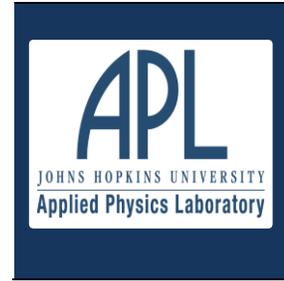




**JHU/APL Seminar Series**  
*Rethinking U.S. Enduring Strengths,  
Challenges, and Opportunities*

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**27 March 2014**

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**Georgetown University**

*State of Global Terrorism:  
Potential US Counterterrorism Policy and Strategy*

**Notes:**

1. Below are informal notes taken by a JHU/APL staff member at the Seminar.
2. Links to the video and audio files for this and past seminars can be found on the [Rethinking Seminars](#) website and the [JHU/APL YouTube Playlist](#).

**Introduction**

Dr. Hoffman noted that his first speaking engagement after 9/11 was at a JHU/APL event and remarked at how the interest in the topic of terrorism has dissipated over the years. However, he recently finished working on a high-level follow-up study of the the 9/11 Commission Report. The [Tenth Anniversary Report Card: The Status of the 9/11 Commission Recommendations](#) was produced by the bi-partisan National Security Preparedness Group. Before their Congressional testimony, Dr. Hoffman and his co-authors visited with congressman including one from New York who remarked that popular thinking about 9/11 is now almost like popular thinking about Gettysburg.

**Decreased Interest in the Terrorism Threat**

This is especially true about threats from Al Qaeda (AQ) and is not surprising given:

- The death of Osama bin Laden
- Evidence that AQ has been significantly weakened largely because:
  - Drone activity has increase four fold since 2009
    - Killing about 3 dozen leaders (over half of identifiable AQ leadership) and over 200 AQ fighters
    - Result: a seriously weakened AQ core
  - Captured documents showed that bin Laden was worried about the impact of the Arab Spring
    - AQ was as surprised as the State Department about the protests
    - AQ came to be seen as irrelevant by those in the region since civil protests were doing what AQ had been unable to do
    - AQ and Islamist terrorists lost ground because they had killed more Muslims than they did their stated enemies

- Bottom line: AQ alienated its base and lost the war of ideas
  - Longing for democracy and economic reform had trumped the repression and violence that AQ was depending on

Often hear reports that AQ had all but collapsed and core AQ certainly has suffered

- However, in the last few years the AQ brand and network of affiliates has grown
  - AQ now seems more resilient
  - AQ organizations are now in more places than they were six years ago
    - Currently, there are 16 networks or areas of operations, double the number since 2008 when it was AQ in:
      - the Far East (primarily Philippines & Indonesia)
      - Pakistan and Afghanistan
      - East Africa, Iraq, and Europe
    - Efforts to contain AQ networks and affiliates has been ineffective
- Reasons for the doubling include:
  - World-wide economic retrenchment requiring intelligence and military services to reduce their manpower and capabilities for budgetary reasons
  - AQ has done the nearly impossible by expanding into Sudan as well as:
    - North America as seen in incidents such as:
      - The abortive attempt on the New York subway system which could be traced back to AQ leaders in Pakistan
      - A disrupted Canadian railroad system attack that was connected to AQ senior leadership
      - Successful radicalizing of individuals
    - Tunisia, Libya, and Lebanon
      - A new AQ in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) is always referred to as the greatest threat in intel leaders testimony to Congress
      - AQ now revived in the Maghreb across North Africa
      - In last 18 months AQ seen growth in Nigeria,
        - According to Abbottabad documents, bin Laden called for AQ expansion there 10 years earlier
    - AQ is now also spreading to Mali, Niger, Mauritania
    - Most recently AQ is reviving in the Levant, especially Syria

### **Alternative Perspectives**

- Prof. Hoffman noted he often disagrees with Peter Bergen of the New American Foundation, *The Status of the 9/11 Commission Recommendations Report* co-author
  - Bergen doesn't see the AQ threat increasing
  - But Bergen agrees that spread of groups is increasing
- Primary disagreement
  - Bergen: core AQ has been weakened much more than Hoffman believes
  - Hoffman: there is more of a relation between core AQ and its associates than Bergen believes that there is

