

# PERSPECTIVES ON TERRORISM

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## Al-Qaeda's Propaganda Advantage and How to Counter It

By Brigitte L. Nacos

In early 2006, Jarret Brachman and William McCants published an article entitled "Stealing al-Qa'ida's Playbook," that examined the writings of several prominent Jihadi scholars, among them Ayman al-Zawahiri, al-Qaeda's second in command. Within weeks, al-Zawahiri released a video commenting on the article and mentioning that the review was based on research conducted at the United States Military Academy at West Point. Originally posted on an extremist Internet site, the video was eventually available on Google as well. [1] In response to al-Zawahiri's review of the article, Brachman remarked that "postmodern doesn't quite capture it." [2] Perhaps not, but the incident illustrated how today's terrorists—even those hiding in the most remote places—can and do utilize global information and communication networks that did not exist a decade or so earlier or were not easily accessible.

During the 1990s, when Western television and radio networks, wire services, and leading print outlets dominated the global media market and the Internet was not yet a major factor, Osama bin Laden had to give interviews to Western reporters in order to get his propaganda messages across to friends and foes. In the mid-1990s, bin Laden had an Arab student in the United Kingdom establish an office known as the "media wing of al-Qaeda," with the understanding that a physical presence in important media markets was essential for effective publicity campaigns. In 1996 and 1998, when the al-Qaeda leader issued his so-called fatawa, or religious edict, these declarations of war against the United States, Western crusaders, Israel and Zionists, were first published by the London-based newspaper *al-Quds al-Arabia*. After al-Jazeera emerged as the first non-Western global TV network at the beginning of the War in Afghanistan against the Taliban and al-Qaeda, bin Laden and his associates no longer had to rely on direct contacts with the Western press, but made their videos and other communications available to the Arab television network. They knew that their propaganda would make its way via al-Jazeera and other Arab satellite network to the global media. Finally, the Internet allowed contemporary terrorists to circumvent media outside their control to post their propaganda tracts on their own web sites or friendly organizations' and individuals' sites.

Nothing is fundamentally new when it comes to terrorism; especially with respect to terrorists' emphasis on publicity and propaganda. Terrorists have always understood the need to advertise their existence and causes. From the very beginning, they knew violence was the surest means to promote their organization. The emergence of technological advances has greatly expanded terrorists' ability to spread their propaganda on a global scale via satellite telephones, the Internet, and the distribution of DVDs. The creation of the global television-networks al-Manar and al-Aqsa Television have greatly benefited Lebanese Hezbollah and the Palestinian Hamas respectively. In fact, today's terrorists utilize all of these communication mediums.

Hamdi Issac, who was one of the participants in the failed July 21, 2005 London bombing attacks told Italian interrogators in Rome that he had been recruited by another would-be bomber, Said Ibrahim. According to Isaac:

We met each other at a muscle-building class in Notting Hill and Muktar (Said Ibrahim) showed us some DVDs with images of the war in Iraq, especially women and children killed by American and British soldiers. During our meetings we analyzed the political situation and the fact that everywhere in the West Muslims are humiliated and that we must react. [3]

Most of today's terrorists, regardless of their ideological leanings, utilize other forms of media—including the entertainment genre. This is also true for Islamic extremists. Islamic extremists may condemn Western pop music as decadent, but they have their own brand of "Terror Rap." For example, the lyrics of "Dirty Kuffar" by the British Hip Hop group Sheik Terra and the Soul Salah glorify Osama bin Laden and the 9/11 attacks and vilify Tony Blair and George W. Bush. More recently, the same group produced a shocking rap video titled "Dirty Kuffar Murder Iraqi Civilians." [4] The group's videos are not hard to find because they are available on the most popular sites on the Internet, such as YouTube, Google Video, and Yahoo! Video. Other similarly accessible videos celebrate suicide bombers and attempt to recruit "martyrs"—even from the ranks of children. Furthermore, they have a substantial impact. After Hamas's al-Aqsa TV aired a children's program that depicted the real life story of a female Palestinian suicide bomber, the woman's little daughter pledged to follow her mother's example. [5]

While the communication revolution of the last decade or so has greatly enhanced terrorists' ability to circumvent the traditional media, for the time being, the traditional or "old" media (television, radio, and print; as well as the "old" media's on-line sites) remain central factors in terrorist propaganda.

There is no doubt that contemporary terrorists have utilized and exploited the accelerated globalization of communication and media. As a 2007 National Intelligence Estimate stated, "globalization trends and recent technological advances will continue to enable even small numbers of alienated people to find and connect with one another, justify and intensify their anger, and mobilize resources to attack—all without requiring a centralized terrorist organization, training camp, or leader." [6]

#### Failure of U.S. "Public Diplomacy"

The promoters of hate and violence against civilians have been able to indoctrinate and recruit impressionable young Muslims around the globe via the Internet, DVDs, TV programs, and hip hop lyrics. Washington, however, has not found effective communication strategies to counter terrorist propaganda from al-Qaeda and like-minded groups and individuals. The U.S. Department of State's post-9/11 public diplomacy programs have failed to deter terrorist recruiting in the Middle East and in the Muslim

diaspora—especially in Europe. When Karen Hughes, President Bush’s long-time confidant, resigned as head of the State Department’s public diplomacy section this fall, America’s image abroad, and especially in the Arab and Muslim world, was still on the downward slide that she had hoped to halt and reverse when she took the job two years earlier. In his analysis of the 2007 Pew Global Attitude Project, Richard Wilke wrote, that “in particular, the United States continues to receive overwhelmingly negative ratings in the one area that was the primary target of public diplomacy efforts during Hughes’ tenure: the Muslim world. Recent Pew Global Attitudes surveys show that, among Muslim publics, favorable views of the U.S. have remained scarce over the last two years and in some countries America’s image has eroded even further. Perhaps the most notable example is in Turkey, where America’s favorability rating has plunged into single digits -- only 9% of Turks currently have a positive opinion of the U.S., down from 23% in spring 2005, just before Hughes took office, and down dramatically from the beginning of the decade, when roughly half of Turks (52%) had a favorable view. [7]

