances to spare... for at least another generation the Taliban and other terrorist groups will have no problem replenishing their stock of young fighters [and] suicide bombers."

Questions that Emerge from the Broad Strategic Trends

Types of Targets

Economic Targets

The persistence of the broad underlying sources of international terrorism that gave rise to 9/11 will provide the overall strategic context of terrorism in 2025. One question that emerges from this trend is what sorts of targets people "against modernization" are likely to set their sights on. Experts have noted that generally speaking, terrorist thinking has shifted "from the desire to inflict mass casualties to one of inflicting severe economic damage." Analysts argue that Al Qaeda first realized the potential of economic attacks as a form of terrorism in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. Although the World Trade Centre, the Pentagon and (it is believed) the Congress were chosen for their symbolic commercial, military, and political status, the financial damage and the ongoing damage to the airline industry was enormous.

The trend toward economic targets is likely to continue, given that the change in emphasis is consistent with Mousseau's assessment of contemporary terrorism as being an expression of "antimarket...rage". This shift has several implications. Because efficiently running transportation systems are central to economic vitality, they are likely to remain as targets in the future. The 2004 Madrid train bombing, 2005 London underground and bus bombing, and 2006 plots against airliners departing Britain for the United States reflect this trend. In addition, in 2004 U.S. agencies received specific intelligence that Al Qaeda terrorists planned to use hijacked aircrafts in suicide attacks. Because so much of Western economic prosperity depends on the smooth functioning of information technology systems, we can also expect terrorists will step up their attempts to carry out a devastating cyber attack.

One of the most effective ways to disrupt the global economy is to attack oil supplies. Over the last several years, there have been numerous attacks against pipelines and refineries in places like Yemen, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq. Aside from the direct targeting of oil assets in oil producing states, since 2000 there have also been a number of maritime related attacks, either planned or successfully carried out. A good example was the 2002 bombing of a French-registered supertanker, which experts believe confirmed Al Qaeda's desire to attack the financial anchors underpinning the Western capitalist system. Energy security analysts have also noted the growing nexus between piracy and terrorism as a result of the fact that most of the world's oil and gas is shipped through the world's most piracy-infested waters. Intelligence agencies believe that Al Qaeda and its affiliates now own dozens of ocean going ships, and there are reports of terrorist pirates hijacking tankers to practice steering them through crowded sea-lanes, with little interest in learning how to dock them.

Terrorists are likely to focus many of their future attacks on world oil supplies and energy infrastructure. Terrorism expert Martin Rudner has described Al Qaeda and its affiliates as working in the context of a seven-stage, 20-year post-9/11 plan

under which stage 3, from 2007 to 2010, explicitly targets energy. Whether future attacks are against the production, piping, or maritime transportation of oil, the objective will be the same: to raise the price of oil to the extent that it significantly and adversely affects the prosperity of the globalized world. In the words of Rudner, the goal is to "make the West walk and freeze," but "It's not just the West...It's [also] India and China."

Soft Targets

Risk analyst experts have noted a post-9/11 trend towards "soft targets" like hotels, bars and discos, places of worship, transportation, office complexes, foreign workers, and contractors. This is because with greater security around the West's "hard" (political and military) targets, Al Qaeda's loss of a strategic operating base in Afghanistan, the seizure of important components of Al Qaeda's financial base, and increased intelligence cooperation among countries since 9/11, the ability for terrorists to organize against and penetrate hardened targets has significantly declined. Moreover, many scholars and analysts point out the centralized Al Qaeda structure that organized the 9/11 attacks has evolved into a loosely structured network of decentralized subsidiaries around the world. Al Qaeda has moved from being a tangible entity with a sophisticated infrastructure, to being an amorphous "movement of movements" a galvanizing idea with no discernable organization.

An assessment of whether the trend toward soft targets will continue centres on whether Al Qaeda's decreased freedom of manoeuvre and new decentralized structure is likely to persist over the next two decades. For the former, many scholars and analysts argue that the 9/11 attacks have "decisively limited the environmental and strategic context in which Al Qaeda is able to operate." But some also go further to argue that this established trend will strengthen, not weaken, in the coming years. "Over time," wrote one terrorism expert in 2004, "the post-9/11 counter- and anti-terrorism measures developed will have an impact on terrorist groups and their support bases. Therefore, the threat of terrorism, although ever present will decrease substantially in the coming years [emphasis added]."

