

Khalid Mohammed / Associated Press. IRAQ.

CHAPTER 1

Dying to Lose: Explaining the Decline in Global Terrorism

In October 2003 the then US secretary of defense, Donald Rumsfeld, noted in a confidential memo to senior administration officials, “We lack metrics to know if we are winning or losing the global war on terror.”⁵ Today there *are* “metrics”—notably three datasets—one from an official US government agency and two others that are funded by the US Department of Homeland Security.⁶ This *Brief* provides the first critical assessment of their findings.

Each of the three datasets tracks the global incidence and human costs of all forms of terrorism—domestic and international, religious and secular. However, notwithstanding the mass of data that is now available, determining whether terrorism is increasing or decreasing around the world remains a complex and controversial task. In part this is because attempts to measure a phenomenon, the very meaning of which is subject to intense—and often highly politicized—debate are bound to be contested. The United Nations (UN) has consistently failed to reach an agreed definition of terrorism in part because, as the well-known cliché puts it, “One man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter.”

For the purposes of this chapter, terrorism is defined as a tactic—“the intentional use of violence for political ends by non-state actors against civilians.” This definition is broadly compatible with those adopted by the three datasets discussed here.

In what follows we provide a brief overview of how security experts view the global terrorist threat. We then subject the claims associated with this assessment to a critical test, drawing on the statistics from the three datasets. We show how the statistical information that these, and other datasets, provide can be read in very different ways and that a close examination of the data, together with other research findings, reveals a picture that is very much at odds with the mainstream consensus.

The Expert Consensus

More than six years after al-Qaeda’s September 11 assault on the United States (US), expert opinion in the West holds that the threat of global terrorism is growing. There are few dissenting voices.

In August 2007 a nonpartisan survey of 100 leading US foreign policy and security experts by the Center for American Progress and the US journal *Foreign Policy* reported that 84 percent of those polled rejected the assertion that the US was winning the war on terror. The central focus of this “war” is, of course, Islamist terrorism.⁷

This pessimistic assessment was in line with the findings of the 2006 US National Intelligence Estimate, which reported that “activists identifying themselves as jihadists ... are increasing in both number and geographic dispersion.”⁸ Similar sentiments were reiterated in the July 2007 National Intelligence Estimate.⁹ In November 2007 the director of the UK’s Security Service claimed that in the previous 12 months

there had been “an increase in [terrorist] attack planning across the continent.”¹⁰

The consensus view of the various Western intelligence agencies is in turn supported by statistics from the three datasets analyzed in this chapter. The National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), the official US agency charged with tracking the incidence of terrorism around the world, has data that show that the number of terrorist attacks—and the fatalities they cause—have increased steeply worldwide from 2005 to 2006—the last year for which the agency has complete data.¹¹

Similarly, the US-based Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism (MIPT), which has statistics on international and domestic terrorism going back to 1998, shows fatalities from terrorism worldwide increasing sharply from 2003—as does the relatively new National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) dataset from the University of Maryland.¹²

In all three datasets it is clear that the sharp increase in “terrorism” fatalities around the world has been driven by the rapidly rising civilian death toll in Iraq that followed the US-led invasion in 2003.

But describing the intentional killing of civilians in civil wars as “terrorism” is both unusual and somewhat controversial. It also has the effect of greatly inflating the global terrorism toll.

The expert consensus in the West is that the threat of global terrorism is growing.

The MIPT, NCTC, and START datasets all include fatalities from domestic as well as international terrorism. However, the concern driving the US-led “Global War on Terror” (GWOT) is not local terror groups fighting over local issues, but the threat—and especially the threat to the West—from Islamist terrorists associated with the global campaigns of al-Qaeda and its affiliates.

This concern is understandable. Islamist terror groups around the world are well organized and well funded; their members are resolutely committed to their cause; their networks have a global reach; they communicate, inform, and propagandize via hundreds of websites; and they have launched major attacks on five continents. In this chapter, the terms “Islamist” and “Islamists” are not always coupled with the words “terrorism” or “terror.” However, the context should

make it clear that the reference is to terror organizations, not to the many nonviolent Islamist organizations.

A recent statistical study that is discussed in detail later in this chapter revealed a huge jump in Islamist terror incidents worldwide after 2003—an increase that was again driven by events in Iraq.

The fact that the loose Islamist terror network inspired by Osama bin Laden has metastasized in recent years creating quasi-independent “homegrown” or “self-starter” Islamist terror nodules in Europe and elsewhere has been a cause for further concern.

Some US commentators even believe that the West confronts an existential “Islamofascist” terrorist threat as grave as the dangers posed by Nazi Germany.¹³ Many more believe it is simply a matter of time before an Islamist terror organization gains access to, and uses, weapons of mass destruction (WMD).¹⁴

Although there are some notable dissenters,¹⁵ the expert consensus in the West is that the threat of global terrorism—and of Islamist terrorism in particular—is growing.

What the Data Reveal

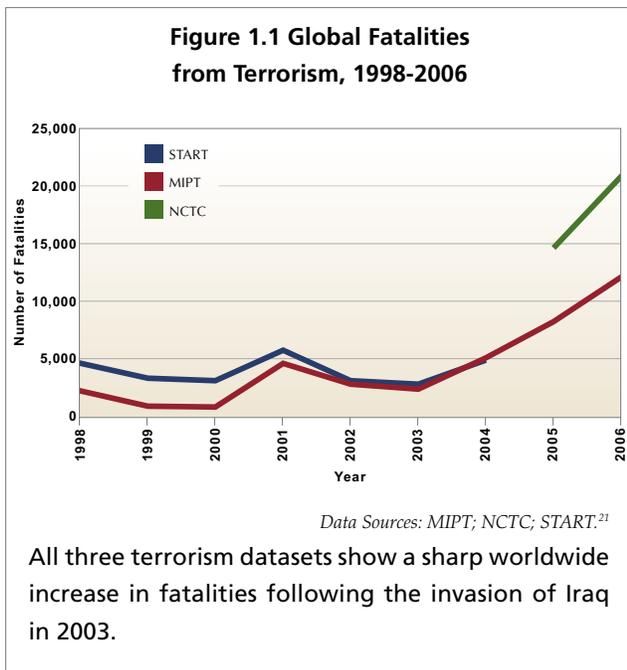
In this section we review the data on the incidence of all types of terrorism around the world. Later, we address the particular challenges involved in determining whether Islamist terrorism is increasing or decreasing.

In tracking terrorism from year to year we rely primarily on fatality counts, rather than the number of attacks. This is partly because fatalities are the best measure of the human cost of terrorism, but it is also because the definition of a terrorist “attack” can differ from dataset to dataset. For example, it is possible to count 100 coordinated bombings in a single city in a single day as one terrorist incident—or as 100. Yet, regardless of how the data compilers decide to count *incidents* in a case like this, the *fatality* toll will remain essentially the same.

