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**Is International Terrorism What We Thought
It Was? An Empirical Study of the Global
Neosalafist Jihad in 2004**

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Working Paper (WP) 33/2005

(Translation from the Spanish, Revised & Extended Version)

7/11/2005



Is International Terrorism What We Thought It Was? An Empirical Study of the Global Neosalafist Jihad in 2004

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Summary: Current international terrorism is often characterised as a particularly new phenomenon. This is mainly because of the highly lethal and indiscriminate nature of its bombings, the routine involvement of suicide terrorists indoctrinated by Islamic fundamentalism and its tendency to focus on Western targets, especially US citizens and interests. It is true that a certain combination of the features considered typical of international terrorism, and even proclaimed by its instigators and militants, is usual in the most notorious attacks to have taken place in recent years. However, the fact is that this global and religiously-inspired violence, more specifically neosalafist in its ideological orientation, has resulted in a lower-than-expected mortality rate, far more conventional procedures than commonly believed and victimisation patterns that are also different from those hitherto taken for granted. An empirical study of its main actors, scenarios, consequences and targets during the year 2004 indicates that international terrorism is to a greater extent a paradigm of conflicts inside the Islamic world than an expression of a clash between civilisations.

Introduction

At least 208 attacks that can justifiably be attributed to current international terrorism were recorded between January and December 2004. In other words, these acts of international terrorism are attributable to groups and organisations that are part of the global jihad movement, share the same neosalafist interpretation of the Islamic creed, have as their ultimate goal the political unification of the Moslem world through the establishment of a new caliphate and look towards al-Qaeda both as their founding nucleus and their permanent matrix of reference (see Table 1). The acts of international terrorism collected in this study include both major and minor incidents committed by groups and organisations that are part of the global neosalafist jihad movement. Multiple serial attacks perpetrated over a short period of time, often within minutes, in a single location and against interrelated targets have been tabulated as unitary incidents. Also included among the incidents recorded here are the few attempted attacks which either failed or were disrupted, insofar as the actual planning was completed and the terrorist act about to be perpetrated. A significant number of other episodes, unaccounted for in this article, can surely be attributed to this new Islamist terrorism that is part of the broad global neosalafist jihad by reason of their location, procedure and targeting. However, their authorship has been neither claimed nor subsequently revealed, thus allowing for only more or less consistent conjectures about those who perpetrated them. Besides all this, it should be borne in mind that the complex configuration adopted nowadays by this phenomenon does not easily permit a clear identification of the entities that plan or carry out the attacks. Even those with a better defined organisational structure occasionally make use of interchangeable names that overlap with one another, sometimes to endorse acts of violence carried out by small self-constituted and relatively autonomous local cells whose relationship with al-Qaeda's decision-making centre, or with the relevant cadres of

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any of its affiliated groups, is apparently tenuous.

The data compiled make it more than feasible to analyse the incidence of international terrorism in 2004, with special attention being devoted to certain features such as the main actors involved, the geopolitical scenarios affected, victimisation patterns, procedures and modalities in the execution of attacks and the basic characteristics of the targets. The statistical information provided in this article has been gathered, systematised and processed at the Elcano Royal Institute for International and Strategic Studies' Area of International Terrorism. Open sources were used for the purpose of collecting data and extensive use has been made of the Terrorism Knowledge Base (TKB) maintained by the Oklahoma City Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism (MIPT). However, the actual compilation of terrorist incidents has been made in accordance with the author's own criteria, based on their attribution to groups and organisations related to the complex and extensive movement known as the global neosalafist jihad. It does not, therefore, fall in line with the distinction made in the mentioned data base between domestic and international terrorism, since groups integrated in the global neosalafist jihad can appear in the first category, while the second includes organisations unrelated to the network of radical Islamists and which practice transnational rather than international terrorism. On the other hand, the extracted and systematised data has been subsequently revised and completed with information provided in Spain by the archives of the daily newspaper *El País* and the news agency EFE. A final updating benefited from the corresponding annual chronology of significant terrorist incidents published in the United States by the National Counterterrorism Centre (NCTC).

