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GLOBAL SUPPORT FOR AL QAEDA AND OSAMA BIN LADEN: AN INCREASE OR DECREASE?

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Abstract:

Operational terrorism is a vicious by-product of ideological terrorism. Numerous countries have mastered operational counter-terrorism but not strategic counter-terrorism. To be successful, the operational hunt for terrorists must be complemented with the correction of misled ideologies. Reducing support for terrorism is paramount to reduce and manage the threat of terrorism and its partner, ideological extremism. This paper describes the factors and drivers that are correlated to an increase or decrease in support for al Qaeda and its leader, Osama bin Laden.

Keywords: Operational Counter-Terrorism, Strategic Counter-Terrorism, Ideology, Al-Qaeda.

Resumen:

El terrorismo operacional es un deletéreo resultado del terrorismo ideológico. Numerosos países han logrado dominar el contra-terrorismo operacional, pero no el contra-terrorismo estratégico. Para ser efectivos, la persecución operacional de los terroristas ha de verse complementada con la corrección de las ideologías. Reducir el apoyo al extremismo es vital par aminorar y controlar la amenaza del terrorismo y su socio, el extremismo ideológico. Este artículo explica los factores que están correlacionados con un aumento o descenso del apoyo a al Qaeda o su líder, Osama Bin Laden.

Palabras clave: *Contra-terrorismo operacional, contra-terrorismo estratégico, ideología, Al-Qaeda.*

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1. Introduction

Operational terrorism is a vicious by-product of ideological terrorism. Numerous countries have mastered operational counter-terrorism but not strategic counter-terrorism. To be successful, operational hunt for terrorists must be complemented with the correction of the misled ideologies. Most individuals identify terrorism as a sadistic social phenomenon that has evolved considerably over the years however; to those who engage in it, terrorism is a continuously evolving political ‘weapon’ that is designed to obliterate while producing constant social and psychological warfare. In contrast to contemporary negative labels often used to characterize terrorists, countless violent political movements distinguish themselves in positive terms and use techniques of neutralization to justify violence in defense of Islam. “A terrorist group is only the apex of a much larger pyramid of sympathizers and supporters.”³ Radicalization of sympathizers and supporters promote extremist beliefs and ideologically based radical movements worldwide.

Reducing support for terrorism is paramount to reduce and manage the threat of terrorism and its parent, ideological extremism. Heightened extremism leads to advocacy, support and eventually participation in terrorism and other forms of political violence. Curbing individual and group support for extremist ideologies and the resultant terrorist activities determines public safety and state security. Individualistic and collectivistic views of the public auxiliary determines communal attitude toward terrorism. Reducing support for violence and violent ideologies is as important as countering such threats. We must reinforce the message of non-violence and take necessary steps to build strong and resilient communities to resist all forms of violent extremism. Further, implementation of policies that promote gender equality and elimination of gender discrimination can create an environment that leads to decrease in support for extremist ideologies.

“Public opinion plays in creating an environment in which terrorist groups can flourish, relatively few works have explored survey data to measure support for terrorism among general public.”⁴ Global attitudes about the United States, its foreign policies in dealing with the Middle East and the Iraq war are also prevailing aspects in seminal support for al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden. This paper determines the factors and drivers that are correlated to an increase or decrease in support for al Qaeda and its leader, Osama bin Laden. Measures of different facets of al Qaeda and bin Laden are robustly correlated with attitudes toward the United States. “Support for terrorism is positively correlated with negative views of the U.S., a perception that the U.S. does not favor democracy in a respondent's country, and a belief that the Iraq war has made the world more dangerous.”⁵ Indifferences and growing concerns about al Qaeda and bin Laden has not necessarily resulted in a drastic improvement in terms of America's image. Despite anti-American sentiments majorities demonstrate openness to improving their country's relations with the U.S.

³ McCauley, Clark: “Terrorist Group Persistence and Dynamics”, Project, *START, National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism*, at <http://www.start.umd.edu/start/research/#wg1>.

⁴ Wike, Richard and Samaranayake, Nilanthi: “Where Terrorism Finds Support in the Muslim World”, *Pew Research Center* (23 May 2006), at <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/26/where-terrorism-finds-support-in-the-muslim-world>.