Just like her predecessors Charlotte Beers and Margaret Tutweiler, Hughes was unable to replace the image of “the ugly American” with a positive brand. While astute in domestic politics, Hughes lacked knowledge of the Middle East. During her first “listening tour” of several Arab countries, she was perceived as clueless and patronizing. However, even if the now open job at the Department of State were filled by someone familiar with the premier target region, it would be next to impossible to succeed with the current public diplomacy strategy and tactics. While attractive branding and packaging matters in the marketing of products, in diplomacy it is the content of the box of cereal or wash detergent that ultimately determines success or failure. Similarly, while so-called strategic communication initiatives, such as Washington officials granting interviews to al-Jazeera and other Arab media, receive attention in the region, ultimately it is U.S. policy that matters, not the rhetoric of public diplomacy vendors.

In a recent speech, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates called on the U.S. government to spend more money and yield to “soft power” because “the military alone cannot defend America’s interests around the world.” [8] The defense secretary said furthermore:

The government must improve its skills at public diplomacy and public affairs to better describe the nation’s strategy and values to a global audience.

We are miserable at communicating to the rest of the world what we are about as a society and a culture, about freedom and democracy, about our policies and our goals.

It is just plain embarrassing that al-Qaeda is better at communicating its message on the Internet than America.

As laudable as it may be, spending more money and placing more effort into “soft power,” will not assure a more effective “public diplomacy” in the Middle East and among Muslims and Arabs. Even if the United States Information Agency were revived

and its once excellent parts revitalized, these vehicles of public diplomacy would not be successful in current target regions as they were during the Cold War when they were working within a far more limited and controlled communication environment. In today's global setting, most people of the world know almost instantly what happens elsewhere around the globe. They no longer need the Voice of America or Alhurra TV as their primary source of information. It is unlikely that they will react positively to Americans selling U.S. culture and values and the advantages of democracy and freedom.

When foreign governments decide to utilize strategic communication in order to convince the American public and elite alike to support or oppose particular policies, they do not rely on their own public relations, publicity, public diplomacy, or propaganda. Instead, they hire leading and well-connected Americans in the most prestigious firms to promote their interests. For example, after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, the Kuwaitis hired and paid many millions of dollars to Hill and Knowlton, a large American public relations firm, to push the "Free Kuwait" cause in the United States. This action ultimately influenced America's decision to enter the first Gulf War.

While one would not want to repeat the tactics used in the Kuwaiti "public diplomacy" campaign, the advantage of using homegrown public diplomacy experts is indisputable. Thus, if the U.S. wants to make inroads against Islamic extremists' propaganda and its consequences, the best course of action is to win the hearts and minds of religious scholars and experts in the Arab and Muslim world and to communicate non-violent alternatives to the messages of hate and violence via the same range of media and communications that terrorist organizations and their supporters exploit.

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[1] See, <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-1172754576785196282&hl=en> , accessed May 20, 2007.

[2] Brachman made the comment in an e-mail to author.

[3] "Italy arrests another brother of London bomb suspect." Agence France Presse, July 31, 2005. Retrieved from Yahoo ! News, July 31, 2005, at <http://news.yahoo.com/afp/20050731/wl-uk-afp/britainattacksitaly-050731153552&prin...>

[4] <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=9083681522527526242&q=Sheikh+Terra+and+the+Sol+Salah+Crew> , accessed June 15, 2007.

[5] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cqHUDwePfbM>, accessed June 1, 2007.

[6] National Intelligence Estimate, "The Terrorist Threat to the US Homeland," July 2007, [http://www.dni.gov/press\\_releases/20070717\\_release.pdf](http://www.dni.gov/press_releases/20070717_release.pdf) .

[7] Richard Wilke, "Karen Hughes' Uphill Battle." <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/627/karen-hughes>

[8] Tom Shanker, "From U.S.' hard power' sector, a plea of 'sofer' assist." *International Herald Tribune*, Nov. 27, 2007.

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## Arab Prisons: A Place for Dialog and Reform

By Nicole Stracke

Reforming and rehabilitating terrorists could be one of the most effective long-term counter terrorism strategies to have been adopted in a number of Arab states. States plagued by terrorism had to learn the hard way that prisons and detention centers could be breeding grounds for hard-liners and recruitment centers for terrorist groups. This is, however, not a new phenomenon. During the 1970s and 1980s, Egyptian prisons sometimes became centers that turned young Islamists from sympathizers who vaguely understood the ideas of Jihad into hard-liners. The case of Ayman Al-Zawahiri is well-known. He was imprisoned in Egypt for three years and during this time, he transformed from a moderate jihadi and regime opponent into a hardcore militant, who used his time in prison to recruit new members for his organization.

However, for some time now, Arab states have been witnessing a remarkable reversal in the role of prisons: once used as a recruitment center by terrorists groups, they now have become reform centers. The "Revision of Jihad" ball started to roll in May 1997 when deep from within the cells of political prisons in Egypt, the imprisoned leadership of *al-Jama'a al-Islamiya*, one of the largest and most violent extremist Islamic movements in Egypt, declared an initiative to denounce violence and provided a new interpretation of the principles of Jihad wherein the use of violence was considered legitimate only in the case of self-defense. The literature that was later produced by the group's leadership was particularly critical of al-Qaeda ideology and its brutal methods. [1] Ten years later, in November 2007, the imprisoned leadership of the second most important Egyptian Islamist Jihadi movement *al-Jihad al-Islamiya* (whose former leader was al-Zawahiri) has decided to follow suit and adopt the already successful example of reconciliation with the government and society.