Table 1. Acts of international terrorism in 2004, according to groups and organisations

Groups and organizations	Frequency	Percentage
Taliban	73	35.1
Tawhid wal Jihad	30	14.4
Islamic Army in Iraq	12	5.8
Ansar al Sunna	11	5.3
Al Qaeda	10	4.8
Lashkar e Tayiba	10	4.8
Tanzim Qa'idat al Jihad fi Bilad al Rafidayn	10	4.8
Riyadus Salikhin Battalion of Chechen Martyrs	9	4.3
Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat	6	2.9
Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula	5	2.4
Abu Sayyaf	4	1.9
Jaish e Mohammed	4	1.9
Harakat ul Mudjaheedin	3	1.4
Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan	3	1.4
Lashkar e Jangvi	3	1.4
Abu Hafs al Masri Brigades	2	1.0
Yemaa Islamiya	2	1.0
Al Haramain Brigades	1	0.5
Other groups and organizations	10	4.9
Total	208	(100)

Source: the author.

Actors of International Terrorism

According to the data compiled, the original nucleus and effective vanguard of current international terrorism, namely al-Qaeda, could be directly or indirectly connected with no more than a very small part of the incidents recorded, barely ten of all those which occurred in 2004. This is not surprising, since al-Qaeda has rarely planned and completed attacks on its own, September 11 being among the exceptions to the rule. More specifically, this terrorist structure most probably was behind five attacks in Saudi Arabia, at least two in Afghanistan, two more in Pakistan and another in Syria last year. In

addition, an al-Qaeda spokesman also claimed responsibility for the massacre perpetrated on 11 March in Madrid, and members of the cells that carried out the attacks belong to the same network as those who subsequently attempted an equally gruesome action against the high-speed train linking Madrid and Seville and then played a leading role in the collective suicide of 3 April in the town of Leganés, near Madrid. These are a series of acts which, in turn, involved individuals related to the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group, affiliated to al-Qaeda from its inception. It is also true that responsibility for a further two incidents in Turkey during the same period was claimed by the so-called Abu Hafs al Masri Brigades, a name that alludes to a prominent Egyptian member of what was known as al-Qaeda's military committee and who died some years ago as a result of a US air strike in Afghanistan.

Of the several hundred militants that various al-Qaeda subgroups apparently have in the Arabian Peninsula, many gained experience in the Afghan struggle during the eighties or trained in camps initially established for that purpose. Some of them carried out at least five terrorist acts in Saudi Arabia territory in 2004, to which could be added a further attack which is commonly attributed to a faction within the same jihadi sector, known as the Al Haramain Brigades. In Iraq, *Tanzim Qai'dat al Jihad fi Bilad al Rafidayn*, that is, the al-Qaeda Organisation for the Holy War in the Land of the Two Rivers, perpetrated ten more attacks as from the middle of October. It was precisely during this month that the group *Tawhid wal Yihad* (or Monotheism and Holy War), whose formation probably dates back to the summer of 2003 and is made up of several hundred mostly non-Iraqi Arabs, adopted the above-mentioned name after its leader, a Jordanian national who adopted the name Abu Musab al Zarqawi, publicly swore loyalty to Osama bin Laden. But by then, its set of relatively independent cells had already perpetrated no less than 30 attacks, mainly in central and northern Iraq. Groups calling themselves Islamic Army in Iraq and *Ansar al Sunna* (Defenders of Tradition), to a large extent overlapping with the armed organisation which decided early in the autumn to change its name, jointly responsibility for a further 12 and 11 terrorist incidents, respectively, that occurred in the same geographical area throughout 2004.

Al-Qaeda and its local or regional associates have therefore perpetrated around 39% of the terrorist acts attributable to the global neosalafist jihad in 2004. The 73 attacks carried out in 2004 in Afghanistan were the responsibility of armed activists still loyal to the values and institutions of the extinct Taliban regime, closely linked to al-Qaeda since the mid-nineties. Following the US military intervention, which destroyed the sanctuary enjoyed by the terrorist group under the Afghan theocratic totalitarian regime, a large proportion of the members and leaders of the armed jihadi organisation, along with many combatants who previously adhered to the Taliban political system, crossed the frontier to settle in the Pakistani provinces of Baluchistan and the North-West, adjacent to Afghanistan, while others sought refuge in the more densely populated cities of the neighbouring country and others dispersed in their respective countries or communities of origin, inside or beyond the Islamic world. On a whole, the number of attacks carried out in Afghan territory by armed Taliban activist totalled approximately 35% of all incidents related to current international terrorism world-wide in 2004.