According to NCTC, the number of fatalities from all terrorist attacks, Islamist and non-Islamist, domestic as well as international, increased by 41 percent from the beginning of 2005 to the end of 2006. NCTC recorded 14,618 fatalities in 2005; 20,573 in 2006.¹⁶

MIPT’s dataset shows global fatalities from terrorism increasing from 2,172 in 1998, to 12,070 in 2006, an increase of some 450 percent. Most of this increase takes place after the invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003.¹⁷

The START dataset shows fatalities rising by 75 percent in 2004 alone—2004 is the last year for which the START team has released data.



The escalation of the global fatality toll is clearly revealed in Figure 1.1 above. The peak in 2001 is caused by al-Qaeda's September 11 attacks on the US.

The rising post-2003 fatality toll revealed by all three datasets, coupled with the bleak assessments of US intelligence agencies, appears to provide compelling evidence for the claim that the global terrorist threat has indeed increased significantly. However, as we will see, the data are open to quite different interpretations.

A Misleading Picture?

The reason that the NCTC, MIPT, and START global fatality tolls rise so dramatically after 2003 is because all three datasets are counting a large percentage of *all* civilian fatalities from intentional violence in Iraq's civil war as deaths from "terrorism." For example, NCTC's estimate for fatalities from terrorism in Iraq in 2006 is 13,343. This is nearly 80 percent of the *total* Iraqi civilian fatality toll of 16,657 for that year as estimated by the independent US organization, *icasualties.org*.¹⁸

In 2006 Iraq's share of global deaths from terrorism—as recorded by NCTC and MIPT—was startlingly high. According to NCTC, in 2006 some 64 percent of terrorist fatalities worldwide were in Iraq.¹⁹ MIPT's data indicate that Iraq's share was an extraordinary 79 percent.²⁰

Since the concept of terrorism remains contested, the counting rules used by NCTC, MIPT, and START are as legitimate as any others. But they are unusual because counting the intentional killing of civilians in civil wars as

"terrorism," as all three datasets do, is a sharp departure from customary practice. As Ohio State University's John Mueller has noted: "When terrorism becomes really extensive in an area we generally no longer call it terrorism, but rather war or insurgency."²² Moreover, as a July 2007 US Congressional Research Service report noted, NCTC's Iraq data are "largely the product of sectarian violence, rampant criminal activity, and home-grown insurgency—[and therefore] grossly distort the global terrorism picture."²³

Over the past 30 years, civil wars in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Angola, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Bosnia, Guatemala, and elsewhere have, like the war in Iraq, been notorious for the number of civilians killed. But although much of the slaughter in all these cases was intentional, politically motivated, and perpetrated by non-state groups—and thus constituted "terrorism" as conceived by MIPT, NCTC, and START—it was almost never described as such.

Accounts of the human costs of these conflicts typically refer to "death tolls"—a term that usually includes both combatants and civilians. Insofar as the intentional killing of civilians in wartime has been the focus of specific attention, it has traditionally been described as a "war crime" or "crime against humanity," or even "genocide"—but not "terrorism."²⁴

However, the departure from traditional practice is not the only reason for concern. What makes MIPT and START's fatality counting practices particularly problematic is that they are not applied consistently. To be more specific, while both institutions count a large percentage of all violent civilian deaths in Iraq's civil war as terrorism, they code extraordinarily few of the thousands of violent civilian deaths in Africa's many civil wars since 1998 this way. (NCTC does not cover the years in which the sub-Saharan African conflicts noted below were taking place and therefore its data are not considered here.)

We know that the politically motivated killing of civilians by non-state armed groups has been seriously undercounted in Africa by MIPT and START because we can compare their terrorism fatality data with statistics compiled by Uppsala University's Conflict Data Program (UCDP).²⁵ UCDP does not use the term "terrorism," but the UCDP dataset on "one-sided violence" includes fatality data on intentional, politically motivated violence perpetrated against civilians by non-state armed groups. This is very close to the definition of terrorism used by MIPT and START.

Comparing UCDP's data on Africa's civil war fatalities with those of MIPT and START is instructive. Take the case of Sudan. In 2004 UCDP, whose estimates are always conservative,

counted 723 civilian deaths perpetrated by the Janjaweed and other non-state armed groups. Yet, MIPT recorded zero deaths from terrorism in Sudan in 2004; START counted just 17.

MIPT defines terrorism as politically motivated “violence, or the threat of violence, calculated to create an atmosphere of fear and alarm ... [and] generally directed against civilian targets.”²⁶ Given this definition, how could MIPT, which reported 2,471 deaths from terrorism in Iraq’s civil war in 2004, record no terrorism deaths at all from Sudan’s civil wars in the same year?

In the DRC in 1999 large numbers of civilians were being deliberately targeted by rebel groups.

Sudan is not the only African country where MIPT and START appear to be using different fatality counting rules from those they use in Iraq. In the DRC in 1999—where large numbers of civilians were being deliberately targeted by rebel groups in a vicious civil war—the same pattern is evident. MIPT again found that there had been no fatalities from terrorism; START counted seven; UCDP 624. In Uganda in 2002, MIPT’s terrorism count was again zero, START’s was 107, while UCDP’s was 1,109.

Perhaps the most telling comparison is that between MIPT’s estimate of terrorism’s share of all deaths—combatants as well as civilians—in Iraq in 2006 with its estimate of terrorism’s share of all deaths in sub-Saharan Africa in 1999. We chose 1999 because it had the highest death toll from armed violence in that region of any year from 1946 to 2006, and because sub-Saharan Africa’s wars at that time, particularly in the DRC and Angola, were notorious for their attacks on civilians. We chose 2006 for Iraq because that was the year that that country experienced its highest death toll since 1998 according to MIPT.

While MIPT’s data indicate that 48.4 percent of all fatalities in Iraq in 2006 were due to terrorism, in sub-Saharan Africa for 1999 it finds that just 0.06 percent of fatalities were due to terrorism. Had MIPT’s coding practices been the same in sub-Saharan Africa as they were in Iraq, then we would expect that terrorism’s share of all fatalities in Africa in 1999 would have been significantly greater.

If the intentional killing of civilians is not counted as terrorism in Africa’s civil wars, it should not be counted in Iraq’s civil war either.²⁷

It is not clear why MIPT and START use different coding practices in Iraq and in sub-Saharan Africa, but a review of their terrorism fatality counts in different countries around the world suggests one possible explanation.²⁸ In countries where intentional political violence against civilians is widely viewed as terrorism in the US and by the international community—in southern Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines, Spain, and Israel, for example—it is counted as terrorism by MIPT and START. Similarly, in sub-Saharan Africa, MIPT and START recorded the fatalities from the al-Qaeda attacks in 1998 and 2002 in Kenya, and in Tanzania in 1998, as terrorism.

In civil wars where some insurgents are widely identified in the US as “terrorists”—in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Colombia, for example—MIPT and START also tend to count civilian fatalities from insurgent violence as terrorism. However, in civil wars in which intentional violence against civilians by rebels is *not* widely identified as terrorism in the US and elsewhere, MIPT and START ignore, or seriously undercount, civilian fatalities from political violence. The sub-Saharan African wars noted above are cases in point.