At first, the Egyptian security authorities were skeptical and hesitant to support the process, which was initiated by the prisoners themselves. Then, the authorities decided to offer limited support, namely by facilitating the many and long meetings that took place between the leaders of the organization and its members. [2] Recently, with the announcement of the *al-Jihad* leadership initiative, Egyptian authorities have decided to facilitate the process by separating the supporters of the reform or "revision" process from the small group that was objecting to the process simply by relocating about 30 of the 'rejectionist' militant Islamists to other prisons.

The Egyptian experience was unique in the Arab World in comparison to the Saudi and Yemeni experience in the sense that the leadership of the terrorist organization, or some of its leading figures, decided to 'review' the organization's ideology and strategy and then implement 'collective reform.' The 'reform' was designed to be wide-ranging and inclusive, encompassing the great majority of the organization's members.

In the years between the two phases of the "Revision of Jihad" process, which was implemented in Egypt during 1997 and 2007, some Arab governments introduced their

own reform programs inside prisons and detention centers to target individuals who were allegedly involved in terrorist activities.

What is unique about the Arab rehabilitation and reform program is the soft approach to fight terrorism. The security services, after having engaged in dialogues with Islamists, understood that it was better to put a 'carrot' at the end of the 'stick' if they wanted to successfully fight terrorism. In the earlier days, the alleged cruel treatment of Islamist prisoners and the harsh interrogation methods used inside prisons had only radicalized detainees and hardened their views. Detainees started to revolt against prison authorities and organized themselves to resist the authorities' pressure. Some who were sent to prison for suspected illegal activities or minor offences became 'radicalized' and vulnerable to pressure from militant groups, who eventually recruited by these prisoners.

The Saudi government was one of the first in the Arab World to set up professional and comprehensive reform programs in prisons. In mid-2004, Saudi Arabian authorities initiated *al-Munasaha wa al-Islah committee* (Advice and Reform) with the aim of targeting certain individuals who were detained on terrorism-related charges. The 'de-radicalization' and rehabilitation program was started after the wave of terrorist attacks in May and November 2003, and it was only one of a number of counter terrorism tactics adopted as part of the general counter terrorism strategy by the state. To implement and promote the program, the Saudi government established a special committee. The Saudi move was based on the belief that the great majority of young people who had been detained were victims of misguided interpretations of Islam or had succumbed to pressure from the militant groups.

Therefore, the program aimed to gain the trust of prisoners, and enlighten them on the 'true teachings of Islam', which forbid followers to use violence against civilian Muslims or non-Muslims. The program presented alternatives for those who were willing to review their attitude and change. The initial run of the program experienced some difficulties as prisoners distrusted the authorities and disbelieved the promises and intentions of the project managers and consultants from the official religious institutions. Terrorist groups worked hard at trying to discredit the program and publicly warned anybody working with the project. Yet, the program was successful, and Saudi officials confirm that only 3 to 5 percent of the hard-line prisoners from 2004 to 2007 relapsed into their old ways. [3]

Numerous factors contributed to the success of the program. First, the program targets Islamists who have not yet committed a terrorist act but have shown tendencies and willingness to become involved in terrorist activities. It is easier to convince these Islamists their ideas and actions were wrong. Many of the detainees did not have an adequate understanding of the Holy Quran and were surprised by the interpretation provided by the religious scholars visiting them in prison. Moreover, these Islamists had not yet been subjected to extensive brainwashing by terrorist groups, and therefore, it was much easier to convince them that they had chosen the wrong religious path. [4]



The second major contributor to success was the Saudi government's huge financial commitment of over \$30 million for the program from 2004 to 2007. [5] The ongoing program is comprehensive, employing about 80 permanent staff members, including religious scholars and psychologists, and affecting every aspect of the prisoner's life. The program provides social and economic incentives for detainees who decide to cooperate. The Saudi government was prepared to ensure employment, provide houses or even facilitate marriage for the detainees in the belief that responsibility for a family would prevent the detainee from being attracted to the militant cause and going to the Jihadist battlefields in Iraq or Afghanistan. In most cases, this strategy proved to be very successful. The government initiative is not limited to the prisoners' personal well-being alone. Indeed, in some cases, authorities take care of the detainee's family by continuing the payment of his or her salary and providing medical treatment for ill parents to set an example of generosity in order to finally convince the detainee that the government is not their enemy. After being released, the detainees remain in contact with the Saudi authorities and return for a 'follow up examination.'

A third factor is that the Ministry of Interior oversees *al-Munasaha committee* in Saudi Arabia. That is different from the programs in other states of the Arab World where the rehabilitation programs are under the supervision of the Ministry of Religious Affairs or the Ministry of Justice. This is important as only the Interior Ministry has the authority to give security guarantees to detainees promising that if they cooperate; it will not only provide them with benefits, but could also recommend their release from prison if they prove their trustworthiness. Therefore, prisoners are more likely to cooperate if they have a safety guarantee directly from the ministry. Influenced by al- Munasha committee, the Saudi government has already released more than 1,000 prisoners. This is likely to encourage other prisoners to cooperate in the hope of securing release.

Finally, even though the soft approach of the program has been a success, it should be mentioned that prisoners are well aware of the consequences they face if they fail to cooperate with the program's objective - namely to abstain from all kinds of terrorism-related activities. Only some prisoners would be able to cope with the prospect of having to spend even more years in prison.