A further 44 cases, around 21% of the total incidents recorded in 2004, are attributable to several other collective actors associated with al-Qaeda. These include *Lashkar e Tayyiba* (Army of the Pure), a terrorist organisation created in 1989 which, in line with another group that appeared at the end of the following decade, *Jaish e Mohammed* (or Army of Mohammed), aims at both the complete annexation of Kashmir to Pakistan and Islamic domination of the neighbouring nations and even the whole of India, where they have already perpetrated bloodthirsty attacks. Between the two groups they have a few thousand adherents and are based in Pakistani territory. A similar case is that of *Harakat*

ul Mudjahedin, an organisation operating in Kashmir but with important transnational connections. Established in the early eighties, it soon began to recruit Sunni volunteers to combat the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan until its association with al-Qaeda at the end of the nineties. It is believed to have reached a number of around 500 activists of different nationalities, although most are Pakistanis. A further terrorist group, *Lashkar e Jangvi* (Army of Yhangvi) has less than one hundred adherents but regularly carries out attacks against Western targets and Shiites in the same area, as was actually the case last year.

Equally notorious in 2004 was the terrorist activity of the Riyadus Salikhin Battalion of Chechen Martyrs, which made itself known two years ago and whose deadly attacks usually take place in Russia, especially in the federal capital or in territories of the Northern Caucasus, where terrorist actions are combined with other guerrilla operations. In addition to its separatist agenda, the extremist group, allegedly made up of a few hundred individuals, is related with the global jihadist movement and led by Shamil Basayev. Also significant last year were the terrorist actions perpetrated by the so-called *Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat* (Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat), active in Algeria since the early nineties, when it established itself with the intervention of Osama bin Laden himself and became part of the global jihadist movement. At present it has a few hundred members not only in its country of origin but in others nations of North Africa, having spread even to the Sahel region in addition to establishing a propaganda and proselytising infrastructure in various European countries. Somewhat similar in size is another organisation involved in acts of international terrorism, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, founded in 1998 and whose actions take place preferably in its homeland, although in the past it has attempted to widen its field of action to neighbouring states bordering on Central Asia. Many of its militants have trained in camps in Afghanistan under al-Qaeda instructors. The group, largely but not exclusively made up of Islamic Uzbek radicals, has been affiliated to al-Qaeda from its inception.

Yemaa Islamiya is another of the organisations integrated into the current international terrorist network and which perpetrated attacks in 2004. Created in January 1993, since then it has managed to recruit several thousand members in relatively independent cells whose activity encompasses several countries in South-East Asia, mainly in the Indonesian archipelago, although its structures have reached Australia itself. It has received funds and support from al-Qaeda and, in turn, provided assistance to components of this terrorist structure in South-East Asia. It also maintains close links with the *Abu Sayyaf* (Sword Carrier) group, among others in the region having a similar jihadist ideological orientation, which concentrates its attacks on Moslem areas in the southern Philippines and has also perpetrated notorious international terrorist actions in 2004. The remaining seven incidents of international terrorism perpetrated in 2004, nearly 5% of the total recorded, were carried out by cells and groups with a variable formal articulation, often under no specific name in an essentially autonomous manner but firmly aligned with al-Qaeda and the global neosalafist jihad movement.

Scenarios for the Neosalafist Jihad

Throughout 2004, 36% of the total recorded acts of international terrorism took place in Afghanistan and around 31% in Iraq (see Table 2). Some 7% were recorded in India and a further 6% in Saudi Arabia. Below this percentage, among the countries affected to a greater or lesser extent by the remaining 20% of attacks were Algeria, Egypt, Indonesia, Pakistan, the Philippines, Russia, Spain, Syria, Turkey and Uzbekistan. According to the geopolitical regions involved, almost all of all the attacks attributed in 2004 to organisations and groups related to the global neosalafist jihad movement, or approximately 52%, were recorded in Central and Southern Asia, while around 39% occurred within an area extending from the Middle East to the Gulf. Slightly over 4% of the total acts of international terrorism committed between January and December of 2004

were perpetrated in Eastern Europe, around 3% of them in a single country of the Maghreb, and a similar percentage in two countries of South-East Asia. Less than 2% were perpetrated in Western Europe, specifically in Spain.