These coding decisions suggest that MIPT and START researchers may have been influenced by the US State Department’s criteria for determining what constitutes a “foreign terrorist organization,” in particular the requirement that such organizations must “... threaten the security of US nationals, or the national security ... of the United States.”²⁹ Clearly this highly US-centric definition excludes many of the non-state groups in Africa and elsewhere that are guilty of perpetrating intentional, politically motivated violence against civilians—i.e., actions that fit the broadly consensual definition of terrorism that the MIPT and START datasets both use.

Treating civil war deaths in sub-Saharan Africa differently from those in Iraq distorts the trend data.

Whatever the reason for treating civilian deaths in civil wars in sub-Saharan Africa differently from those in Iraq, the practice distorts the trend data. Had civilian fatalities from intentional violence in sub-Saharan Africa been counted the same way as civilian fatalities in Iraq were counted, the MIPT and START trend data would reveal a far higher global death toll from terrorism from 1998 onwards—and the sharp post-2003 increase in fatalities caused by Iraq’s civil war would be much less significant.

TRACKING TERRORISM: A COMPLEX AND CONTESTED EXERCISE

Conflicting definitions, inadequate data, and inconsistent coding rules greatly complicate efforts to measure the incidence and intensity of terrorism around the world.

Just three research institutions—all based in the US—track the incidence of terrorism around the world and publish their findings annually:

- The National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), an official US agency created in August 2004, collects and records data on terrorism as part of its mandate. It has published statistics on international and domestic terrorism since 2005. NCTC was created partly in response to criticisms of the inadequacy of the US State Department's annual *Patterns of Global Terrorism* reports.³⁰
- The Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism (MIPT) was created in memory of the Oklahoma bombing in 1995. MIPT has data from 1998 to the end of 2006.³¹ Prior to 1998, MIPT has data on international terrorism only.
- The relatively new National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) at the University of Maryland has two datasets. GDT1 1970-1997 was created from the Pinkerton Global Information dataset. Data for the GDT2 dataset, which is the one referenced here, were collected by the START team. Thus far, START has only published its findings to the end of 2004.³²

Both START and MIPT are funded by the US Department of Homeland Security.

All three datasets collect information on both domestic as well as international terrorism. Previously, datasets like "Iterate" and the State Department's "Patterns of Global Terrorism" focused exclusively on international terrorism—which over the past 30 years has killed, on average, fewer than 500 people a year.³³

The current, more inclusive, approach to data collection reflects the belief that the distinction between "domestic" and "international" often obscures more than it reveals. In Europe, for example, many Islamist terrorists were European nationals, but were inspired by organizations like al-Qaeda and often had links with overseas terror groups.

Despite the huge challenges involved in compiling terrorism datasets, MIPT, NCTC, and START have made a major contribution to our understanding of the changing incidence of terrorism around the world. Without the

systematic and timely collection of global and regional data on terrorist attacks and fatalities, there is no way of determining whether or not the incidence of terrorism is increasing or decreasing—information that is essential for evaluating the changing nature of the terrorist threat and the success, or failure, of counterterrorism policies.

We address the issue of whether or not it is appropriate to categorize the intentional killing of civilians in wartime as terrorism elsewhere in this chapter. But this is by no means the only controversial issue that dataset compilers working in this area have to address. Here we review three other major challenges.

Access to Reliable Data

All three datasets rely on media and other reports in compiling statistics on terrorist attacks and fatalities. However, deaths often go unreported in civil wars and hence are not recorded. Even when deaths are reported, it is often difficult to determine whether the victim was a civilian or a combatant in civilian clothes. This matters because killing combatants does not normally count as an act of terrorism.

Terrorists do not always claim responsibility for their actions. So even when it is clear that the victim is a civilian, it may not be possible to determine the identity of the perpetrator. Knowing the identity of the perpetrator is important—the intentional killing of civilians by non-state armed groups will be counted as terrorism, but the intentional killing of civilians by government forces will not.

A similar problem arises when researchers try to determine whether violence was perpetrated with political or criminal intent—again being able to make this distinction is crucial because purely criminal violence does not count as terrorism.

Should Terrorism Counts Include Only Civilian Deaths?

Most analysts agree that one of the defining characteristics of terrorism is that it involves attacks on civilians, not combatants. Yet, at the same time—and somewhat paradoxically—few in the West would dissent from the claim that the al-Qaeda attack on the *USS Cole* was an act of terrorism—even though the *Cole* was an on-duty warship.

MIPT, NCTC, and START address this issue differently.

NCTC uses the term “noncombatant” rather than “civilian” in its discussion of what constitutes terrorism. “Noncombatants,” according to NCTC, include “military personnel outside a war zone or warlike setting.” Since the Cole was neither in a war zone, nor a warlike setting, the al-Qaeda attack was clearly an act of terrorism for NCTC.

MIPT acknowledges that terrorism is “generally directed against civilian targets,” but goes on to state that when attacks on military or police forces are carried out “in order to make a political statement,” they should be designated as terrorist acts.³⁴ It is, however, often impossible to know the intent of perpetrators, so it is quite unclear how coders could make such determinations with any degree of confidence. But there is no doubt that MIPT assumes that a great deal of violence against the police and the military is intended to “make a political statement” since in 2005 military and police deaths constituted *more than a third* of all fatalities in the MIPT database.

START recognizes that opinions differ as to whether attacks on the military or police should be counted as terrorism and does not stipulate whether they should or should not be included. Rather, START leaves it to users of the dataset to create their own definitions. They can do this by using filters to exclude (or include) particular categories of victims, including the police and the military.³⁵ At this stage of its development, however, START’s dataset is far from user-friendly and contains many anomalies.

The Difference between “Terrorism” and “Insurgent” or “Sectarian” Violence

Both MIPT and NCTC make a distinction between “terrorism,” on the one hand, and “insurgent” and “sectarian”

violence, on the other. Yet, while both define “terrorism,” neither defines “insurgent” or “sectarian” violence in a way that is helpful in distinguishing terrorism from the latter two forms of violence. MIPT, for example, defines terrorism as “a tactic,” while “insurgency” is described as “a political-military strategy.”³⁶ But this distinction does not tell us whether a particular attack on civilians should be coded as a case of terrorist violence or as a case of insurgent violence.

NCTC notes that “in the cases of Iraq and Afghanistan, it is particularly difficult ... to distinguish terrorism from the numerous other forms of violence, including crime and sectarian violence.”³⁷ However, while NCTC defines terrorism, it does not define either insurgency or sectarian violence. Yet, without clear and unambiguous coding rules—which in turn require clear definitions—data cannot be coded consistently. And consistency is critical. As Alan Krueger and David Laitin noted in their influential 2004 critique of the US State Department’s *Patterns of Global Terrorism* data: “Time-series analysis, which seeks to discern trends in given phenomena over time, requires a consistent approach to collecting data.”³⁸

Researchers at MIPT, NCTC, and START are acutely aware of the difficulties of working with contested definitions and insufficient, and often inaccurate, information. All three datasets are seen as “works in progress,” with data constantly being revised as new information becomes available. As the discussion above clearly indicates, the challenges involved in tracking terrorism are very real. Nevertheless, the data that MIPT, NCTC, and START provide, when used with due caution, can be illuminating. They reveal surprising and important findings about current terrorism trends and the factors that drive them.

