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## Global Threat Assessment 2009

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*Whilst 2009 will continue to see terrorism as the pre-eminent security threat, much can be done by the West to reach out to alienated communities, especially in the Muslim world. The United States should remove Muslim mistrust and suspicion of America's intentions. Without Muslim public support, the fight against terrorism and extremism will be lost.*

### **New Year, Renewed Threat :**

Terrorism will continue to be the pre-eminent national security threat to most countries in 2009. The terrorist threat will spread from conflict zones to neighbouring regions and countries. More threat groups will adopt Al Qaeda's methodology of suicide and ideology of global jihad. Using vehicle- and human-borne suicide attackers, terrorist groups in Asia, Africa and the Middle East will mount spectacular attacks against high profile, symbolic and iconic targets in urban cities.

The phased withdrawal of United States-led coalition forces from Iraq will create greater instability in Iraq and beyond. The Iraqi forces will fail to contain the violence. Iran will expand its covert and overt influence in Iraq. The threat from Iraq will spread to the Levant, Europe and beyond. Unless the US is pragmatic in its withdrawal plans, Al Qaeda and its affiliates will use Iraq as a forward operational base to mount operations in the Middle East, North and Eastern Africa and the West.

Despite a dramatic increase in coalition forces in Afghanistan, the terrorist threat will persist in Afghanistan. The answer to stability in Afghanistan rests in clearing the terrorist enclave on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. The Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA) remains the epicentre of global terrorism, where Al Qaeda-led and -driven multiple threat groups plan, prepare and execute attacks globally. Unless and until the international community recognizes and assists Islamabad to dismantle Al Qaeda and the Pakistani Taliban infrastructure in tribal Pakistan, the threat to the world will continue.

The conflict zones in the Middle East (particularly the Levant), East/Horn of Africa and South Asia (Pakistan and Afghanistan) will witness the highest level of threat. Threat groups operating in conflict zones will conduct Al Qaeda-style long range terrorist operations in neighbouring regions and

countries in the global south. The terrorist threat will be lowest in Northeast Asia (except Xinjiang) followed by Southeast Asia (except Indonesia).

The threat to North America, Europe and Australia will largely stem from politicized and radicalized segments of migrant and diaspora communities. However, by increasing their intelligence penetration of radicalized segments of the Muslim communities, the Western security agencies will manage the threat to their host countries.

### **The Context:**

The US-led coalition intervention in Iraq in March 2003 was a huge waste of resources – both human and material. The American political incompetence distracted and diverted limited specialist military and intelligence resources from Afghanistan and Pakistan to the Middle East. Seven years after 9-11, the core leadership of Al Qaeda that masterminded 9-11 is still free. After Iraq, Al Qaeda propaganda that the US is deliberately killing Muslims and attacking Islam found resonance among Muslims globally, increasing the global threat.

Today, there are more threat groups and greater Muslim participation and support for violence than at 9-11. The US under Obama is likely to invest in strategic counter terrorism – ideological, educational, developmental, media, informatics response – aimed at winning Muslim hearts and minds.

### **Understanding the Threat:**

Understanding the threat is paramount to tactically and strategically reducing it. The global terrorist threat largely stems from conflict zones such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, Algeria, India (Kashmir), Russia (Chechnya) and China (Xingjiang) where Muslims are suffering. Both virulent ideologies and operational capabilities in those conflict zones spill over to neighbouring regions and countries. While the bulk of the terrorist attacks will be detected and disrupted in the planning and preparation stages, a few attacks will be successful.

Operating out of FATA, Al Qaeda has transformed from an operational organization to a training and an ideological movement. Using Al Sahab [the Cloud] -- Al Qaeda's multimedia arm -- Dr. Ayman Al Zawahiri, the deputy leader of Al Qaeda, and his son-in-law Abd-al Rahman Al Maghrebi, the head of the information committee, is radicalizing both territorial Muslims in the Global South and migrant/diaspora Muslims in the West. In 2009, Al Qaeda will forge more partnerships with likeminded regional groups. Local groups adopting the name Al Qaeda will become a trend. In 2009, it is very likely that Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement (Turkistan Islamic Party) and at least another group will adopt the name Al Qaeda.

