

SCUSA AT 60
“MEASURING PROGRESS AND DEFINING NEW CHALLENGES”

THE CHALLENGES OF TERRORISM

“We must get our message across to the masses of the nation and break the media siege imposed on the jihad movement. This is an independent battle that we must launch side by side with the military battle.”

— **AYMAN AL-ZAWAHIRI**¹

In the post-Cold War era, rapid technological development, the information revolution, and the resurgence of radical ideologies have dramatically transformed the international security environment and have defied the predominance of American power. During the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century in particular, core American objectives have been increasingly challenged by terrorist groups and networks. A growing number of these groups stress their intention to inflict massive harm on Americans. Some of them abide by a totalitarian Islamist ideology, and the most radical among them have expressed an interest to use all means at their disposal to injure the United States. Despite the major changes in the international system, however, the core objectives of U.S. national security have remained fundamentally the same: to enhance American security both at home and abroad, to bolster economic prosperity, and to promote the spread of democracy and human rights around the world. Participants of the 2008 SCUSA Roundtable on “The Challenges of Terrorism” will gather to assess the various terrorist threats posed to the United States and identify and prioritize counterterrorism policies that will address these challenges effectively, while preserving American values of human rights, individual freedom, and democracy.

The central issues examined at this roundtable revolve around nine clusters of questions. The first four relate to the challenges posed by terrorism and address the following questions: How important is the threat of terrorism in relation to other threats to U.S. national security? How should the United States define its enemy? What is the nature of the terrorist threat? And what are the terrorism challenges posed by the ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan? The remaining five clusters relate to the proper formulation of a strategy to counter terrorism and address the following questions: How should counterterrorism strategy, its goals, and its principles be defined? How have old counterterrorism strategies fared, and what new strategies can be identified? How can America’s image be improved? Should the United States wage a war of ideas, and if so, by what means? And, how can Washington improve international cooperation in the struggle against terrorism?

¹ Ayman al-Zawahiri, “Knights Under the Banner of the Prophet,” *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, December 2, 2001.

PART I: THE CHALLENGES OF TERRORISM

I: Terrorism in the Context of National Security

This cluster addresses the following question: How important is the threat of terrorism when compared to other threats faced by the United States, such as that emanating from other states, natural disasters, or environmental problems? How should the United States allocate and prioritize its immense, but still finite resources to address these threats?

II: Defining the Enemy

This cluster addresses the following questions: How useful is the concept of the global war on terror? Should it be reconsidered? Who is the United States fighting against? Should the United States care about local terrorist organizations that do not pose a threat to it? Can and should the United States prioritize its enemies? Should it define its struggle as one against specific groups such as Al Qaeda or Hizballah? Should it define its struggle as a struggle against ideology, and if so, which ideology? What, if any, definition of terrorism should the United States adopt? Is America fighting international terror (the use of a specific set of tactics by a variety of actors for a variety of reasons), a global insurgency (a deliberate political-military effort to overthrow the existing world order and replace it with another), or both?

III: Nature of the Terrorist Threat

This cluster addresses the following questions: Which terrorist tactics pose the most substantial threat to the United States today? Do these tactics require a counter-strategy of their own, or should a CT strategy contain specific strategies targeted at certain tactics, such as suicide attacks, IEDs (Improvised Explosive Device), or CBRN (Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear) attacks? What specific groups pose the largest threat to the United States? Do state actors pose terrorist threats similar to those of non-state actors? What specific types of terrorist groups pose the most acute threat to the United States at present and in the foreseeable future? How should the threat posed by international terrorist organizations, groups, and/or networks; homegrown/self-radicalized cells; and state sponsors of terrorism be assessed? Which terrorism-related problems should be of most concern to the United States in the foreseeable future and what can the U.S. do to address these concerns—WMD at the hands of terrorists; the diffusion of Iraq war veterans; suicide attacks in the United States; the proliferation of CBRN weapons and material; or any other threats?