⁵ *Ibid.*



Widespread Opposition to U.S.-led War on Terror

	---- Percent Oppose ----			
	2002	2003	2004	2005
	%	%	%	%
Lebanon	56	67	--	65
Jordan	85	97	78	86
Morocco	--	84	66	56
Pakistan	45	74	60	52
Turkey	58	71	56	71

2. The Context

When al Qaeda attacked America's most iconic landmarks on September 11, 2001, the intention of al Qaeda was to build global support for a campaign against the U.S., its allies and friends. The larger Muslim world was shocked at the scale of horror unleashed by a Muslim terrorist group in the name of Islam. Many Muslim nations began to perceive Islamic terrorism as a threat to their countries and as a result, the public began expressing hostility toward violence in defense of Islam. However, with the U.S. invasion of Iraq in March 2003, Muslims worldwide from Europe to Asia, Middle East to South America, and Africa expressed serious concerns about U.S. foreign policies. It was perceived as a serious threat to Islam.

Consistently Low Marks for the U.S.

	1999/ 2000	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
View of U.S.	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Favorable	23	10	13	21	23	27	15	19	16	17
Unfavorable	--	69	81	60	60	56	68	63	68	68
DK	--	20	6	18	18	17	16	17	16	16

1999/2000 survey trend provided by the Office of Research,
U.S. Department of State.

Pew Research Center Q7a.

In 2005, majority of people surveyed in Jordan and Lebanon cited U.S. policies as the most significant cause of Islamic extremism.⁶ During this time period, "in Muslim nations, the wars in Afghanistan and particularly Iraq have driven negative ratings nearly off the

⁶ Funk, Carolyn: "Islamic Extremism: Common Concern for Muslim and Western Public", *Pew Research Center* (14 July 2005), at <http://pewglobal.org/reports/pdf/248.pdf>.



charts.”⁷ American-led invasion of Iraq continues to motivate the operations of the Al Qaeda, its associated groups and affiliated cells. However, the Obama administration has taken efforts to change the rhetorical approach to the threat of terrorism by formally replacing the term “Islamic terrorism” with “violent extremism.” Hence, they have swiftly moved away from using the “war-on-terror” rhetoric that was criticized as the “with-us-or-against-us” philosophy which majority of Muslims perceived as an attack on Islam.⁸ Nine years after the September 11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the Pew research polls demonstrate that support for Osama bin Laden has declined considerably among Muslim publics in recent years.⁹ Pew Research Center’s Global Attitudes Project demonstrates that from 2003-2010 there has been a significant decline in confidence for Al Qaeda and bin Laden. With the steadfast increase in violence by insurgent and terrorist groups against civilians, the perception of the predominantly Muslim communities worldwide towards the U.S. has slightly improved while al Qaeda and its leader bin Laden have grown less favorable among the solid majority of Muslims. However, according to latest polls conducted by the Pew Research, American’s image largely remains negative in Pakistan due to unfavorable views of American foreign policy. In addition, Americans in general also receive low rating in Pakistan.

3. Factors Correlated to an Increase in Support for al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden

3.1. Opposition to U.S.-led War on Terror

In May 2003, the Muslim population worldwide perceived U.S. efforts against combating terrorism and democratization in the Islamic world as a definite threat. Following U.S. engagement in “global war on terrorism” many Muslims were outraged and displeased by the US-led occupation of Iraq. The widespread oppositions drew predominantly from Arab and Muslim countries—Lebanon, Jordan, Morocco, Pakistan and Turkey. Although many Muslims do not support Islamic extremism, Osama Bin Laden’s anti-U.S. sentiments may have been perceived favorable during this time period.

In 2004, majority of Muslim countries surveyed demonstrated hostility toward U.S.-lead war on terrorism. Osama bin Laden was viewed “favorably by large percentages in Pakistan (65%), Jordan (55%) and Morocco (45%)... even in Turkey, where bin Laden is highly unpopular, as many as 31% say that suicide attacks against Americans and other Westerners in Iraq are justifiable.”¹⁰ Majorities in German, France and Russia also believed that they made the right decision by not getting involved in the war. Many Muslims are still uncertain about the war on terror because they believe that it was an effort to dominate the world and to control the significant oil reserves in the great Middle East. The perception of American antagonism may have been a result of western hostility to Islamic practices and beliefs.

⁷ Wike, Richard: “America’s Image; Muslims and Westerners”, (18 December 2008), at <http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=263>.