Over the last few years, numerous initiatives have been implemented to win the 'battle of the hearts and minds' in Saudi Arabia including tackling the influence of radicals over the Internet. In 2004, a number of religious scholars set up a web page under the name *Sakeenah*, or '*inner peace*', to fight terrorism on an ideological level, offering open debates and answering questions. Furthermore, in October 2007, the Presidency for Scientific Research and Religious Edicts (*Dar Al-Ift'a*), the Riyadh-based organization comprising prominent Islamic scholars that issues fatwas, set up a website for its religious rulings. The site ([www.alifta.com](http://www.alifta.com)) provides access to the fatwas issued by *Dar Al-Ift'a*, which is affiliated to the Council of Senior Islamic Scholars of Saudi Arabia headed by the Grand Mufti Sheikh Abdul Aziz Al-Sheikh. The decision to tackle radical ideology via the Internet was made after it was alleged that some Imams in Saudi Arabia were issuing fatwas and calling on young people to take part in the Jihad. The project

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also aims to tackle the broadening jihadist Internet scene that increasingly targets and recruits ‘wannabe jihadists’ through the worldwide web.

The success of the Saudi reform program contributed to official responses in other countries. In 2003, the government in Yemen established the committee of al-Hawar al-Fikri (the intellectual dialog) headed by an Islamic religious scholar, Judge Humoud al-Hattar. Al-Hattar confirmed in interviews that within a few months of the start of the program, the government agreed to free 92 detainees on the recommendation of the committee. During 2004, the commission succeeded in convincing 246 people of former Arab Afghan Leaders to give up their ‘wrong extremist ideas.’ One of the most popular representatives who participated successfully in the program is Khalid Abd al-Nabi, the leader of the Aden-Abyan Islamic Army.

The Yemeni program had attempted to deal with major issues concerning the question of Jihad and relations between the citizens and the authorities, as well as attitudes towards non-Muslims. Among the main topics on the project's agenda were:

1. The true concept of jihad in Islam.
2. The importance of adherence to the Islamic basic sharia law.
3. The principles of the dialogue in crucial matters in Islam.
4. The importance of understanding the true rules of takfeer (declaring someone as unbeliever).

The Yemeni program drew the interest of the British Foreign Office. Intending to learn from the Yemeni experience, it invited the head of the al-Hawar al-Fikri committee to give briefings concerning the committee’s achievements. The UN has also shown interest in the Saudi experience. Richard Barret, the coordinator of the monitoring team of the 1267 Sanctions Committee, which was formed per a Security Council resolution, contacted Saudi authorities to obtain information on the Kingdom's special anti-terrorism program aimed at protecting people from being influenced by Al-Qaeda ideology.

The achievements of “de-radicalization” and reform programs have also been noticed by the US government, which is now making an effort to implement a similar program in Iraq. Since the beginning of this year, the US has been funding a \$254-million rehabilitation program in Iraq aimed at reforming militant Islamists. The program has been initiated in various US administered prisons and detention centers where many Iraqis are detained or imprisoned for alleged terrorist activities. US official sources claimed in the *Los Angeles Times* newspaper that so far, none of the more than 1,000 detainees who had been through these 'reform programs' had been re-arrested for renewed terrorism-related activities. But the sources remained skeptical about the sustainability of such a high rate of success and also mentioned that about “30 percent of the detainees may be impervious to the efforts” of the rehabilitation program. [6]

The Arab world and the West have acknowledged that terrorism cannot be overcome by force alone, and that the battle for the hearts and minds is even more important to win.

Against this backdrop, it can be expected that the rehabilitation and reform program will remain a vital part of counter-terrorism strategies in the region.

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NOTES:

- [1] “Dr Fadl”, Tarsheed al Jihad fi Misr wa Aa’lam, 2007
- [2] Al Hayat, 7 November 2007
- [3] www.alarabiya.net, 20 June 2007
- [4] Al-Riyadh Daily Newspaper, 9 December 2005
- [5] Al Sharq Al Awsat, 21 April 2007
- [6] Los Angeles Times, 16 November 2007.

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**Global Poverty, Inequality, and Transnational Terrorism: A Research Note**

By James A. Piazza

*“No-one in this world can feel comfortable, or safe, while so many are suffering and deprived.”*Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan  
March 22, 2002  
Monterey, Mexico

Among politicians and political figures within the media and throughout the general public, the idea that transnational terrorism is a predictable consequence of global poverty and the unequal distribution of global wealth remains quite popular. This belief rests on an essentially reasonable premise: If citizens of a country are denied the means to satisfy their basic human needs, are deprived of access to reasonable economic opportunities, or are faced with glaring levels of socioeconomic inequality; they will become hopeless and enraged and may view political violence as an acceptable means for redressing their grievances. Because political moderation and trust in the established system to address society's problems rest upon a healthy and prosperous economy, economic distress increases the appeal of radicalism in the eyes of ordinarily reasonable and moderate people.

Linking terrorism and wealth distribution is also politically attractive because it prompts a straightforward policy response to the problem and aids policymakers in creating political support for that policy response. If poverty and inequality cause terrorism; world leaders, media figures, analysts and ordinary people can embrace a causal framework through which something can be done to stop terrorism. Concluding that terrorism is caused by bad conditions - rather than by “bad people” or other abstractions - facilitates a concrete policy response. Furthermore, because of the prevailing belief that poverty, inequality, or poor economic developments are causes of terrorism, politicians are able to harness this belief to build political support behind antipoverty policies. Politicians may use these beliefs to communicate two very strong messages: (1) one can do something to reduce or even stop terrorism; which is to reduce or eliminate global economic want; and (2) to continue to ignore global poverty or inequality is to continue to place the world and its citizens in mortal danger. Indeed a very wide range of public figures have communicated these very messages, including President George W. Bush, former President Bill Clinton, former U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell, former Secretary General of the United Nations Kofi Annan, and Nobel Laureate Desmond Tutu. [1]