Table 2. Acts of international terrorism in 2004, according to countries and geopolitical regions

Countries	Frequency	Percentage
Afghanistan	75	36.1
Iraq	64	30.7
India	15	7.2
Saudi Arabia	13	6.3
Pakistan	10	4.8
Russia	9	4.3
Algeria	6	2.9
The Philippines	5	2.4
Spain	3	1.4
Uzbekistan	3	1.4
Turkey	2	1.0
Egypt	1	0.5
Indonesia	1	0.5
Syria	1	0.5
Total	208	(100)
Geopolitical regions		
Central and Southern Asia	103	49.5
Middle East and Gulf	81	38.9
Eastern Europe	9	4.3
Maghreb	6	2.9
South-East Asia	6	2.9
Western Europe	3	1.5
Total	208	(100)

Source: the author.

Afghanistan, which between 1996 and 2001 was a sanctuary for al-Qaeda, has gradually been losing the centrality it hitherto held for international terrorism, despite the frequency of incidents still recorded last year. The US military intervention after the September 11 attacks put an end to the Taliban regime in power at the time, with a decisive influence on the configuration of that terrorist structure and the global neosalafist jihadism as a whole. The former became weakened and fragmented, but the latter has become a more extended and diffuse movement. Since then, the remnants of the Taliban militia and elements of al-Qaeda itself, moving easily across the Pakistani frontier, have systematically carried out acts of terrorism. Their aim has been not only to oppose the presence of Westerners and block the activities of non-governmental international organisations, but also to hinder the normal functioning of the incipient public administration and, above all, to spread fear among the population, thereby attempting to inhibit their acceptance of a new form of government in the country. This violence persisted in Afghanistan throughout 2004 with an extraordinary frequency that ran parallel to the limited but significant progress achieved in state reconstruction and political stabilisation. The country's first democratic elections were held on 9 October 2004 and the steady normalisation of society and consolidation of its security forces should have a detrimental effect on the capacity of the Taliban or al-Qaeda-related armed groups for mobilising resources and affecting the ongoing political process with their terrorist acts.

In the case of Iraq, terrorist activities in general and acts of international terrorism in particular occur in the context of the insurgency that has been a constant factor since the summer of 2003, when the Ba'athist dictatorship was toppled by the US-led multinational coalition's invasion and occupation of the country. As the general elections called for 30 January 2005 drew near, the frequency of the attacks increased in order to make it impossible to hold normal elections. One month previously, three armed Sunni groups connected with global neosalafist jihadism published a menacing communiqué via Internet

which read: 'We call on all the Moslem faithful to refrain from participating in that infidel practice whose aim is to impose the infidel laws of the crusades and replace our great religion with secularism'. Native insurgents and foreign terrorists failed to invalidate or prevent the elections, but continued to attempt to condition the country's political development. Half-way through 2004 it was estimated that the contingent of foreign jihadists joining these armed Sunni groups linked to al-Qaeda might vary between several hundred and a few thousand. Those of Saudi provenance seemed to be in the majority, although a significant Syrian and Kuwaiti presence was also recorded. In 2004, their attacks constituted a small part of the total of attacks carried out by insurgent forces. They were predominantly directed against members of the new Iraqi security forces, US or other troops in the area and the headquarters of international organisations. However, the Shiite community, which accounts for the majority of the population, was also targeted with the aim of provoking civil unrest and sectarian violence.