New Training Ground?

As for persistence in the decentralized structure, the key element is the degree to which a new training ground for terrorist activity has been established in the post-9/11 era. As indicated in this paper's opening paragraph, an important factor behind Al Qaeda's ability to carry out the 9/11 attacks was the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. A decade of conflict in that country gave Islamic extremists a rallying point and a training field. Not surprisingly, many analysts are focussing on whether, in the post-9/11 era, there has been a newly established Soviet Afghanistan.

There is broad agreement that the 2003 invasion of Iraq has created a new rallying point for radicalized Muslims worldwide, attracting more young Muslims to militant circles than might otherwise have been the case. This was the conclusion, for example, of a leaked U.S. National Intelligence Estimate in September 2006. But that is different from saying Iraq is a new terrorist training ground, and here there is little consensus. While the National Intelligence Council has argued Iraq provides terrorists with "a training ground, a recruitment ground, [and] the opportunity for enhancing technical skills," others have made the case that Iraq is more important as a symbol than a physical battlefield or training ground. From this perspective Iraq, like other conflicts around the world — Chechnya and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict come to mind — is best understood as a force for inspiration than anything else. Indeed, Rudner notes that "al-Qaeda's Islamist world view operates independent of specific events."

Even if Iraq is proving to be a training ground, there is no consensus on whether the new generation of trained terrorists is staying in Iraq (and therefore making the rest of the world safer) or spreading out around the world. The unique aspect of the war against the Soviets in Afghanistan is that many, if not most, of the fighters were from outside Afghanistan (Usama bin Laden being one prominent example). Al Qaeda originally focussed on Afghanistan, but broadened its scope to worldwide operations after the Soviet withdrawal. In the case of Iraq, by contrast, only one in ten jihadists are from outside

the country. As a result, "It is not obvious now how many Iraqi Jihadists will support the global jihad of bin Laden, and how many will focus their efforts on Iraq's fledgling state."

Beyond Iraq, particular areas of concern with regard to new training grounds include Africa (especially the horn of Africa), and the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, where it is believed Al Qaeda has regrouped. An assessment of the degree to which these areas will be future training grounds for terrorists is beyond the scope of this paper. It would involve examining the effectiveness/success of a whole range of initiatives, just a few of which are, the U.S. troop build-up in Iraq and efforts to stabilize that country; U.S. air strikes against Al Qaeda members in Somalia in 2007; the creation of a U.S. Africa command in 2007; the deployment of U.S. troops to Africa over the past several years to train indigenous forces in anti-terrorist skills; NATO's mission in Afghanistan, particularly anti-terrorist measures in the south and east of the country; and, diplomatic relations with Pakistan and the degree to which Pakistan is able to assist in eliminating the threat along its border with Afghanistan. At a minimum, it can be argued that terrorists are unlikely to become as well established as they were in Afghanistan under the Taliban. The decentralized structure of international terrorism is likely to remain in place in 2025 and this, combined with continued restrictions on freedom of manoeuvre, indicates that most future targets will be soft targets.

Scope of Operations

A related point, drawing on the above mentioned trends, is that future attacks are likely to be smaller in size, less meticulously planned, and local rather than transnational in scope. This assessment well describes the January 2007 attack by "locally grown leftists" against the U.S. embassy in Athens. In addition, it is expected that by 2025 Al Qaeda will be superseded by similarly inspired but more diffuse Islamic extremist groups.

But there also is some recent evidence that Al Qaeda is more resilient than was previously thought. There are indications that, in addition to being a source of inspiration for "a new generation...[of] jihad seekers...who are not waiting for Al Qaeda to recruit them," Al Qaeda remains a cohesive organization that can plan its own attacks. This suggests that a major attack involving a significant number of deaths, while unlikely, remains possible.