It is important to note here that there is nothing in the definitions of terrorism adopted by MIPT or START that suggests that fatalities from intentional violence against civilians in Africa’s civil wars should *not* be included in the global terrorism count.

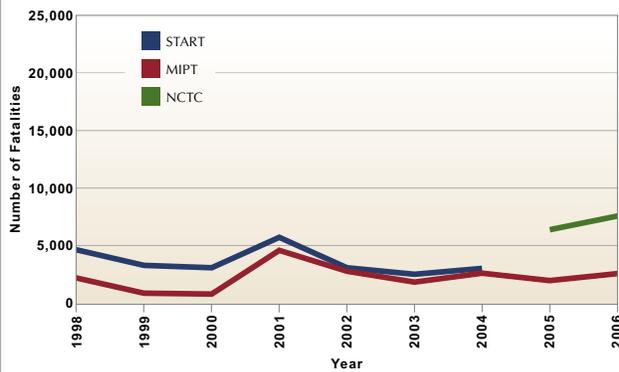
Global Terrorism Trends without Iraq

What happens if we remove Iraqi deaths from the global terrorism count to determine what the underlying trends are? There is a defensible case for doing this since, as noted above, the intentional killing of civilians in civil wars has not traditionally been described as terrorism. In addition, by counting civilian deaths from intentional violence in Iraq’s civil war as

terrorism, MIPT and START are not only at odds with traditional practice but also with their own coding practices in Africa’s civil wars.

In Figure 1.2 the fatality trend lines from Figure 1.1 are redrawn with the Iraq death toll omitted. A radically different picture now emerges. The huge increases in the global terrorism death toll following the invasion of Iraq that were so dramatically evident in the MIPT, NCTC, and START trend lines in Figure 1.1 have disappeared completely. Now neither of the two datasets that record fatalities back to 1998 shows any substantive increase—indeed both show a *net* decline in fatalities, from 2001 in the case of MIPT, and from 1998 in the case of START.³⁹ Clearly, if the hitherto unusual practice

Figure 1.2 Global Fatalities from Terrorism, Excluding Iraq, 1998-2006



Data Sources: MIPT; NCTC; START.

Absent Iraq, there has been no major increase in fatalities from terrorism since 2001.

of counting civilian fatalities from intentional violence in wartime as terrorism is rejected, then the trend data in Figure 1.2 pose a major challenge to the expert view that the global terrorist threat is increasing.

Iraq in 2007, a Dramatic Change

Thus far we have only reviewed the global fatality data to the end of 2006—this being the last year for which NCTC and MIPT have complete annual statistics.⁴⁰ However, in December 2007 NCTC released new fatality data covering the period from the beginning of that year to the end of September.

The new data reveal a dramatic decline in terrorism fatalities from March to September 2007. The decline in Iraq for this six-month period was 61 percent; the worldwide decline was 46 percent. And, as Figure 1.3 makes clear, the civilian fatalities in Iraq that had driven the global terrorism toll sharply up from 2005 to 2006 drove it sharply down in 2007.

If NCTC’s practice—which is shared by MIPT and START—of counting the deliberate killing of noncombatants in civil wars as terrorism is accepted, then the steep reduction in such killings in 2007 poses an additional challenge to the expert consensus that the global terrorist threat is worsening. If the intentional killing of civilians in Iraq is *not* counted as terrorism, then the evidence still suggests there has been a decline in terrorist fatalities—although in this case the decline starts earlier and is more modest.

NCTC was not the only organization to record a drop in deadly assaults on civilians in Iraq in 2007. In September 2007 General David Petraeus, commander of the Multi-National

Force-Iraq, testified to the US Congress that there had been an unprecedented decline in violence in Iraq. Civilian deaths, Petraeus claimed, had declined by 45 percent Iraq-wide since the high point of sectarian violence in December 2006.⁴¹

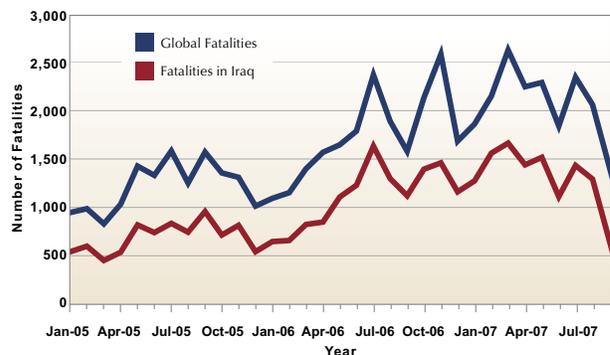
Petraeus’s claim was strongly disputed by opponents of the war in the US.⁴² But the declining trend he reported was virtually identical to that reported by the UK-based Iraq Body Count (IBC), a strongly antiwar organization that has kept a careful record of civilian fatalities from organized violence for several years.⁴³ IBC’s data show that civilian deaths dropped by some 69 percent from the middle of 2006 to November 2007.⁴⁴

In the months that followed Petraeus’s presentation, the death toll kept dropping. In mid-November, the US military reported that civilian fatalities were 60 percent lower than in June, while the weekly count of armed attacks across the country had shrunk from 1,600 to 575.⁴⁵ In December the military claimed that fewer weapons were entering the country from Iran, while the number of foreign fighters entering Iraq from Syria was down by 25 to 30 percent.⁴⁶

The Iraqi Interior Ministry, which uses a different methodology for counting civilian deaths than that used by the US military, reported in early December 2007 that 538 Iraqi civilians had been killed in November, two-thirds fewer than the August toll. This was the lowest monthly civilian death toll reported by the ministry since February 2006.⁴⁷

These various estimates are based on quite different counting methods, some more thorough than others, but all the data reveal a similar trend in declining fatalities—military as well as civilian.

Figure 1.3 Global Fatalities from Terrorism vs. Fatalities from Terrorism in Iraq, January 2005–September 2007



Data Source: NCTC.

Violence against civilians in Iraq drives the global terrorism toll.

By the end of 2007, with tens of thousands of Iraqi refugees beginning to return to Baghdad, there was no longer any doubt that the security situation in the country had undergone a major change. But what had driven the change remained the subject of lively debate.

Why Civilian Fatalities in Iraq Declined in 2007

Because it is clear that NCTC is counting such a large percentage of all civilians killed in Iraq by insurgent or sectarian violence as victims of terrorism, any explanation of the decline in the civilian death toll, *in general*, will also be a major part of the explanation of the decline in the fatality toll from terrorism as NCTC defines it.

The steep decline in the Iraqi and global terrorism tolls in 2007 was driven by a series of major changes in the Iraqi security environment during the year. First was the much-vaunted “surge”—the deployment of nearly 30,000 extra US troops to Iraq in the first half of 2007.⁴⁸ Second was a major shift in US military strategy on the ground. In 2007 providing security for the population had, for the first time, become a top priority for the US military—a radical change from past practice. The additional troops provided by the surge greatly facilitated this new policy.