In other countries of the Arab and Islamic world, acts of international terrorism aim above all to erode the legitimacy of their respective rulers who, seen from a neosalafist viewpoint, are considered to be either apostates or unbelievers because they fail to abide by the rigorous precepts imposed by a fundamentalist interpretation of the Moslem creed, as expounded by the Sharia or Koranic law. The armed groups and organisations linked to al-Qaeda combine their own local or regional agendas, aimed at the short- or medium-term restoration of political regimes inspired by a strict disciplinarian interpretation of Koranic laws, with the ultimate objectives pursued by the global neosalafist jihad: the establishment of a caliphate that would politically unify Islam and thus make this religion prevail world-wide. In Saudi Arabia, for instance, the attacks of 2004 were a continuation of the campaign that started half way through the previous year. In Algeria, terrorism is connected with the Islamic extremism that has convulsed the country since 1992, though now aligned with the global jihadist movement. In India, violence is particularly related to the conflict over Kashmir, attracting al-Qaeda elements or affiliated groups and affecting neighbouring Pakistan as well. In Indonesia and the Philippines, acts of international terrorism are, in turn, indicators of structural cleavages and generators of sectarian violence. In Uzbekistan, terrorist groups take advantage of the unstable political environment, heightening the social and religious cleavage, while in Egypt, Syria and Turkey it encourages the radicalisation of society.

Outside the Moslem world, the most important incidents of international terrorism recorded in 2004 were the massacres that occurred in Madrid on 11 March and Beslan on 1 September. As to the former, it was not the first time that leaders and members of the current international terrorist network had attempted to commit an atrocity of such a magnitude in a Western European country, but it was the first time that they managed to successfully carry out their plans. A series of attacks against German, French, British or Spanish targets in southern Asia, the Middle East and North Africa were the prelude to what finally took place within the European Union's borders. International terrorist activities were favoured in Spain by a combination of accessibility, vulnerability and opportunity that until then had not been present in the same way in any other Western European country. Geographical proximity to the Maghrib, the peculiar attraction of the Iberian Peninsula's Moslem past for neosalafist terrorists, anti-terrorist arrangements that were highly developed and effective but not yet adapted to combating the challenges of a global jihadism and a time of tense internal political debate over the Spanish government's alignment with the US military intervention in Iraq, combined to create a set of circumstances that were comparatively propitious, though by no means determinant, for the spectacular Madrid attack. Al-Qaeda and its affiliated bodies also stood to gain in propaganda terms from the collateral effects of the slaughter on what became known as the 'trains of death'.

Insofar as there is a proved connection between the Chechen armed group which seized the Beslan school, in the southern Russian republic of Northern Osetia, and the current network of international terrorism related with the global jihadi movement, the events of September 2004 in that city certainly have no less a relevance than the 11 March slaughter in Madrid, as regards the impact of such violence on countries where the population is not preponderantly Moslem. The Beslan case would be a good example of how the adoption of a terrorist repertoire by various groups and organisations of Chechen rebels, initially as a reaction to the devastating repression unleashed on the separatist militants and their population of reference by the Russian armed forces during the middle nineties, allowed al-Qaeda and its affiliated groups to penetrate and reframe an existing ethno-nationalist conflict, turning it into a religious confrontation where local and global agendas complement each other.

A New International Terrorism?

Current international terrorism is often presented as a particularly novel phenomenon: first of all, due to its high degree of deadliness and the indiscrimination with which attacks are conducted. Secondly, because of the routine involvement of suicide bombers in terrorist attacks. Finally, because of its focus on Western targets, especially US citizens and interests. Actually, the rhetoric of the leaders and followers of this international terrorism based on the global jihadist movement underlines the deadly potential of their threats, appeals for activists to carry out what they consider to be martyrdom operations and insists on an anti-Western discourse that is particularly hostile towards Jews and Christians. However, although a certain combination of these features considered to be typical of international terrorism, and also proclaimed by its instigators, is usual in the most spectacular attacks that have taken place over the last few years, such globalised violence has been evolving, as revealed by the data collected for 2004, with lower mortality rates and far more conventional procedures than expected, also with victimisation patterns that are different from those often taken for granted.