## How Has AQ Achieved This Revival?

- Core AQ has had a deeper bench than was originally assumed
  - There are still some hard core leaders with 20-30 years of experience going back to the struggle in Afghanistan against the Soviets
  - These leaders are still in the top echelons and have both great levels of respect and institutional memory especially of survival skills
    - Names may not be well-known but they are not inconsequential
  - Bottom line: AQ does have an experienced cadre to fill in for those taken out by drones
- Changes in the characteristics of middle- to upper-level AQ members
  - Previously, these leaders could be easily identified by their scarves and bandoliers like Pashtun warriors
  - Now AQ is recruiting in Pakistan from middle class university graduates
  - A 1980s study showed that terrorists at the end of the Cold War were mostly teachers, philosophers, or historians, not scientists or engineers
    - As a Georgetown professor Hoffman can say that professors are not necessarily the best terrorist leaders, and usually lack technical skills
      - Would not know much about weapons
    - Now seeing AQ recruiting from the science and engineering faculties especially in Pakistan
      - Not surprising as these are the most prestigious departments in the developing world
      - New leaders are building on roles of earlier leaders from Pakistan
    - Ayman al-Zawahiri has turned out to be a more effective leader than would have been expected a few years ago
      - Split between Islamist State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the Islamist State of Iraq and Sham (Syria) weakened AQ
        - Zawahiri acted swiftly to retake control and expel the ISIL to maintain the group's cohesion
      - Zawahiri is capable of taking actions to adapt and expand AQ
        - Brought in a bin Laden acolyte as a deputy commander
        - Diversified the AQ command structure, shifting it from Afghanistan to the Arabian peninsula
  - As seen in captured documents, even though various local jihadist groups have local aims, they have also bought into AQ's world view of jihad which includes:
    - Reestablishing the Caliphate
    - Creating a transnational Islamist rule over territories
      - See tremendous cooperation between West North African and East African groups with close connections to core AQ
  - Of note: core AQ did not establish any of these affiliates or associates
    - The groups chose on their own to associate with core AQ
    - This situation creates on-going uneven command and control relationships between the core AQ and the associates

- Much like the relationship between the US and its European partners, they agree on the basic tenets but each has local considerations
- Core AQ is also helped a great deal by the fact that it does have a strategy, which it has articulated and appears to be following:
  - Attriting and enervating the US and its European allies, which they believe have invaded and occupied Islamic territory, to drive them out
    - They would no longer have the capability or the will to intervene
    - Example: AQ in Iraq was weakened by the death of its leader and the US Surge, but it has come back recently, even challenging core AQ
      - The strategy is working – no will in the US to go back into Iraq
  - Taking over territory to establish safe havens, which today is AQ's lifeblood
    - 30 years ago Prime Minister Thatcher called publicity the oxygen of terrorism, which was true during the Cold War
    - Now the necessary oxygen for AQ comes from having physical bases that gives it room to take advantage of opportunities
    - After the Arab Spring uprisings new stretches of ungoverned areas are available for safe havens across N. Africa, the Sinai, the Levant
  - Declare emirates in the newly "liberated" lands
    - Expecting to be safe from the interference because of US/Western unwillingness to get involved since their weakened conditions
    - Not there yet but definitely the next highly consequential stage
      - Dr. Mary Habeck has written that no AQ affiliate has been ousted by local protest
      - Outsiders must do the work of getting rid of such insurgent groups even when they are hated by the local populace
      - Example: Mali needed recent French intervention
  - AQ, its affiliates and associates are still seeking opportunities to attack the US, but this is somewhat of a controversial view within AQ
    - AQ has established a presence in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Syria and Turkey to use as bases for attacks against Europe and the US

### **AQ's Current View of Its Situation**

Believes situation conforms to AQ's stated five-stage strategy to victory, which the West has usually ignored or dismissed as internal propaganda since the 1990s

- Stage #1: Awakening (from 9/11 until 2003)
  - Concept was to deal a powerful blow to the head of the snake (the US)
- Stage #2: Eye-opening (from the start of the war in Iraq in 2003 to 2006)
  - Claims that they sought to enmesh the US in one of a string of wars that would weaken it and the West
  - Lots of fantasy and ex post facto rationalization in describing these fantasies
  - Problem: propaganda doesn't need to be true, just believable to be harmful
    - Most false propaganda builds from a little bit of truth
- Stage #3: Rising up and standing on the feet (from 2007 to 2010)
  - Proactive expansion into new venues and taking advantage of new opportunities for AQ to insert its ideology and message