The third change was the security effect of forced population movements—the good news about declining civilian deaths in Baghdad was due in part to the bad news about “ethnic cleansing.” In Baghdad, sectarian violence had continued to drive people from their homes throughout the surge buildup in the first half of 2007. Areas controlled by Shia expanded in the north of the city, while Sunnis, who were mostly on the losing side, consolidated in the south.⁴⁹

The sharply redrawn sectarian boundaries that were the consequence of ethnic cleansing created more “defensible space” for both communities, while far fewer vulnerable mixed neighbourhoods meant that there was less territory to fight about. This, plus the heightened local security provided by the US, increased the costs of sectarian violence while reducing its benefits, which in turn pushed down the civilian death toll.

The fourth major change in the Iraqi security environment was the announcement in April 2007 by Shiite militia leader Moqtada al-Sadr that the Mahdi Army, his powerful but deeply factionalized militia, would observe a unilateral ceasefire.⁵⁰ In mid-November 2007 the US military reported that the Mahdi Army’s ceasefire had been “a significant factor behind the recent drop in attacks in Baghdad.”⁵¹ As this *Brief* went to press there was major fighting ongoing between the Shia-led government forces and Mahdi Army militias. This will not

necessarily have caused an increase in fatalities from terrorism, however. Combat fatalities (including civilians inadvertently caught in the crossfire) are not counted as terrorism by any of the datasets under review.

Finally, and of critical importance for understanding the challenges that Islamist terror organizations confront elsewhere in the Muslim world, was the surprising alliance formed between the US military and its former Sunni insurgent enemies against the Islamist terrorists of al-Qaeda in Iraq.

The Failure of al-Qaeda in Iraq—a Global Defeat for Islamist Terrorism

In July 2005 Ayman al-Zawahiri, al-Qaeda’s main strategist and number two to Osama bin Laden, described Iraq as the location of “the greatest battle of Islam in this era.”⁵² This battle was being fought on Iraqi soil by a foreign-led group of Sunni militants who had become known as al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI).

In 2005 and early 2006, AQI was pursuing a nationwide terror campaign against Iraq’s “apostate” Shia community. AQI suicide attacks against Shia mosques and other civilian targets were intended to provoke Shia revenge attacks against Sunni communities that would lead to a Sunni-Shia civil war. The resulting turmoil would, it was believed, precipitate the withdrawal of the US and its allies.

The good news about declining deaths in Iraq was due in part to the bad news about “ethnic cleansing.”

However, these provocations, plus the militants’ efforts to impose their extremist ideology on the local Sunni populace in al-Anbar province and elsewhere, and their savage attacks on anyone who challenged them, had generated growing Sunni anger, not just in al-Anbar but throughout Iraq.⁵³

In September 2006 a nationwide opinion poll revealed that the terror tactics of AQI were rejected by a large majority of Sunnis, as well as overwhelming majorities of Shia and Kurds.⁵⁴ A year later, anti-al-Qaeda sentiments in Iraq had grown even more intense. An ABC News/BBC/NHK poll revealed that 100 percent of those surveyed—Sunni and Shia alike—found AQI attacks on Iraqi civilians “unacceptable”; 98 percent rejected the militants’ attempts to gain control over areas in which they operated; and 97 percent opposed their attempts to recruit foreign fighters and bring them to Iraq.⁵⁵

WHY MOST TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS FAIL

While many believe that terrorism is an effective tactic for achieving political objectives, the evidence suggests that is not the case.

Despite a huge surge of new research since al-Qaeda's 9/11 strikes on the US in 2001, remarkably few studies have analyzed why the overwhelming majority of terrorist campaigns, non-Islamist as well as those associated with al-Qaeda and its affiliates, fail to achieve their strategic objectives.⁵⁶ Most research has focused on why terror campaigns start, rather than why they end.

There are many possible explanations for the failure of terror campaigns. Prominent among them, as Audrey Kurth Cronin has argued, are doctrinal infighting, lack of effective operational control, and lack of unity—all very evident in the case of al-Qaeda and its affiliates.⁵⁷ However, the historical evidence also suggests that terror campaigns that lose public support will eventually be abandoned, even if the terrorists themselves remain undefeated.⁵⁸ As Cronin puts it, "Terrorist groups generally cannot survive without either active or passive support from the surrounding population."⁵⁹

The recent history of terrorism in Europe is an instructive case in point. In the 1960s and 1970s, and through into the 1980s in some cases, there was an upsurge of urban guerrilla/terrorist activity in Europe—the Baader Meinhof Gang/Red Army Faction launched attacks in Germany, the Red Brigades in Italy, Action Direct in France, the Fighting Communist Cells in Belgium, the Revolutionary People's Struggle in Greece, and the Angry Brigade in the UK. However, the radical neo-Marxist political agendas of these small essentially middle-class organizations, like the maximalist goals of Islamist groups, had zero appeal to the citizens that the radicals hoped to mobilize.

Insofar as the militants had any coherent strategy, it was to use violence to provoke indiscriminate state repression, which they hoped would in turn radicalize their potential support base. But, like the Islamist terror campaigns in Egypt and Algeria, and that of al-Qaeda in Iraq, the violence of the neo-Marxist groups succeeded only in alienating them still further from society, while catalyzing—and creating public support for—tough official antiterror policies.

Only a small percentage of the active members of these organizations were ever captured, killed, or imprisoned. The rest simply gave up on strategies that—as individual members of these organizations increasingly came to realize—had no chance of succeeding, while putting them at great personal risk.

By contrast, a number of terror campaigns employed by national liberation movements against colonial powers—against the British in Cyprus and Yemen and the French in Algeria, for example—achieved real success. However, here the strategic circumstances were completely different.

In an era when anticolonialist sentiments were growing rapidly in both the developed and developing world, the nationalist rebels, unlike Europe's neo-Marxist radicals or today's jihadi terrorists, had widespread popular support. In such a strategic context it is not surprising that terrorism proved to be an effective tactic. The anticolonial nationalists had time—and history—on their side.

These successes have few parallels in the current era, however. Today's terrorists are not fighting European powers with few vested interests in clinging to an outmoded colonial system.⁶⁰ They are confronting incumbent national governments that have an existential interest in avoiding defeat.⁶¹ Since the armed forces of these governments are almost always far larger, as well as better armed and trained, than are the terrorists, it is not surprising that the latter so rarely prevail.

Just how infrequently terrorist organizations achieve their goals in the current era was revealed in a rare quantitative study published in *International Security* in 2006. In an analysis of the successes and failures of 28 terrorist organizations in 42 campaigns over a five-year period, Max Abrahms found that terrorists failed to achieve their stated policy goals in 93 percent of cases—a remarkably high failure rate.⁶²

Although the defining characteristic of terrorism is the use of political violence against civilians, Abrahms noted that terror groups that mostly attacked civilians had a success rate of zero.

In the rare cases where terrorism succeeded, the militants had limited policy objectives and attacked military targets more than they did civilians.⁶³ A case in point is the suicide bombing of the US Marines barracks in Lebanon in October 1983 that left some 300 US Marines and French paratroopers dead. The terrorists' objective was limited—to achieve the withdrawal of a small number of foreign troops from Lebanon—and the target was military.⁶⁴ US and French forces pulled out of the country early in 1984.

This case is misleadingly cited by Osama bin Laden and others as evidence that terrorism succeeds.