The 208 acts of international terrorism recorded in 2004 caused the death of at least 2,007 people and left no less than 4,983 injured. Thus, the average number of victims per attack was around 10 dead and 29 injured. This is no doubt relatively high when compared with average fatalities and casualties caused by transnational or international terrorism during the seventies and eighties, but it certainly does not parallel the catastrophic number of victims in the New York attacks or, to a lesser extent, those of Bali, Casablanca, Madrid or Beslan. However, in over a quarter of the terrorist incidents recorded in 2004 there were no deaths at all, while in more than half of them there were between one and ten deaths. The latter figure was only exceeded in nearly 17% of the recorded incidents, while in only five cases did the deaths total 100 or more (see Table 3). Around 43% of the international terrorist acts that occurred in 2004 recorded no injured and about 36% of these attacks produced injuries of varying degrees to between one and ten people. In approximately 20% of the cases the number of injured exceeded 10, while only a nearly 7% of attacks resulted in more than 100 injured.

Table 3. Acts of international terrorism in 2004, according to dead and injured

Dead	Frequency	Percentage
None	56	28.6
Between 1 and 10	107	54.6
Between 11 and 40	19	9.7
Between 41 and 99	9	4.6
Between 100 and 199	4	2.0
200 and over	1	0.5
Total	196	(100)
<i>Missing data: 12</i>		
Injured		
None	76	42.9
Between 1 and 10	64	36.2
Between 11 and 40	20	11.3
Between 41 and 99	5	2.8
Between 100 and 199	7	4.0
200 and over	5	2.8
Total	177	(100)
<i>Missing data: 31</i>		

Source: the author.

The figures of dead and injured victims are consonant with the fact that almost 46% of the recorded acts of international terrorism were perpetrated with bombs and other explosive devices, whereas approximately a quarter of the incidents involved firearms and the remainder other miscellaneous procedures, including a more than significant percentage of kidnappings and hostage-takings (see Table 4). Despite the fears that terrorist groups and organisations linked to the global neosalafist jihad might use chemical, bacteriological, radiological and nuclear devices in their attacks, in 2004 they only employed fairly conventional and well-known procedures. This does not imply that the risk of using unconventional elements in a terrorist incident is non-existent, but rather that its statistical likelihood, in view of the available data, is very low. As regards suicide terrorists, none were recorded in about 84% of the international terrorist actions perpetrated in 2004, with only an estimated 16% of cases involving terrorists who deliberately lost their own lives. The relevance of suicidal terrorism, however, is supposed to vary markedly depending on country, group or nationality.

Table 4. Acts of international terrorism in 2004, according to procedures and modalities

Procedure	Frequency	Percentage
Bombs and explosive devices	92	45.5
Terrorist attacks with firearms	48	23.8
Kidnapping and hostage taking	41	20.3
Other procedures	21	10.4
Total	202	(100)
<i>Missing data: 6</i>		
Modality		
Without suicide terrorists	158	83.6
With suicide terrorists	31	16.4
Total	189	(100)
<i>Missing data: 19</i>		

Source: the author.

Among the preferred targets of international terrorism in the year 2004 were state security agencies, government institutions and, to a lesser extent, economic and tourist interests, private individuals and property, public transport and services, and diplomatic

representations, accounting for nearly 80% of the total (see Table 5). However, around 61% of the targets were not Western and, on the other hand, about 27% of the attacks were directed at exclusively Western citizens and interests. Furthermore, in 2004 international terrorism was exclusively directed at US targets in only 10% of the recorded attacks. These figures therefore point to a much wider range of victims than is frequently attributed to the violence emanating from the global neosalafist jihad. In fact, empirical evidence makes it clear that in nearly two-thirds of the cases recorded, the organisations and groups connected with current international terrorism selected non-Western targets, although in some cases they were native Christian groups in Asian countries. Cross-referencing this data with information regarding countries and geopolitical areas where incidents involving the global neosalafist jihad took place during 2004, it can be reached this conclusion: the victims of current international terrorism are mainly local population in largely Moslem societies.

Table 5. Acts of international terrorism in 2004, according to target type and adscription

Type	Frequency	Percentage
Law enforcement and military	43	21.6
Government institutions and personnel	38	19.1
Economic and tourist interests	31	15.6
Private citizens and property	24	12.1
Public transports and services	16	8.0
Diplomatic targets	11	5.5
Religious bodies and figures	6	3.0
Other types of targets	30	15.1
Total	199	(100)
<i>Missing data: 9</i>		
Adscription		
Non-Western	107	60.8
Western (American)	18	10.2
Western (other nationalities)	26	14.8
Western (mixed)	4	2.3
Western and non-Western	15	8.5
Others (United Nations)	6	3.4
Total	176	(100)
<i>Missing data: 32</i>		

Source: the author.