IV: Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Challenge of Terrorism

This cluster addresses the following questions: To which extent is the ongoing war in Iraq and Afghanistan part of the larger struggle against terrorism? How important is victory in Iraq and Afghanistan to that struggle? Which U.S. activities in Iraq and Afghanistan are likely to reduce the threat of terrorism emanating from these countries in the foreseeable future? How can the U.S. best reduce the dangers emanating from the tribal regions along the Afghan-Pakistani border? Is a cooperative approach with the Pakistanis necessary or would such an approach be ineffective? What counterterrorism lessons can be learned from the campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan?

PART II: THE CHALLENGES OF COUNTERTERRORISM

V: Definitions, Goals, and Principles of a Counterterrorism Strategy

This cluster addresses the following questions: What are the goals of the United States in what has previously been called the global war on terror? When, if at all, can victory be declared? What can the United States do to set more realistic policy goals in countering this threat? How can the United States ensure that its core values are upheld during the struggle against terrorism? Is there a point at which the fight against terrorism supersedes American values? How can the United States balance the sometimes competing interests of preventing terrorism and ensuring civil liberties? Should the United States examine the factors leading to terrorism? Why or why not? To the extent that poverty or political grievances cause terrorism, should the United States seek to alleviate poverty and other grievances to help fight terrorism? How can the United States reconcile the physical pursuit of terrorists with its desire to bring terrorists to justice in court? How should counter-terrorism policy be integrated with foreign policy and national security policy?

VI: Assessment of Old and New Strategies

This cluster addresses the following questions: How should the United States define the role of military power in the overall strategy to counter terrorism? How successful have particular counterterrorism efforts been thus far, and to which extent should they be reconsidered—various lists run by the Department of State of terrorist entities and state sponsors; terrorism threat level alerts, and so on. What strategies have proven less successful? Should any existing strategies to counter terrorism be amended or rejected entirely? How successful has been the strategy of preemption? What policy should the United States devise regarding targeted assassinations of key terrorist leaders? Are the benefits of these policies of preemption and targeted assassination outweighed by the costs associated with repercussions? Or do they fulfill a justifiable domestic political need to be proactive? How successful has been the U.S. drive to harden physical installations? Has this hardening led to increased terrorist attacks against “softer” targets? What must the United States do to better protect its borders, ports, and airports? To what extent does immigration to the United States influence terrorism and what can/should it do to prevent potential terrorists from immigrating to the United States? What new strategies can America adopt to improve its chances to win the GWOT? How important is it for the United States to counter the financing of terrorists, given that successful acts of terrorism do not necessarily require large amounts of funds? What can the United States do to prevent or render more difficult the free movement of terrorists across international borders?

VII: Improving America’s Image

This cluster addresses the following questions: Should the United States attempt to improve its image? Is American foreign policy undermining its ability to achieve a stable and secure international environment? What can the United States do to better address anti-Americanism, and which branches of government play a role in that? What lessons should be learned from the treatment of terrorism suspects by the United States? Should the United States reconsider its policy of extraordinary rendition? What can the U.S. military do to prevent servicemen from committing acts that are likely to offend Arabs and Muslims? What role do the media play, and should the U.S. government influence the media in how they portray the struggle against

terrorism? How can the United States convince Muslims that its activities are not targeted at Islam itself?

VIII: Waging the War of Ideas

This cluster addresses the following questions: How important is the “war of ideas” for the overall strategy to counter terrorism? Who should fight the war of ideas? To the extent that the war of ideas should be handled by moderate Muslims, how can the United States identify and support these moderates? What can the United States do to reduce the ideological appeal of Salafi Jihad? To which extent can/should the United States change its policies vis-à-vis the Middle East? How has the internet changed the manner in which terrorist groups organize, train, and recruit, and how can the United States contain or halt the ongoing spread of radical Jihadist propaganda in this virtual space?

IX: International Cooperation

This cluster addresses the following questions: How can international cooperation in the struggle against terrorism be improved? How important is it that the United States acts multilaterally? When must the United States act unilaterally? What can the United States do to better explain its need to act unilaterally at times? What can it do to act more multilaterally? How is the right balance struck? What can the UN and other international organizations do to help the United States wage a more successful battle against terrorism? Should U.S. intelligence agencies openly share their intelligence on terrorism with allied agencies?

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