The growing revulsion felt towards AQI was to become a major strategic liability for the militants, not least because it paved the way for the unprecedented US-Sunni security collaboration that had gathered pace in the last half of 2006 and accelerated through 2007. Sunni insurgents, who had previously been killing Americans, were now working alongside them in a campaign to hunt down and kill their former AQI allies.

Throughout 2007, as part of the extraordinary process that had become known as the “Sunni Awakening,” tens of thousands of mostly young Sunni men, many of them former insurgents, flocked to join anti-al-Qaeda “concerned local citizens” militia groups—large numbers of which are armed and funded by the US.

The Islamists’ failure in Iraq is neither accidental nor unique.

The US military’s new Sunni allies—there are now more than 90,000 of them—provided priceless intelligence on the identity and location of AQI fighters with some of the most valuable information coming from AQI defectors who had joined the new militias.⁶⁵ Previously, US counterinsurgency operations had lacked reliable information on who—and where—the militants were. The predictable result was that many innocent civilians were arrested without good reason and interned—or were killed or injured in offensive sweep operations by Coalition forces. Unsurprisingly, this increased popular hostility towards the occupation, while generating more volunteers for the insurgency.

In the late summer of 2007, the combined efforts of the concerned local citizens groups and US forces had dealt a series of crushing blows to AQI in most of its urban strongholds in the country—a dramatic reversal of the terror group’s fortunes in a relatively short period of time. The new US-Sunni alliance was also an important factor in the nationwide decline in civilian—and thus terrorism—fatalities as counted by NCTC.⁶⁶

By November 2007 it had become evident that an equally remarkable—though much less widespread or publicized—movement was underway to create Shia “concerned citizens” auxiliary police forces. According to the US military, some 15,000 volunteers had joined 24 all-Shiite groups, while a further 18 mixed Sunni/Shia groups had also been formed.⁶⁷ The protection offered by both Sunni and Shia concerned citizens militias to the local communities in which they

operated was yet another factor driving the civilian death toll down in 2007.

At the end of December 2007, General Abdul Kareem Khalaf, a spokesman for the Iraqi Interior Ministry, claimed that 75 percent of AQI’s networks and safe havens had been eliminated.⁶⁸ AQI activity was now concentrated in Iraq’s north where the organization was under growing pressure from US forces.

While the decline in civilian casualties in Iraq has been widely welcomed, the security situation in the country is far from stable. The alliance between the US military and former Sunni insurgents in al-Anbar and elsewhere is *not* a collaboration based on shared values. It was, and remains, an initiative based on common opposition to a common foe—“my enemy’s enemy is my friend.”

If AQI is completely crushed, the rationale for the US-Sunni cooperation disappears. There are real concerns in Washington that, should this happen, the former insurgents, now re-armed and trained by the US, will again turn their guns against the Americans.

The Shia-dominated Iraqi government, on the other hand, worries that the 90,000-plus US-armed and trained Sunni militia is undermining a sectarian balance of power that has come to favour the Shia majority.

While Iraq’s future security remains uncertain in many respects, by early 2008 one thing was very clear: AQI, while far from being completely crushed, had suffered a stunning defeat—politically as well as militarily. Hated by both the Shia and Kurdish communities and having deeply alienated its former Sunni allies, there appeared little prospect that Osama bin Laden’s Iraqi affiliate would be able to make a comeback.

The Islamists’ failure in Iraq is neither accidental nor unique. Throughout the Muslim world there have been similar reactions against the extremist ideology and the indiscriminate violence that have become hallmarks of Islamist campaigns.

The Sources of Islamist Political Failure

AQI’s failure in Iraq parallels earlier failures of violent Islamist movements in the Muslim world—notably in Egypt and Algeria. In all three cases, growing revulsion at the policies and the indiscriminate violence of the militants generated a popular backlash and effective campaigns of often ruthless official repression.⁶⁹ Similar negative reactions to Islamist political agendas are now evident throughout the Muslim world. Indeed, evidence that large and growing majorities of Muslims reject the Islamists’ harsh and repressive ideology is overwhelming.

Most Muslims (79 percent according to Gallup) share the militants' belief in the importance of sharia law.⁷⁰ But the way this belief is interpreted by mainstream believers is dramatically different from the extremist policies and practices that al-Qaeda and other Islamist groups seek to impose wherever they have the opportunity.⁷¹

It is also clear from opinion polls that most Muslims embrace a wide range of other views that the extremists reject. A major Gallup poll in 10 Muslim countries conducted between August and October 2005 found that, notwithstanding the strongly anti-American sentiments that hold sway in much of the Islamic world, there was also widespread support for the very liberal values that the Islamists reject:

The vast majority of those surveyed support freedoms of speech, religion and assembly—as well as a woman's right to vote, drive and work outside the home. The majority of opinion in every nation surveyed save Saudi Arabia also believes it is appropriate for women to serve at the highest levels of government ... A mean of 60% in the ten countries said they would want religious leaders to play no direct role in drafting a country's constitution.⁷²

Similarly, an ABC News poll taken in Afghanistan and released in December 2005 found that large majorities of Afghans, men as well as women, supported women's rights to be educated, to vote, to work outside the home, and to hold government office.⁷³

The liberal values revealed by the Gallup and ABC polls are completely antithetical to those of the Taliban, al-Qaeda, and other Islamist extremists—a fact that has clear strategic implications. As the 2006 US National Intelligence Estimate put it: "The jihadists' greatest vulnerability is that their ultimate political solution—an ultra-conservative interpretation of *shari'a*-based governance spanning the Muslim world—is unpopular with the vast majority of Muslims."⁷⁴

The reality is that al-Qaeda's extraordinarily harsh pan-Islamist ideology and the policies that are associated with it appeal to only a tiny—and shrinking—minority of Muslims around the world. And the more the Islamists attempt to impose it, the more rapidly they lose support.

Muslims around the world are not only deeply opposed to the Islamists' ideology and policies, they also strongly reject their use of suicide attacks and other deadly assaults on civilians. This is not surprising—the majority of victims of jihadi/Islamist violence have been fellow Muslims.

A Pew poll released in July 2007 revealed that "in Lebanon, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Indonesia, the proportion of Muslims who view suicide bombing and other attacks against civilians as being often or sometimes justified has declined by half or more over the past five years. Wide majorities say such attacks are, at most, rarely acceptable."⁷⁵

A December 2007 poll conducted in Saudi Arabia revealed that Osama bin Laden's fellow countrymen had "dramatically turned against him, his organization of al-Qaeda, Saudi fighters in Iraq, and terrorism itself."⁷⁶

In Afghanistan, where the government is locked in a confrontation with a resurgent Taliban supported by foreign jihadis, MIPT found that terror attacks on civilians increased from 28 in the first quarter of 2005, to 123 in the second quarter of 2006.⁷⁷ However, as the level of violence rose, so too did popular antipathy towards the Taliban and their foreign jihadi allies.