In view of these data, it seems particularly relevant to note that only one of the five deadliest international terrorist attacks recorded in 2004 took place in what is traditionally considered the Western world or was expressly directed against Western targets: the synchronised series of explosions on 11 March in the trains taking rush-hour commuters to central Madrid, which caused 191 deaths and injuries of varying degree to 1,500 people. Another major incident took place in Eastern Europe, in Beslan, where 331 people died on 1 September, including 186 children who were attending school that day. More than 700 others were wounded in this later case. However, before these two incidents there had already been other even deadlier attacks by international terrorists, two in the Gulf, more concretely in Iraq, and one in South-East Asia, in an area under Philippine jurisdiction. All three of them were executed indiscriminately, affecting a native Christian population in one case but in the other two being aimed at Islamic populations.

On 1 February, two practically simultaneous attacks caused the death of 117 people and injured over 220 in the Iraqi city of Erbil, when a like number of suicide terrorists caused the charges they carried strapped to their bodies to explode in the headquarter buildings of the Kurdistan Democratic Party and of the Kurdistan Patriotic Union, at an hour in the morning when they were packed with people and on a day when the Moslem feast of sacrifice was being celebrated. *Ansar al Sunna* claimed responsibility for the attacks. On 27 February, an explosive device hidden behind a television screen caused the sinking of

a passenger ship off the coast of Manila, the capital of the Philippines. As a result of the attack at least 118 people lost their lives while several more were rescued. The arrests made after the incident made evident the implication of the armed Islamist group *Abu Sayyaf*. On 2 March, again in Iraq, a series of synchronised attacks were perpetrated by a suicide terrorist, the firing of shells and the detonation of bombs hidden in bags, causing the death of 106 people and injuries to 230 in Kerbala, when thousands of faithful celebrated the religious festival of the martyrdom of Achura in two Shiite holy places. The attacks were attributed to the terrorist organisation Tawhid wal Jihad.

A More Diffuse Violence

Both the high frequency and the variable intensity of the attacks perpetrated during 2004 are a good example of the violent potential retained by the groups and organisations which form part of the current network of international terrorism. It is plausible to assert that al-Qaeda, the foundational nucleus and acting vanguard for the multinational and multiethnic entities involved in such globalised violence, might have been progressively weakened over the last three years, after losing its sanctuary and suffering from the consequences of a world-wide persecution. But it can also be argued that this terrorist structure appears to have adapted more easily than expected to an adverse environment. Moreover, the global neosalafist jihad it promoted has become widely extended. Acts of international terrorism are mainly perpetrated by groups and organisations having a local or regional focus but affiliated with al-Qaeda. As the data for 2004 reflect, the danger is now one of a diffuse and diversified violence executed by al-Qaeda itself, its numerous associated entities and even small self-established cells which operate in line with the former's goals and methods.

Within Western societies, this diffuse jihadist violence manifested itself last year through deadly attacks against soft targets and there is no reason to believe the trend will change, combined perhaps with individual assassinations, as in the case of a well-known Dutch film-maker in November 2004. International terrorist activities in 2004 were congruent with the strategy designed years ago by the leaders of al-Qaeda and which consists in deploying its violence both in the Islamic world, allegedly against rulers considered by neosalafists to be apostates and tyrants, and beyond. However, despite the anti-Western rhetoric so characteristic of groups and organisations related to the global jihadist movement, the data offered in this study make it clear that international terrorism poses risks and threats to societies pertaining to different civilisations. Actually, it is directing its violence against its own population of reference, mainly in Central and Southern Asia as well as in the Middle East and Gulf region. In principle, this move should raise internal contradictions and make it difficult to obtain the expected yield from propaganda efforts. This does not mean, at least for the time being, that al-Qaeda or its associated groups and organisations lack the necessary capacity for planning and executing sustained campaigns of conventional terrorist violence in certain territories or particularly spectacular attacks, even non conventional, with a far reaching and world-wide impact.