Location of Targets

The Near Enemy

Much of contemporary terrorist activity is directed against traditional countries that are trying to modernize or against countries that have close ties to the West. "Some of the strongest language in the early communiqués of Usama bin Laden and his associates was directed at Hosni Mubarak of Egypt... and even Ataturk, founder of the modern Turkish state," notes one respected newspaper: "Their crime, in Al Qaeda's eyes attempting to modernize and in some cases secularize their states." Thus, the post-9/11 array of terrorist attacks includes bombings against Riyadh housing complexes, and explosions in a synagogue, British consulate, and Hong Kong and Shanghai bank in Istanbul. In the latter case, the perpetrator was a Turkish terrorist organization that is "a violent opponent of Turkey's secular government and its ties to the European Union and the West." Because these targets can be explained in terms of the anti-globalization anger noted above, the persistence of that broad strategic condition indicates attacks in these sorts of locations are likely to still be part of the landscape in 2025. Attacks against the energy infrastructure of oil producing countries that are allied with the United States are especially likely.

The Far Enemy

The United States remains a key target. This is clear in many of the rhetorical statements made by bin Laden in recent years, and also in several planned but thwarted attacks. In 2004, there was an alleged plot to target prominent financial institutions in New York, Newark and Washington D.C., including the Stock Exchange, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Intelligence officials have also determined that the plan to use liquid explosives to blow up airliners out of Heathrow airport in August 2006 involved exploding the airliners over U.S. cities, rather than the Atlantic, to increase the loss of life and the economic impact. For terrorism expert Bruce Hoffman, this case indicates that Islamic extremists remain focussed on attacking the United States directly, on U.S. soil. It also further illustrates the essential economic underpinnings to contemporary terrorism.

Targeting the United States directly has become much more difficult because of post-9/11 security measures, and as result it is U.S. allies who have become targets. Examples include the Bali nightclub bombing in November 2002 (which targeted Australians), the 2004 train bombing in Madrid, and the 2005 subway and bus bombing in London. U.S. interests abroad have also been targeted, as demonstrated by the bombing of the US embassy in Athens in 2007.

The National Intelligence Council believes that over the next two decades the United States and its interests abroad will remain prime terrorist targets, but that more terrorist attacks are likely to be aimed at its allies in Europe. Britain is particularly vulnerable because of the coincidence that Al Qaeda's leadership is based in the tribal areas of Pakistan, where Britain has colonial links and as a result there is a significant flow of people going back and forth. Geographically speaking, we can also expect terrorist attacks in the oil producing states of Africa and the Caucuses and also in the major shipping routes in Southeast Asia. Canada with a large oil-producing sector could be targeted, as could the emerging globalizers China and India.

The Enemy Within

The most notable feature of the past few years has been the rise in domestic terrorism against Western states, perpetrated by citizens of the targeted country — in some cases by people who have been born in that country. The Madrid and London transit attacks are the most visible examples, but there have also been many thwarted plots in Canada, the United States, and Germany. The fact that some of the plots against the United States were discussed in Canada by American citizens is, for some analysts, a sign of new era in which Islamists view the United States and Canada as “one strategic arena for operations.”

The rise in domestic terrorism in a number of Western countries (whether planned or perpetrated attacks) can be understood in part as a domestic-level version of the clientalist/market pattern of interaction at the global level. These are “Muslims that have abandoned the food, music and customs of the “old country” but still feel repelled by the ethos and values of the “new country” argues one scholar, in an assessment that echoes the earlier discussion of countries that have abandoned the clientalist system but have not yet adopted market values. Recruitment of “citizen-terrorists” is fuelled by a “sense of isolation and disappointment in Western culture,” and by “a general sense of frustration with their lives.”

Another parallel with the global level analysis is that economics appears to be a key factor in the rise of domestic terrorism. “On the evidence of most European countries, adequate material and social conditions do not always stop people from becoming terrorists. But the reverse may hold true: if people are economically deprived or socially excluded, the pool of potential killers and bombers will grow. In the highest levels of the British government, the dominant thinking is that economics does matter.” Particular concerns are the high levels of unemployment among the Muslim populations of Europe, and the fact that most of the Muslim women do not do paid work. Both contribute to lower family income.