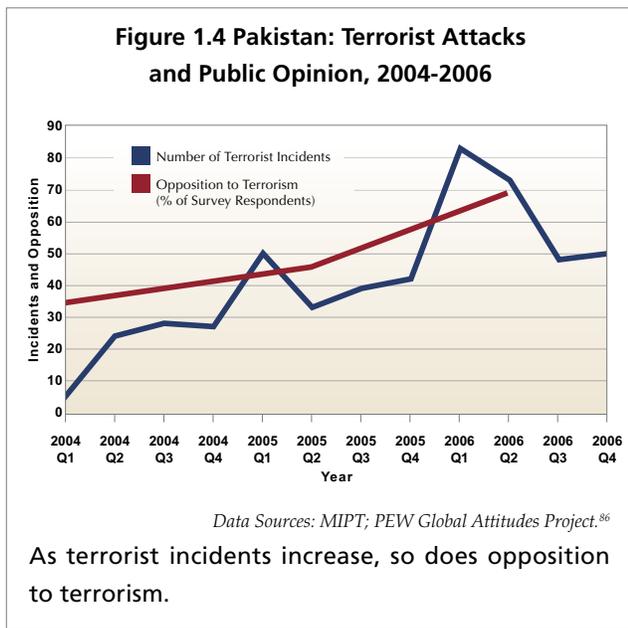
This was made evident in an ABC News/BBC poll conducted in late 2007, which found that just 1 percent of Afghans expressed "strong support" for the presence of the Taliban and jihadi fighters in the country.⁷⁸

In Pakistan—a country widely believed to be harbouring Osama bin Laden and his deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri and providing a home base for al-Qaeda and Taliban militants—the trend against the Islamists is even more pronounced.

As the level of violence rose, so too did popular antipathy towards the Taliban and their foreign jihadi allies.

Figure 1.4 reveals that the percentage of Pakistanis believing that acts of terrorist violence against civilians are "never justified" rose from 35 percent in 2004, to 69 percent in 2006.⁷⁹ The small minority supporting terrorism shrank significantly over the same period. It is no accident that this decline in support coincided with a tenfold increase in terrorism over the same period—from five terrorist attacks in the first quarter of 2004, to 50 in the last quarter of 2006.⁸⁰ As the attacks increased, opposition to them almost doubled.

In August 2007, 33 percent of Pakistanis supported al-Qaeda; 38 percent supported the Taliban. By January 2008 al-Qaeda's support had dropped to 18 percent; the Taliban's to 19 percent.⁸¹ When asked if they would vote for al-Qaeda, just 1 percent of Pakistanis polled answered in the affirmative. The Taliban had the support of 3 percent of those polled.⁸²



In the North-West Frontier Province, where al-Qaeda has a strong presence, the percentage of those with a favourable opinion of Osama bin Laden had dropped from 70 percent in August 2007, to just 4 percent in January 2008—an extraordinary decline over such a short period.⁸³ Bin Laden’s support level halved nationwide over the same period.

The reason for this “sea change” in public opinion in Pakistan, according to Terror Free Tomorrow, include “increased terrorist attacks by al-Qaeda and the Taliban, and the assassination of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto.”⁸⁴

Further evidence of the decline in support for the Islamists comes from the 2008 election results, where Islamist parties gained just 2 percent of the national vote, a fivefold decline from the level of support that they had enjoyed in 2002.

The Islamists’ minimal popular support and their lack of conventional military capability means that any attempt to mount a popular armed uprising in Pakistan would be doomed to failure. Their lack of broad-based support within the military precludes a successful military coup.⁸⁵ The Islamists have a strong presence in the northwest of the country, but no way of leveraging it to achieve state power.

This pattern—the lack of Islamist conventional military capacity, an absence of broad-based support within the military, and minimal popular support—is evident in all other countries where Islamist terror groups are active.

Islamist Terrorism: What the Statistics Tell Us

Case studies can inform us about Islamist terror campaigns in particular countries, while public opinion surveys can

reveal levels of support for Islamist ideology and tactics in the Muslim world. But neither can tell us whether or not the incidence of Islamist terrorism is increasing or decreasing—which is perhaps the most important objective measure of the threat. For this we need to turn again to the datasets.

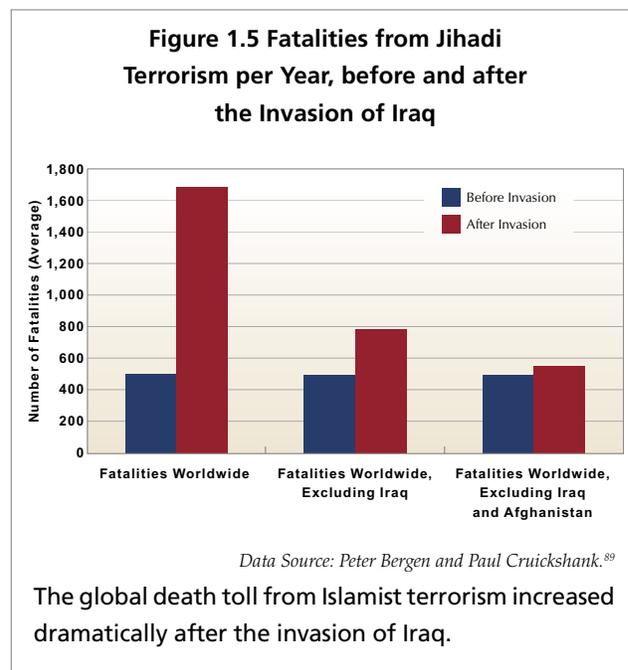
Given the intense concern that Islamist terrorism generates around the world, there is surprisingly little accessible long-term statistical data on its scope or incidence. One notable exception is found in the March 2007 study by Peter Bergen and Paul Cruickshank that extracted data on the incidence of jihadi terrorism from the MIPT dataset.⁸⁷

The authors compared MIPT’s jihadi attack and fatality numbers around the world before and after the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Their findings provided strong support for the expert consensus that the threat of Islamist terrorism is increasing.

The average annual global fatality toll from jihadi terrorism for the postinvasion period (March 2003 to September 2006) was 237 percent higher than in the pre-invasion period (September 2001 to March 2003). The average yearly total of jihadi attacks increased by more than 600 percent.⁸⁸

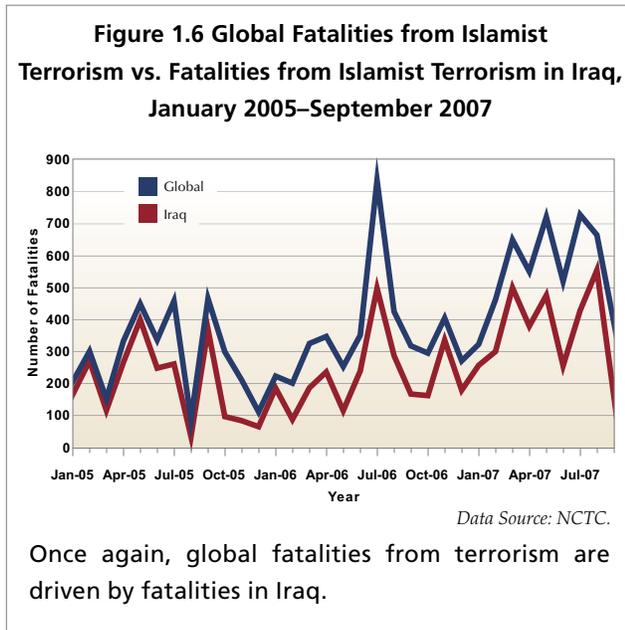
Figure 1.5 clearly shows the sharp increase in the fatality rate from jihadi attacks following the invasion of Iraq. It also suggests that the wars in Iraq, and to a much lesser degree Afghanistan, have been the major drivers of the worldwide increase in jihadi attacks.