Reducing or eradicating global poverty or what former U.S. President Bill Clinton referred to as the “dark side of globalization” [2] – the yawning gap in wealth between the industrialized and the developing countries – is, without question, a worthwhile objective for policymakers. But will it lead to a reduction in transnational terrorism? A spate of recent scholarship suggests that it will not. To date, there is no evidence that that convincingly demonstrates that countries with low levels of economic development, high

rates of unemployment, poor rates of economic growth, high levels of income inequality, and high levels of malnutrition have higher levels of terrorism. [3] It is also not the case that perpetrators of terrorist attacks are more likely to be poor themselves, have low levels of education, high rates of unemployment, or to hail from impoverished countries. [4] Moreover, these findings seem to stand up whether they are derived from individual, group, subnational, regional, or cross-national studies. [5]

### **A Global Analysis**

Are poverty and international inequality predictors of terrorism when looked at from a global perspective? Are changes in levels of global poverty and changes in the distribution of global wealth related to fluctuations of transnational terrorist activity? For several reasons the unique nature of transnational terrorism makes a global analysis, rather than a country-specific or cross-national examination, particularly useful. First, the country locations of transnational terrorist attacks may not be linked to the socio-economic conditions that produce terrorism in the first place. Rather, countries attacked by transnational terrorists might be selected on the basis of local security dynamics, the international prominence of the target, the likelihood that local media will cover the attack, or the softness of the target. Second, as globalization progresses, domestic political economies are more likely to be affected by global processes, leading in turn, to a general globalization of socio-economic and political conflict. Transnational terrorism is more likely to be a reaction to these globalized conflicts. Finally, the theory of blowback posits that transnational terrorism is a counter-reaction to change in global hegemony, both security and economic hegemony, and resistance to dominant paradigms, one of which may be the current structure of the international economic system. A global study, in which the entire international system is the unit of analysis, is well positioned to capture the most important economic forces that are popularly argued to cause transnational terrorism.

This brief research note examines transnational terrorism by employing a global perspective using data on transnational terrorist attacks derived from Terrorism Knowledge Base (TKB) provided by the Rand Corporation and the Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism. [6] The TKB collects open source data on transnational terrorist attacks – defined as attacks in which the perpetrator(s) and the victim(s) come from different countries – for the years 1972 to the present day and is regarded as a reputable and reliable database. [7] The analysis compares annual total rate of transnational terrorist attacks in the world to two other variables that encompass the popular focus on global poverty and inequality of wealth distribution. First, attacks are compared to the annual percentage of the world’s population designated as ‘in poverty’ by Chen and Ravallion, though figures are available only from 1982. [8] Second, attacks are compared to the annual gross domestic product differential between those countries designated as “high income” verses those designated as “low income” by the United Nations Development Program. [9] The annual total rate of transnational terrorist attacks in the world is plotted against these two variables to create three time-series charts represented in Figures 1 through 4. Also, results of Pearson’s *r* Correlation, coefficients are included in the charts with two-tailed significance tests.

## Results

In the first two time-series charts, Figures 1 and 2, there is no real evidence of a significant relationship between measures of global poverty and inequality and incidents of transnational terrorism. The rate of annual transnational terrorist attacks fluctuates wildly across the time-series independent from the percentage of the world's population classified as impoverished and the significant growth of global inequality.

However, a closer examination of the annual rate of attacks yields an interesting pattern. There are five peaks of transnational terrorist attacks – in 1976, 1982, 1985, 1991 and 2004. There is a significant decrease at the end of the 1990s, with 2000 representing the nadir. The 1980s is the most active period for transnational terrorism, and this corresponds with the observations of many qualitative studies of global terrorism. The most dramatic spike in attacks occurs between 2001 and 2004, largely due to the increased terrorist activities within Iraq. Between 2003, the start of the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq, and 2006, an average of 36.6 percent of all transnational attacks occurred within Iraq. In 2004, transnational attacks in Iraq accounted for 61.3 percent of total worldwide attacks for the year. Iraq after 2003 is an outlier, producing a large percentage of total attacks at the end of the time-series. When these attacks are excluded from the data, the results show a somewhat different picture.

In Figure 3, a significant positive relationship between poverty and transnational terrorism is evident. The gradual decrease of poverty – from 66.9 percent of the world's population in 1982 to 47.6 percent – is accompanied by a net decrease in terrorist attacks from 300 to 182. However, as demonstrated in Figure 4, no corresponding relationship is evident between the steadily widening wealth gap between high and low income countries from 1972 to 2006 – the gross domestic product of high income countries increased from 29.9 times the size of low income countries to 61.8 – and change in the frequency of transnational terrorism.

## Conclusion

Clearly these results do not provide compelling evidence that global poverty and global inequality are precipitants of terrorism – certainly not of the type that could support the rather confident assumptions underlying much of the policymaking world's statements about the root causes of transnational terrorism. But, they do provide the possibility that economic development could play a part in antiterrorism efforts by demonstrating that transnational attacks co-vary with levels of total people in poverty in the world. Further empirical investigation is required to determine the validity of this preliminary finding.

The results do yield some more unambiguous points of interest to researchers who use quantitative data on terrorism to explain its root causes. First, global measures of absolute level of development, such as the percentage of people living in poverty, might bear a different relationship to transnational terrorism than relative measures, such as the global distribution of wealth, even though policymakers tend to lump both of them

together as precipitants of terrorism. Second, researchers must consider outliers' effects because they have potentially important consequences for the overall pattern of transnational terrorism. It is possible that short-term and geographically isolated conditions, such as the invasion of Iraq and the disruptions that resulted due to sudden regime-change in that country, can distort the overall picture and mask more universal predictors of transnational terrorism. Finally, there is value in using a global view – an analysis that uses the entire world as a unit of analysis – in quantitative analyses of transnational terrorism. This method could be particularly useful in conjunction with single-case or cross-national analysis.