- Focused on West Africa – Nigeria, and spreading to Mali, Niger, etc.
- More recent focus has been on the Levant, initially Lebanon but now Syria
- Stage #4: Recovery (from 2010 to 2013)
  - Despite bin Laden’s death could exploit new opportunities opened up by the Arab Spring
    - Chance to topple apostate regimes and demonstrate AQ’s continuing relevance
  - Syria has given AQ big opportunities for this, allowing AQ once again to play a part in Mid-East politics
- Stage #5: Declaration of the Caliphate Stage (only in AQ’s dream world)
  - AQ hubris makes them believe they are already in this stage, which they say will be completed by 2016
  - Involves connecting the various emirates geographically and replacing local rule with a transnational control in accord with strict Sharia law
  - Fallout from the Arab Spring makes them believe this is happening already since the apostate governments are being thrown out
  - In Egypt the deposing of Morsi by the military appears to validate AQ’s claim that Muslims cannot trust the West or its governmental structures

### **External View of AQ’s Status Today**

**Syria:** situation has given AQ the opportunity to establish a vital new presence in a key crossroads of the Mid East

- Also gave AQ access to more ungoverned areas for sanctuaries and training camps
  - Bergen claims AQ controls 400 sq. mi. in Syria – may be conservative
- Syria is treasured as the heart of the Muslim world
  - bin Laden often referred to its importance going back to the medieval era
  - 12<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> centuries writers talked about the importance of fighting against the ancestors of the Alawites – Assad’s clan
- Syria is a more perfect jihadi storm than Afghanistan was 30 years ago
  - More accessible so a magnet for foreign fighters
  - Also a magnet for financial support from Gulf and Arabian Islamists
  - Good operational situation since many AQ fighters are familiar with the area from the time of the war in Iraq
- Damascus is respected as the ancient city that once ruled over the whole region before there were country borders
  - Region contains two of AQ’s most hated enemies – Zionist Israel and Hashemite Jordan
- Fatwas and other religious condemnations have been issued against the Assad regime both from Egyptian and Syrian clerics
  - Seeing more sectarian messaging attacking Shia
  - Calling to battle those who would protect Sunnis in Syria
- Syria is the focus of foreign fighters with an estimated at 7,000-8,000, of which at least 50 are Americans
  - Fighters are just the tip of the iceberg, many more in support positions
  - Coming from as far away as Southeast Asia and North America

**Strategic Shifts:** reemergence of AQ's hybrid near enemy/ far enemy strategy involving switching between primary targets

- AQ has been switching throughout its history easily moving between local struggles and attacks on the far enemy (the US)
- AQ senior leadership has ordered its associates and affiliates not to strike in the West especially the US while all these local struggles are going on
  - AQ is also consolidating and strengthening its position in these places

**Africa:** expansion across North Africa shows the fluidity of AQ operations

- Libya: the 2012 attacks in Benghazi show that fighters in both local struggles and those striking at the far enemy can be in the same country at the same time
  - This multiplicity of fighting groups has made Libya ungovernable
- AQ in the Islamic Maghreb: previously they were just thugs involved only in smuggling and kidnapping for ransom
  - Now changed with the influx of weaponry and funds
  - Escalated from 2012 planned but disrupted attacks on western shipping in the Mediterranean to the 2013 successful attack on a gas plant
- Boko Haram: expanding activities from attacks on government and oil facilities to attacks on civilians, especially Christians and churches, plus foreign businesses
  - Activities now include the mark of the jihadist – suicide attacks
  - Also seized northern Mali causing the recent French intervention
- al-Shabaab: in recent years they were supposed to be in decline after being forced out of Mogadishu, but they have been increasing cross border raids into Kenya
  - Attacking security forces, government targets, ordinary citizens and churches
  - Culminated in the Westgate Shopping Mall attack last year in Nairobi

**Where will AQ go now?**

Much easier to analyze where it has been then to suggest policy for the future but can look at change drivers for AQ's possible shape and direction in the next few years

- Driver #1: Continuing access to safe havens, numbers of which have grown in the last few years
  - Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen – have been key and will remain pivotal for AQ
  - Now more options in North and West Africa, Egypt, the Levant, the Sinai and even Afghanistan for expansion and consolidation
- Driver #2: Outcome of the war in Syria is a major issue
  - The longer it drags on the more opportunities it gives AQ to appear relevant and act as a magnet for support
  - Syria is already the focus of the 3 most influential password-protected online AQ forums
  - Emergence of social media makes Syrian situation much more relevant to AQ's plans than anything else could
    - Provides means of radicalization, recruitment, and propaganda