The Bergen/Cruikshank study reveals a major increase in the *average* number of jihadi fatalities for the pre- and post-



war periods. But it does not tell us what happens within those periods, and it only extends to September 2006.

NCTC has data from the beginning of 2005 to September 2007 and its data can also be disaggregated to track fatalities perpetrated by different terror groups, including “Sunni Islamic extremists,” a category that includes al-Qaeda and its affiliates around the world, and is largely synonymous with Islamist terrorism.



As Figure 1.6 shows, Islamist terrorism was indeed increasing around the world from 2005. But in July 2007 things began to change. Between July and the end of September, the global fatality toll from Islamist terrorism halved—going from 727 deaths in July, to 385 in September. Much of this decline was driven by the even steeper decline in Islamist terrorism fatalities in Iraq; these dropped by 73 percent from August to September.

Global fatalities from Islamist terrorism over this period declined less than those in Iraq primarily because fatalities in Afghanistan increased while fatalities in Iraq decreased.⁹⁰

Given recent events in Iraq in late 2007—especially the major setbacks experienced by AQI—there is little reason to assume that the decline in Islamist terrorism in that country that started in September 2007 will be reversed.

NCTC is not the only research institution whose statistics reveal a decline in Islamist terror attacks and fatalities.⁹¹ The Intelcenter, a US think-tank based in Alexandria, Virginia, that focuses on Islamist terrorism, recently examined “the 63 most significant attacks executed by core al-Qaeda, regional arms

and affiliate groups over the past nearly 10 years.”⁹² These include the attacks in Bali, London, Madrid, Amman, and Jakarta, as well as the September 11 attacks in the US—i.e., those most associated with Islamist terror. The survey did not include jihadi/Islamist attacks in Iraq and Afghanistan and other “insurgency theaters.”

Intelcenter found that by August 2007, the number of Islamist attacks and fatalities, and the average number of fatalities per attack, had all declined from a high point in 2004. Attacks were down by 65 percent—from 20 to seven. Fatalities decreased by 92 percent, from 739 in 2004, to 56 in August 2007.⁹³ The average number of individuals killed per attack went from 67 to six over the same period.

Intelcenter’s data, while not as current as those of NCTC, also present a picture that is sharply at odds with the consensus view that the Islamist terror threat is increasing.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that there is little objective evidence to support the claim that the threat of terrorism is increasing around the world—at least as measured by fatalities from terrorist attacks. It has shown that the big increases in the global terrorist toll to the end of 2006 recorded by NCTC and MIPT were the result of counting a large percentage of the civilian deaths from insurgent and sectarian violence in postinvasion Iraq as “terrorism.” We have argued that there are defensible grounds for rejecting this counting approach.

If the Iraq fatalities are removed from the global terrorism data, there is no evidence of any substantial increase in the fatality toll since data on both domestic and international terrorism began to be collected in 1998. Indeed, the two datasets that have statistics going back to 1998 both reveal a decline in deaths from terrorism since 2001.

There is little evidence that the threat of terrorism is increasing.

However, even if we accept that it is appropriate to count civilian deaths from political violence in civil wars as terrorism, the latest statistics from NCTC—the only dataset that has usable data for 2007—still show a decline in the global death toll from terrorism. We have shown that the extraordinary 46 percent drop in fatalities worldwide from all forms of terrorism that NCTC’s data reveal for the period of March to September

2007 was driven almost entirely by the 61 percent decline in deadly assaults on civilians in Iraq.

The change described here is one of a net—not uniform—decline. As terror attacks have declined in Iraq and elsewhere, they have increased in Afghanistan, Algeria, and Pakistan.

In the West, as we noted earlier, the main focus of concern has not been local terror groups fighting over local issues, but the transnational Islamist terror organizations that are the central target of the \$140-billion-a-year global war on terror.⁹⁴

The GWOT, as it is often called, has had some significant tactical successes. Al-Qaeda's global terror campaign has been disrupted by an assault on its financial networks, by the loss of its sanctuaries in Afghanistan, and by the death or capture of individuals in key leadership positions.

In the Muslim world, however, Washington's antiterror efforts have been widely interpreted as being directed against Islam. This fact, plus the intense and widespread Muslim opposition to the US led-invasion and occupation of Iraq, undoubtedly helped swell support for the Islamist cause—offsetting many of the initial tactical gains. However, any initial support the Islamists secured by capitalizing on the

widespread anti-American sentiment in the Muslim world has been largely negated by their violent attempts to impose their harsh ideology and policies on their coreligionists. The response has been widespread public revulsion and a dramatic decline in popular support for the terrorists.

The evidence suggests that in 2008 the international community confronts a terrorist threat that is both serious and far from being eliminated, but that is in no sense comparable to the dangers posed by Fascism as some alarmist commentators have claimed.

The threats to individuals that al-Qaeda and its affiliates pose are real, but they need to be put in perspective. Like organized crime, terrorism can kill individual citizens, but its perpetrators lack both the public support and the military capacity needed to defeat governments. In the long term, perhaps sooner, Islamist terror organizations will join the overwhelming majority of other terrorist groups that have failed to achieve their objectives—from the anarchists of the nineteenth century, to the neo-Marxists of the twentieth. Their members will be killed, captured, or—most likely—will simply abandon a struggle that lacks popular support and that history suggests is doomed to failure.

VIOLENT STRATEGIES LOSING FAVOUR IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

For almost a quarter of a century a profound, but little-noticed, change has been underway in the Middle East and North Africa away from reliance on violent strategies to effect political change.

The failure of Islamist terror groups in the Middle East and North Africa to prevail either militarily or politically has been associated with a remarkable, but little-noticed, shift in grassroots strategies to effect political change in the region.

A new study from the Center for International Development and Conflict Management at the University of Maryland has revealed a sharp decline over the past quarter of a century in the percentage of organizations pursuing violent strategies—including terrorism—to effect political change across the Middle East and North Africa.⁹⁵

The researchers used the Minorities at Risk database to examine violent versus nonviolent strategies employed by 102 political organizations that represent 29 different ethnic/national/religious groups throughout the Middle East and North Africa. The researchers found that the percentage of

organizations employing violent political strategies dropped almost fourfold between 1985 and 2004—from 54 percent to 14 percent.⁹⁶ This extraordinary decline is associated with the defeat of violent political movements in Egypt, Algeria, and elsewhere. The percentage of organizations using nonviolent protest politics increased more than threefold from 1985 to 2004, while the number using electoral politics more than doubled in the same period.⁹⁷

This study provides further support for the thesis that there has been a long-term shift—albeit with significant reverses from time to time—away from reliance on terrorist tactics to effect political change in the Middle East and North Africa. This shift is associated with, and indeed part of, the uneven decline in armed conflict numbers in this region since the early 1980s.