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Figure 1: Transnational Terrorism and Global Poverty

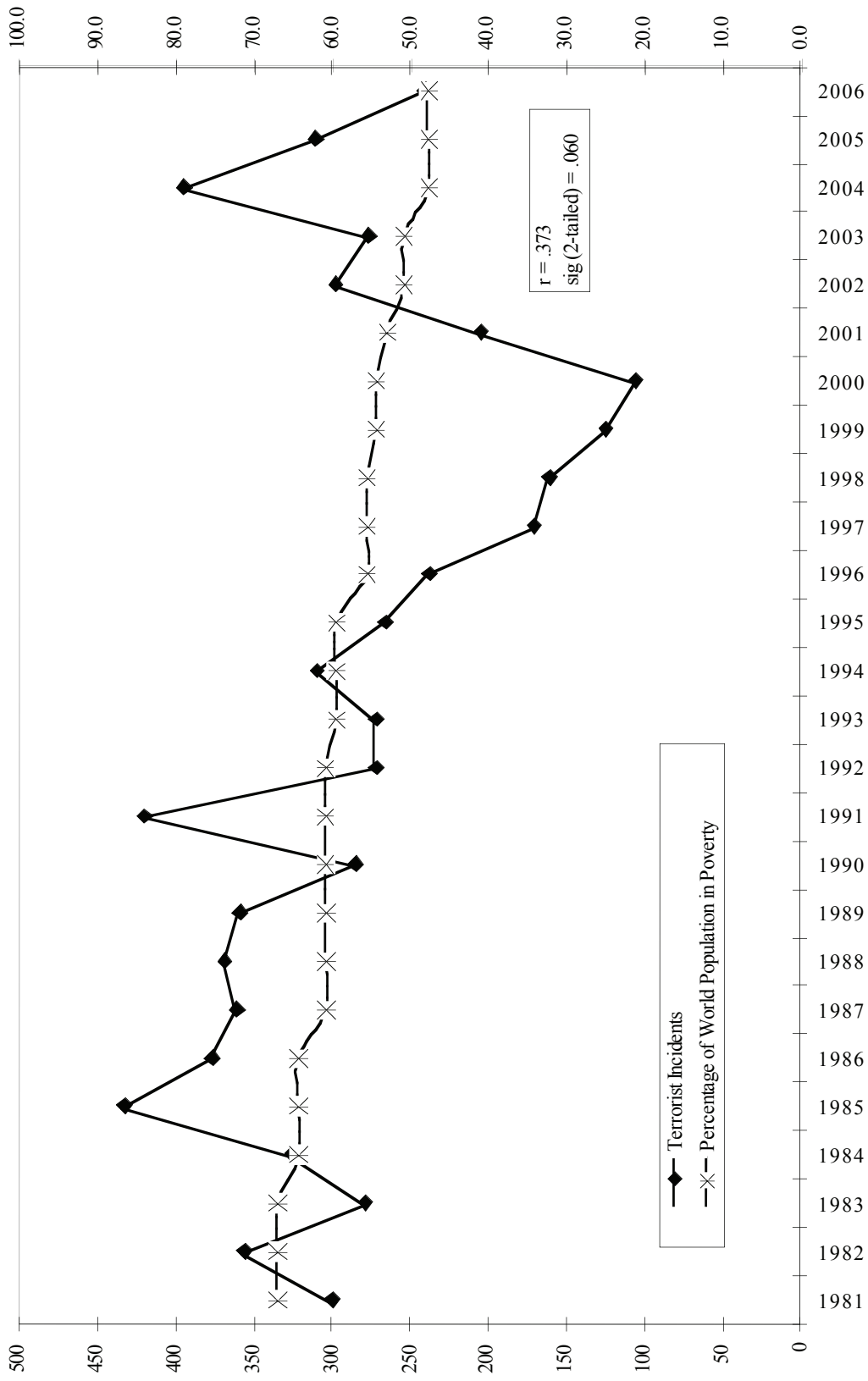




Figure 2: Transnational Terrorism and Global Inequality

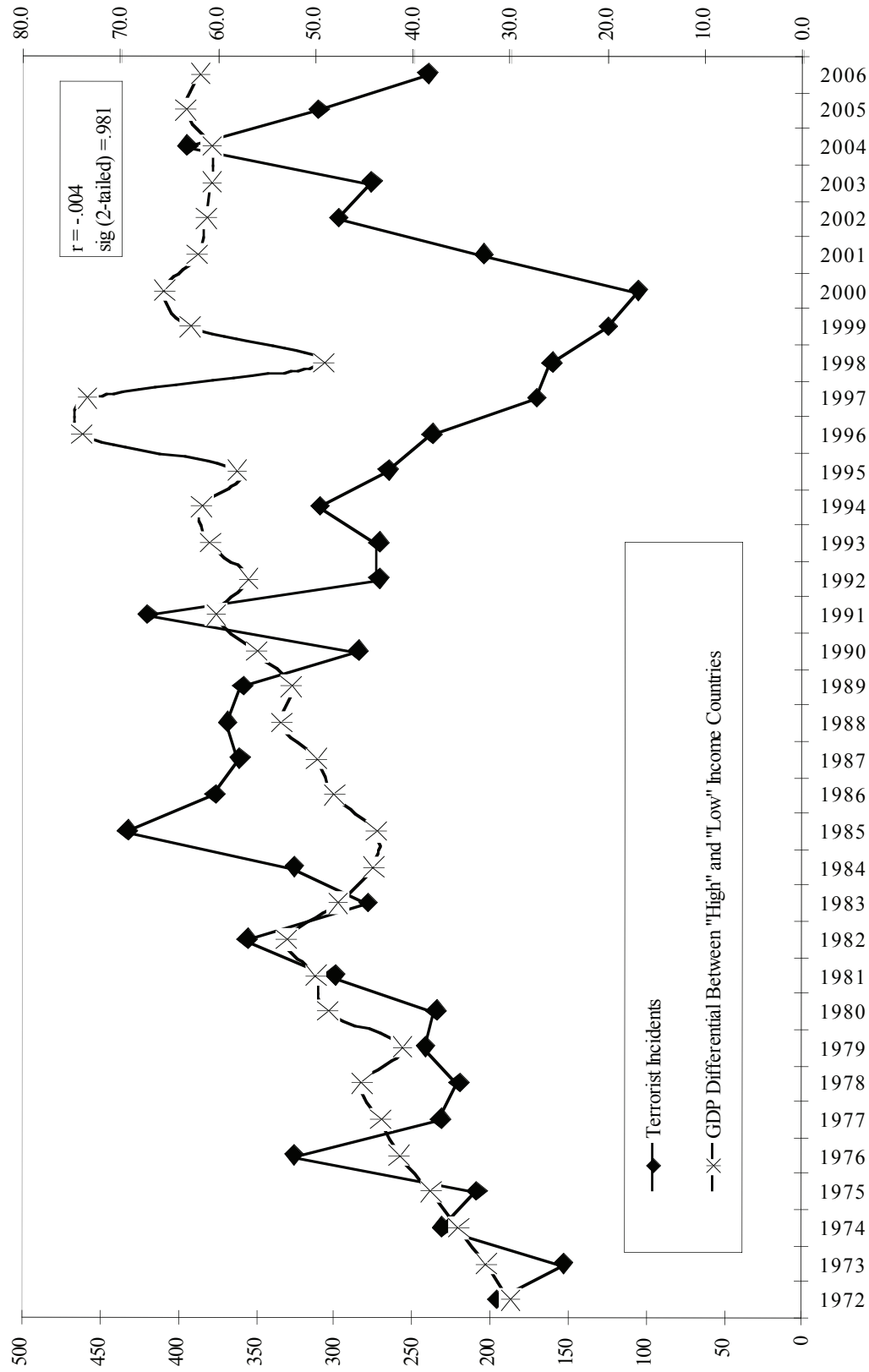


Figure 3: Transnational Terrorism and Global Poverty, Iraq Incidents Excluded

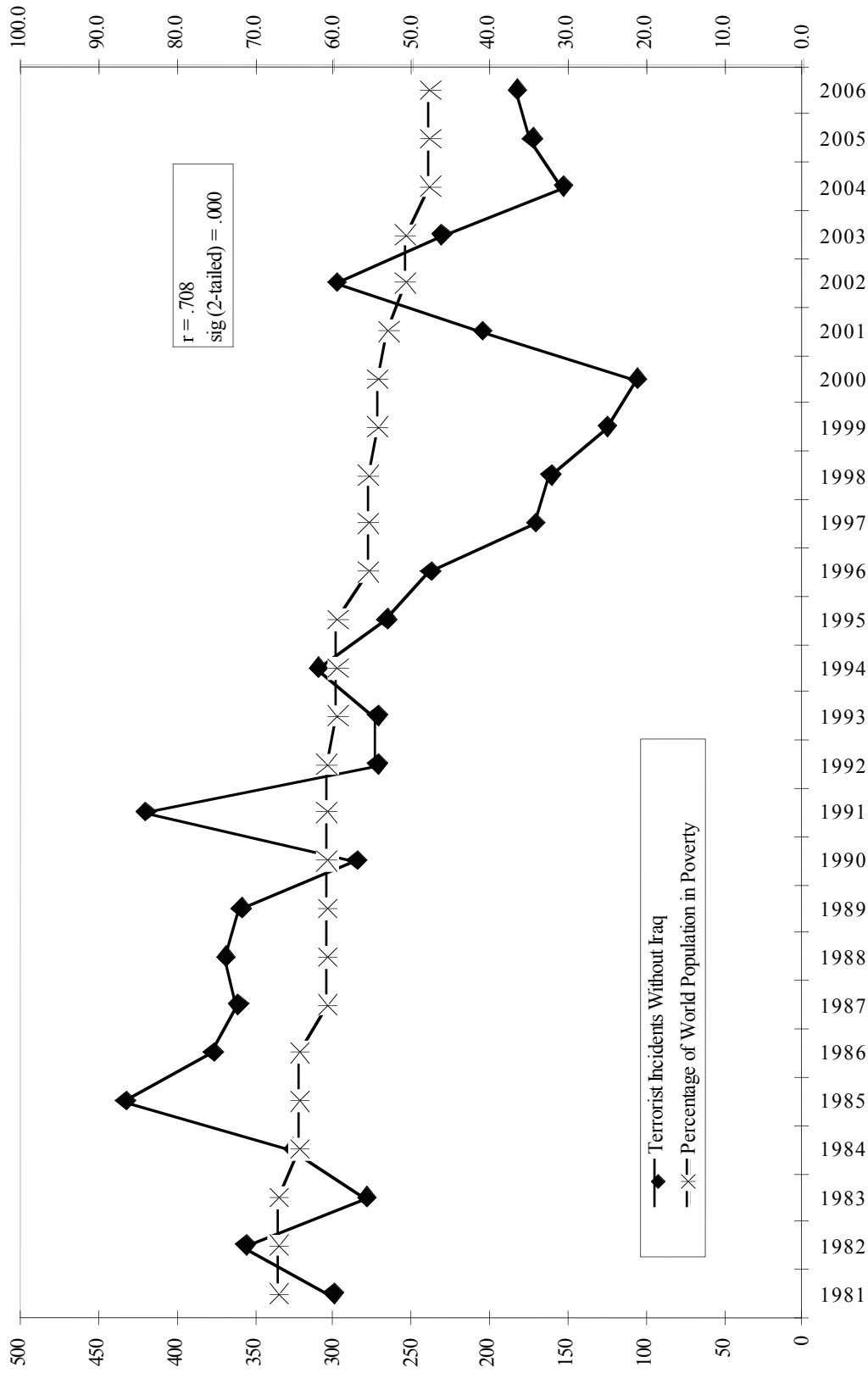
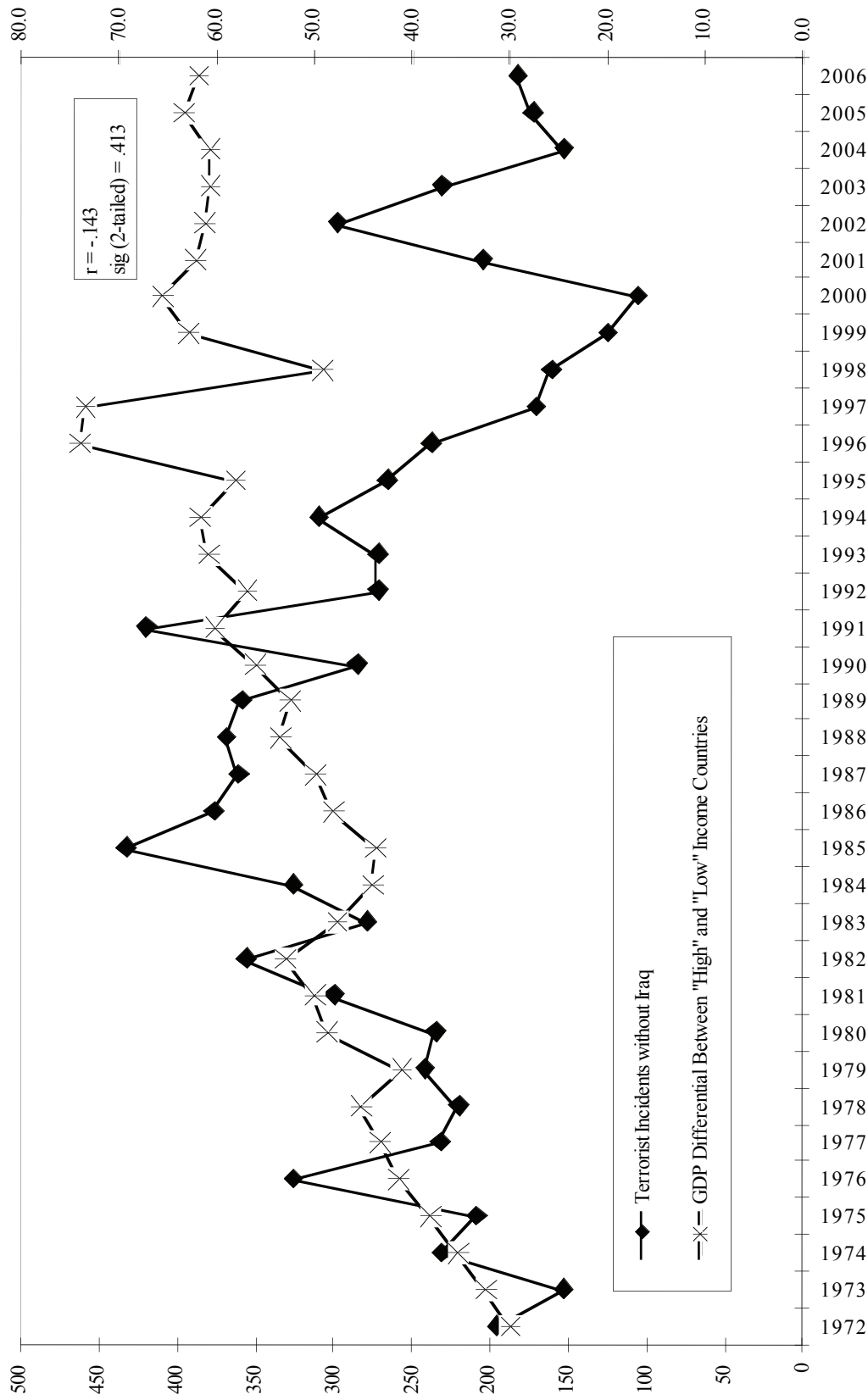


Figure 4: Transnational Terrorism and Global Inequality, Iraq Incidents Excluded



**NOTES:**

- [1] Jai, Janet L. 2001. "Getting at the Roots of Terrorism." Christian Science Monitor. 10 December; United Nations News Service. 2001. "Press Release GA/9971: Terrorism Must Be Addressed in Parallel with Poverty, Underdevelopment and Inequality, General Assembly is Told." November; Bluestein, Paul. 2002. "Bush Seeks Foreign Aid Boost; Plan Counters Overseas Critics." Washington Post. 15 March, A10.
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- [5] For examples of regional study, see Piazza, James A. 2007. "Draining the Swamp: Democracy Promotion, State Failure and Terrorism in 19 Middle Eastern States." Studies in Conflict and Terrorism. 30:4. 2007; and sub-national study see Piazza, James A. 2007. "Terrorism and Party Systems in the States of India." Unpublished manuscript.
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- [8] Source: Derived from Chen, Shaohua and Martin Ravallion. 2004. "How Have the World's Poorest Fared Since the Early 1980s?" World Bank Research Observer. 19:2:141-169.
- [9] Source: Derived from UNDP. World Development Report. (various years). Figures represent high-income GDP divided by low-income GDP.

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