- Hoffman noted that he followed a half a dozen Twitter feeds in English from foreign fighters in Syria (mostly from the UK)
- Twitter efforts have a tremendous impact
  - Those who post in English average 2,000-4,000 followers
  - Some who post in Arabic have as many as 24,000 followers – a huge number when 1,000 would be considered an achievement
  - These fighters are personalizing the struggle, sending very personal views back home to like-minded individuals
  - Using multiple platforms – all difficult to control or shut down
  - Impact much like that of the 1980s paper magazines from Peshawar had but now being done by individuals
    - Discusses importance of jihad and the struggle in Syria
    - Posting pictures of training, praying, eating together showing the comradeship they are experiencing
      - All for a divinely inspired struggle
    - Soliciting others to come to fight or support the fight
      - Easier than trying to get to Afghanistan
      - Fly into Turkey and come across the border
  - Power of this message is evident in recent reports of a UK Muslim who had just gotten out of prison on parole
    - He had been convicted of helping plan a major multi-target airline attack
    - Because of Twitter and other social media, he tried to leave for Syria but was arrested again
  - AQ is now posting an online magazine, *Resurge*, so that they can compete with social media to try to control the message
- Driver #3: Terrorists are always very young
  - Average for IRA fighters of the 1920s and even the more recent terrorists is always in the range of 19 to 25
  - Always a young man's (and increasingly a young woman's) game
  - AQ has always relied on this core demographic of disenfranchised, disillusioned, and marginalized youth
  - No evidence this class of people is shrinking: probably increasing given:
    - Frustration with the collapse of the Morsi regime, slow pace of political change in other countries in the region especially Jordan
    - Failure of economic reform in the Mid East
  - AQ had a demographically narrow recruitment range, but it may be growing
    - Compounded by the fact that the countries involved all have a youth bulge – usually below 30 and in some cases below 19
    - Bulges bring problems with lack of jobs and educational opportunities leading to greater frustration with the political order
  - Bottom line: Groups most susceptible to AQ's propaganda are growing

- Driver #4: AQ's embrace of more sectarian views rather than strictly jihadi concepts
  - Not just against the infidels from the West but also against the hated Shia (Alawites, Iran, and Hezbollah)
  - 86% of all AQ attacks in Iraq have not been against government targets but against Shia targets, including civilian sites
- Driver #5: Disruptions caused by the Arab Spring have undermined the collection/coordination efforts of regional allies' intelligence services
  - Looking now more at local issues rather than transnational jihadi threats
  - After death of bin Laden, the priorities of these intel services has changed
  - Working with CIA has lost its luster after US support of the Mubarak regime and exposures from Wikileaks and the Snowden materials
- Driver #6: Challenges are coming from the fragmented jihadi groups that exist beside the mainstream groups
  - Saw this especially in Libya at the time of the Benghazi tragedy
  - Smaller, diverse groups and even individuals are taking on terrorist tasks
  - Individuals now moving easily between groups
  - Small groups now have lighter footprints with no established modus operandi making them harder to track and predict
    - Especially at time when US has less resources to expend on such tasks
- Driver #7: New generation of jihadi fighters is emerging from West Africa to South Asia including recruits from Europe and North America tend to be more violent
  - Acting more violently than their predecessors to show that they are serious
  - Showing their capacity for violence builds up their street cred
- Driver #8: Advent/proliferation of social media that is now only beginning to be put to use for radicalization and recruitment
  - Expect an evolution to even greater use of newer methods that governments will find increasingly difficult to monitor or control
- Driver #9: Availability / acceptance of unconventional weapons by AQ / associates
  - Recent reports of ricin and sarin efforts by some groups
  - Apparent chemical weapons use in Syria
  - Emerging new weapons such as the 60,000 lb. super truck bomb (one-third the strength of a tactical nuclear weapon)
- Driver #10: Danger of complacency in absence of a new attack leading to a false sense of security, which leads to letting down guards
  - Allows adversaries to find gaps in the once-tight post-9/11 protective shields

## What Can We Do About It?

Current attitudes would be the equivalent of the 1930s British comment that stated: Left or Right, everyone wants a quiet life

- Need to take the AQ threat seriously
- Proactively contain AQ's geographic expansion and resurrection of its capabilities
  - With special attention in Pakistan, Yemen and Syria
  - Start with Turkey and draw the line there – especially since Turkey is a NATO partner with the largest land army in Europe
    - So it should be easily convinced to patrol its borders better
- Increase attention to the possibility of attacks by unconventional weapons including chemical weapons and to counter-proliferation efforts against WMD
  - Given existing stockpiles in Syria and recent AQ efforts to develop sarin and ricin capabilities, a major tragedy is likely to happen
- Improve capabilities to scan the horizon looking for new threats
  - Need to be better at identifying and tracking smaller, more diffuse groups
- Need a more sober discussion of the terrorist threat, which is generational
  - Don't declare victory too soon given such resilient and determined adversaries
- As much as the US would like to focus on domestic problems or other international matters like China or Crimea, it can't forget the terrorism threat
  - Bottom line: Adversaries have not abandoned their ambitions, so we can't abandon our vigilance