Projections as to which countries will be most susceptible to domestic terrorism in 2025 must be specific to each country and would benefit from a more detailed analysis than can be presented here. Canada is thought to be less of a target because it is not a major power, has no imperial past in the Middle East, and no big symbolic targets. Experts argue that the United States is less susceptible to domestic terrorism than European countries for a number of reasons, including a professionally employed and upwardly mobile Muslim population, a greater acceptance of publicly displayed religion, and the fact that the United States is a land of immigrants. These factors could also be attributed to Canada. By contrast, European Muslims tend to be poor, non-professional, and isolated in ethnic enclaves, and their religion threatens secular values. Britain has the added dimension of a colonial legacy and ties to Pakistan (as mentioned earlier). The nature of most of these factors is such that they cannot change quickly; some can never change. As a result, it is likely that present trends in domestic terrorism will continue to exist in 2025. All Western countries will be susceptible to domestic terrorism, however, Europe and especially Britain are most likely to be targeted. India, as a state that is increasingly integrated into the world economy and that boasts a large Muslim population is also likely to be a victim of domestic terrorism.

Types of Weapons

It is useful to consider what sorts of weapons future terrorists are likely to use. The greatest concern among many intelligence agencies is that terrorists will turn from conventional weapons to weapons of mass destruction. The concrete evidence (in the open literature) that Al Qaeda is attempting to acquire WMD includes, among other things, the following: two Pakistani nuclear scientists met with Usama bin Laden in 2001; documents seized in Pakistan in March 2003 revealed that Al Qaeda has acquired the necessary materials for producing biological and chemical weapons; that same year Usama bin Laden received fresh approval from a Saudi cleric for the use of a nuclear weapon against

the United States, considered a significant milestone; specific intelligence received by US agencies in 2004 indicated that Al Qaeda planned to conduct an attack using a radiological bomb; captured Al Qaeda leaders have confessed to the CIA their attempts to smuggle a radioactive device into the United States; and, in 2006 a British Muslim admitted to plotting a series of co-ordinated terrorist attacks in Britain, including one involving a radioactive dirty bomb. There is no evidence the organization has nuclear weapons, aside from Al Qaeda's own claims that it has acquired briefcase nuclear weapons. Some experts make a convincing case that the risk of nuclear terrorism is overstated.

Predicting future weapons use involves tracing "historical trends and current events to extract growing patterns of Al Qaeda's behaviour in order to make a statement about their capabilities for the future." The historical trends indicate a consistent desire over the past several years to acquire WMD, as well as possibly the actual acquisition of chemical, biological and/or radiological weapons. As indicated above, the trends also indicate a growing and future emphasis on economic related attacks, including a strong emphasis on energy infrastructure. If terrorists have not yet acquired nuclear weapons (the open literature suggests they have not), then targeting energy infrastructure can best be done with conventional weapons, since it would involve blowing up assets rather than killing masses of people. Experts predict that should a WMD attack take place, terrorists will undertake strikes with the primary goal of economic disruption, rather than significant loss of life, and they will use a radiological or low-tech biological attack. It is anticipated that, due to the technical difficulty of launching a WMD attack, in the period to at least 2020, terrorists will have little ability to carry out large-scale unconventional attacks.

Conclusion

The strategic conditions underlying terrorism in 2025 will be those that first emerged some two decades ago. They include accelerated globalization, the way in which Middle Eastern states have responded both economically and in terms of schooling and the demographic bulge. In 2025, there is likely to be a large pool of unemployed, frustrated, and religiously educated young men to draw on for terrorist activity.

The more tactical attributes of terrorism in 2025 will have had their roots in the early post-9/11 period. The events of September 11, 2001, revealed the powerful economic implications of a terrorist attack. This demonstration, combined with the economic underpinnings to terrorists' grievances, means that future targets are likely to be economic. Energy infrastructure will figure centrally, but there will also be a large number of soft targets. Smaller groups around the world will carry out the majority of strikes, yet Al Qaeda may remain as an organization to contend with.

Future strikes could be in modernizing countries, and in the United States or other Western countries; however, India and China could be increasingly in the terrorist's sights. Europe, most notably Britain, will be especially vulnerable to domestic terrorism, but the growing number of plots in North America suggests a future attack in this strategic arena. Logic also points toward domestic strikes in India. Low-tech weapons of mass destruction could be used against soft targets to elicit panic, while large conventional bombs are more likely to be used against "hard" targets like oil refineries or tankers. In either case the goal will be the same: to bring about massive economic disruption, and ideally, downfall to all those who are benefiting from contemporary, accelerated, globalization. ■

Elinor C. Sloan

Carleton University,
Ottawa