More terrorist and extremist groups will emulate Al Qaeda's appealing ideology and cost-effective methodology. While Al Qaeda's favoured approach is to mount suicide attacks against high profile, symbolic and strategic targets to inflict mass fatalities and casualties, its ideology calls for attacks against both domestic governments and Western/Israeli targets. As the near simultaneous "no surrender" attacks in Mumbai demonstrated in November 2008, even groups that are not part of the Al Qaeda family, such as Lashkar-e-Taiba, have adopted Al Qaeda-style attacks.

Likewise, a number of threat groups in the Palestinian territories will be inspired by the belief system and methodology of Al Qaeda. Although the bulk of the attacks will be mounted by Palestinian Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Al Aqsa Martyr's Brigade, 2009 will witness both the emergence and strengthening of Al Qaeda-inspired groups in the Palestinian territories, especially after the recent Israeli raids on Gaza.

Afghanistan and Iraq will persist as the world's defining conflict zones. Muslim suffering, agony and

resentment in those zones will galvanize Muslims worldwide. Although only a tiny minority of the Muslims support terrorism, the majority of Muslims will be reluctant to support Western presence in Muslim lands, even if it was well-intentioned.

Increasingly the same tactics used in Afghanistan will be replicated in Pakistan and beyond. It is very likely that Pakistan will continue to suffer from attacks of the scale of the Islamabad Marriott bombing in September 2008. Unless the international community assists Pakistan, the instability in Pakistan will grow in 2009.

### **Challenges in 2009:**

The greatest national security challenge for the world in 2009 is to counter political and religious extremism, the precursor of terrorism. Although the operational and intelligence capabilities have been adequately built in the Muslim world, the West now needs to build global capabilities to counter the extremist message. The most important ingredient necessary to win the fight is restoring Muslim goodwill and public support the West has lost. The US especially should remove Muslim mistrust and suspicion of America's intentions to make the world a better place.

The terrorists won sufficient public sympathy and support to sustain a terrorist campaign largely due to misinformed and misguided Western actions, primarily the US invasion of Iraq. The US must convince the Muslim world that America under the Obama presidency will be significantly different. This will be a monumental challenge. In the face of sustained terrorist and extremist propaganda, neutralizing nearly a decade of cumulative resentment and anger in the Muslim and Islamic world will take time and resources.

Even if the new US Administration successfully engages the Muslim world, it will require an unprecedented international effort. Although all the major powers have suffered from terrorism, in the global fight, Russia, China and India will not be international players.

A priority of the international community should be to build the forces and the mechanisms to stabilize conflict zones that produce suffering, virulent ideologies, violence, displacement, refugees and terrorists. From resolving protracted disputes such as Palestine, Kashmir, Mindanao, and other conflict zones where Muslims are suffering, the West-led international community will have to play a sustained role to buy Muslim goodwill.

Instead of promoting democracy, investing in economic development will result in Muslims themselves wanting greater political participation and representation. For the West to play such a role, the US, Europe and Australia will need to invest in initiatives and partnerships to prevent the political and economic marginalization of Muslims both at home and abroad.

There is a mistaken belief among policy and decision-makers in Washington D.C. and London that they must not be seen with the mainstream Muslim leaders with the potential to counter terrorism. The key to winning the fight is to build lasting partnerships between enlightened Western and mainstream Muslim leaders and their institutions to counter extremism. As terrorism is a by-product of extremism, it is paramount to counter the misinterpretation of religious messages to justify acts of violence. Every Islamic and Muslim school can be tapped as a vanguard to build future peace.

While encouraging and supporting the Muslim governmental and non-governmental organizations to proactively and reactively counter extremism, the West will need to be more sensitive to Muslim sensibility. The Danish publication of a caricature of the Prophet, the Dutch release of the controversial *Fitna* movie and the American use of provocative terminologies such as "crusade" and "Islamic terrorism" favoured the terrorists and extremists.

Without Muslim public support, the fight against terrorism and extremism will be lost. Furthermore, without building an enduring partnership between the West and the Muslim world, the fight cannot be won. Formal and informal education of the Muslim world, especially of its leaders, will be essential to winning the defining conflict of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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