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### Re: Indications of Terrorist Activity in Crimea

- One power of terrorism is its cathartic nature, which is especially attractive when political expectations and desires have been suppressed for a long time
- Long-term ethnic issues must be considered throughout that region
- But, to prosecute a terrorist campaign needs a certain level of infrastructure, preparation, planning, recruitment
  - Not clear that such efforts have had time to develop
  - Could have sporadic, small attempts
- Dr. Hoffman noted that he had not been invited to speak at any discussions of terrorism for a year before the run up to the Sochi Olympics
  - The Olympics went by without trouble in part because of the massive efforts put forth by the Russians
  - Russia is familiar with massive terrorist attacks and was well-prepared
  - Problem: It is hard to sustain such level of attention

### Re: AQ and Transnational Criminal Organizations

Questioner referred to the NDU Press publication [\*Convergence: Illicit Networks and National Security in the Age of Globalization\*](#)

- All terrorist groups tend to support themselves at some point through criminal activities especially smuggling

- In 1970s while studying the IRA, Dr. Hoffman was told that peeling back the layers of any smuggling in Europe will eventually expose IRA involvement
- Such activities continue with AQ affiliates and associates today
- AQ associates developed quickly in North Africa because they already had sugar daddy relationships with some local groups
  - Could then also supply weapons from Qaddafi's arsenal
- AQ core's criminal relations are not well-known, especially not at the unclass level
  - AQ hasn't really had to get involved in criminal activity since was well-supplied with funds from Mid East regional donors
  - Taliban provided some funding from poppies and smuggling to AQ
  - Core AQ has been generally tight-fisted from the time of bin Laden
    - Closely monitors expenditures
    - Also true of close clones like AQAP
    - Other terrorist group often plagued with internal corruption
- Iran's Revolutionary Guard had to be careful how it connected to other groups forcing it to reach out to a shady cousin in Texas for support
  - But connections to AQ can't be ruled out
  - AQ may also need to deal with criminals for human smuggling requirements

### **Re: Democracy, Pakistan, and Terrorism**

- Pakistan's problems came out of the non-federally-controlled areas and not the northwest frontier
  - But the 2005 attacks on the London Underground did come out of camps in the NW frontier
- Democracy helps in reducing the opportunities for terrorism to become a mass movement
  - Problem: It only takes a small number of people capable of being violent to create a dire terrorist environment
  - Terrorists want to use violence or its threat to compel people to make choices they would not otherwise do
  - Democracy may harbor terrorism, but it also limits it from becoming an insurgency, which requires large numbers of participants
- Pace of democracy is often not fast enough
  - Political reforms might not happen
  - Opportunities for corruption may increase or become more visible
  - Problems lead to popular disillusion which could lead to terrorism
  - Bottom line: Democracy is a plus for limiting terrorism but can't stop it
- Pakistani prime minister called for developing literacy in the Swaat Valley to eliminate terrorism
  - It was a good thing for the area but it couldn't eliminate terrorism
    - Some of worst terrorists were the most educated in their areas
  - Problems: a small number of people have a large impact, which is the appeal of being a terrorist
- A contained threat will remain, but the US must not harbor unrealistic expectations for Pakistan's situation

## Re: AQ Weapons

- From before 9/11 up through at least the US Surge in 2003 AQ had an active unconventional weapons R&D program in Afghanistan
  - Parallel programs to weaponize anthrax and other unconventional systems competed
  - Just before 9/11 bin Laden met with two senior Pakistani nuclear scientists
    - Showed his desire for nuclear weapons but didn't get close to acquiring any
  - Chemical and bio efforts were more developed than generally realized
    - AQ needed access to a safe haven but lost it in 2003
    - May have changed in recent years because of development of camps in ungoverned spaces in Pakistan, Syria, and elsewhere
- AQ has lately been thinking more about unconventional weapons as a function of their desperation
  - Looking for that magical weapon to break stalemates
  - Potential availability of Assad's stockpile is attractive
- Jihadi mindset believes that any unconventional (not a gun or a bomb) attack would have profound psychological impacts that would work in their favor
  - Want to bring back the level of fear felt after 9/11
- Bottom line: For a decade affiliates and associates lost interest in this type of weapon for a variety of reason but the interest is now rising again
  - 2006-07: Combination attacks in Iraq paired conventional explosives with chlorine gas but they had little effect and interest dropped
- Problem: We tend to only pay attention to successful plots, not unsuccessful ones
  - Look at the unsuccessful attack from 10 years ago by AQ in Iraq against many targets in Jordan using dump trucks paired with chemical weapons
    - Disrupted when precursor chemicals were found and seized
    - Even a start-up group was interested
  - Bottom line: Interest in using unconventional weapons remains
- Interest seems to run in cycles and may be in an up cycle now given recent sarin events around Syria

## Re: What Threats to Look out for Now

- For a long time the main threat was seen as core AQ which was well targeted in Afghanistan and Pakistan, but there is a new challenge
- Now getting indicators through social media that there are other threats to worry about that don't show up as much as they did on the internet
  - Small groups may go along with general ideology, communicate through social media, but act independently
  - Coalesce around some charismatic leader
  - Most involved in criminal activities – only way they can support themselves
- Need to look for upcoming charismatic leaders or those with veteran status
  - Especially those involved in human smuggling
  - Get handle on them through social media
  - Rising stars are usually down in the weeds so get little attention

## Re: Cyberterrorism

- Historically, such threats have been dismissed
  - Only major event was when Tamil Tigers shut down comms 15 years ago in several Sri Lankan embassies
- Consensus has been that terrorists want the internet up so that they can use it
  - There may be some interest in disruptions to support conventional attacks
- Now that more people with the right skills are among the recruits and social media is widely available, the threat may be growing
  - Terrorists are success freaks – must be successful to create fear/anxiety
  - Terrorists may be politically or religiously radical but they tend to be operationally conservative
    - The stick with what they know will work
- Could be changing with recruitment of more engineers
  - They can also see how disruptive a cyber-attack such as the November credit card incidents can be
  - Terrorists are often at the forward edge of new disruptive efforts and AQ has been a leader in this sort of thing
    - One of first four committees set up in AQ in the 1980s was comms
      - For propaganda and gathering open source literature
    - Capabilities are even more available now
      - They don't need just to shed blood to create fear

## Re: Threats to North America

- Problem: Attacks on Ft. Hood and the Boston Marathon attacks were carried out by individuals who are much harder to identify and track
  - May be inspired by terrorists groups but not necessarily connected to them
  - Not carrying out orders
- There are cycles of attacks
  - 2008-09 had a spike in number of people radicalized – mostly Somalis that caused alarm, but that has dissipated
  - Now fewer people are being charged with terrorism or supporting terrorism
  - But there is a danger of growing radicalization with activity in Syria since it is relatively easy to get there and it is a non-controversial struggle
    - Steady stream of propaganda to worry about
  - Only a very small number of Americans fought as terrorists in Afghanistan
- US intelligence community has done a good job controlling the situation since 2011 when Presidential directives were released
  - Written in response to earlier spike in radicalizations
  - But it helped that AQ was in bad shape at that time, too, given the killing of bin Laden and the drone attacks
- Now there are so many options for radicalization
  - All groups and many individuals have Twitter feeds and other social media outlets and even password-protected websites
  - Terrorist claims maybe 90% fantasy but that doesn't matter

- The groups and individuals can still appear relevant and be players – at least in their own minds
  - If you have a platform, there is a possibility of winning over converts
- Problem: Even individuals who get on to an FBI's list, but don't show the usual marks for a radicalized terrorist, may not be identified before carrying out an attack
  - Expect the problem to increase
  - Not clear how to monitor social media to try to identify these individuals

**Re: Threats to the Electric Grid and Transformers**

- Threat is receiving attention because of the recent attack in California on a transformer but the problem has been identified for years as a vulnerability
  - Focus tends to be on the last successful attack type
  - Unclear who carried out the recent attack or why they did it
    - This lack of knowledge is very concerning
- Need to look across the board at threats, but it is very hard to do everything
- Can be compared with the threat to commercial airlines from man-portable missiles
  - The problem has never developed but it certainly could since only Israeli planes are protected from such threats
  - Such attacks transformed the conflict with the Soviet army in Afghanistan and became part of the jihadi narrative
- Disrupting the electrical grid in the US is very worrisome but just one of many that may be too hard to address