⁸ Boyle, Jon: “Obama Team Drops “war on terror” rhetoric”, *Reuters*, 30 March 2009, at <http://www.reuters.com/article/newsOne/idUSTRE52T7MH20090330>.

⁹ Horowitz, Juliana: “Declining Support for bin Laden and Suicide Bombing”, *Pew Research Center* (10 September 2009), at <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1338/declining-muslim-support-for-bin-laden-suicide-bombing>.

¹⁰ Kohut, Andrew: “Mistrust of America in Europe Ever Higher, Muslim Anger Persists”, *Pew Research Center* (16 March 2004), at www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/world/text/pew_031604.pdf.



The percentage of individuals who oppose the U.S.-led war on terror may have been the reason for wide-spread opposition in the Islamic community. “Overwhelming opposition to American military action against Al Qaeda and the Taliban inside Pakistan is accompanied by universal disdain for the U.S. led war on terror.”¹¹ Thus, majorities of Muslims feels that U.S. foreign policies as hostile.

3.2. Invasion and Occupation of Iraq

Invasion and Occupation of Iraq is positively correlated with hostility toward the U.S. Since the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, there has been a large number of public opinion polls designed to measure people’s opinion on bin Laden and al Qaeda— The Pew Global Attitudes Project, Terror Free Tomorrow and World Public Opinion. “In 2002, just months after the September 11 attacks, one-third in Pakistan said suicide bombing was often or sometimes justified in order to defend Islam.”¹²

Confidence in bin Laden as World Leader			
	<i>A lot or some</i>		
	2003	2005	Diff.
	%	%	
Jordan	55	60	+5
Pakistan	45	51	+6
Indonesia	58	35	-23
Morocco	49	26	-23
Turkey	15	7	-8
Lebanon	14	2	-12

Many believed that it is not justifiable to bomb al Qaeda training camps. According to survey results, 81 percent of Pakistanis rejected U.S. bombing of al Qaeda camps in Pakistan. WPO’s 2007 poll results demonstrate that 80 percent of Pakistanis believed that “the Pakistan government should not allow American or other foreign troops to enter Pakistan to pursue and capture al Qaeda fighters, only 5 percent thought their government should permit it...”¹³

¹¹ “Pakistanis Reject U.S. Military Action against Al Qaeda”, *Terror Free Tomorrow* (2007), at [www.terrorfreetomorrow.org/upimagestft/Pakistan Poll Report.pdf](http://www.terrorfreetomorrow.org/upimagestft/Pakistan%20Poll%20Report.pdf).

¹² Horowitz, *Ibid*.

¹³ “Less than Half Pakistani Public Support Attacking Al Qaeda Cracking Down on Fundamentalists”, *Worldpublicopinion.org*, 31 October 2007, at <http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/brasiapacificra/424.php?nid=&id=&pnt=42> (October 2009) .



Foreign Troops Pursuing al-Qaeda

Do you think the Pakistan government should or should not allow American or other foreign troops to enter Pakistan to pursue and capture al Qaeda fighters?

Favor

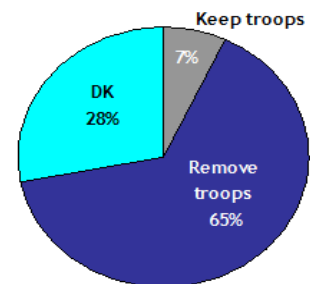
5%

Oppose

80%

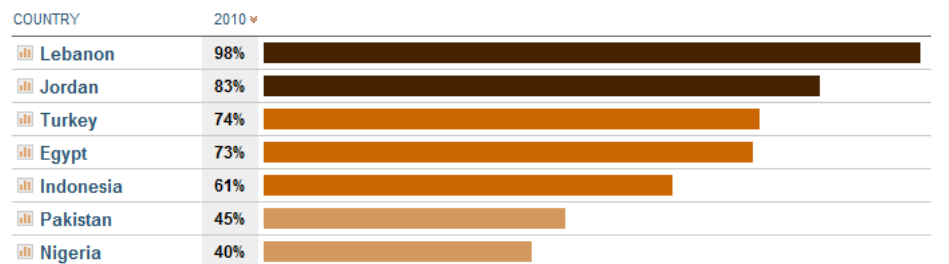
WFO 9/07

Should the U.S. and NATO Keep Troops in Afghanistan?



Pew Research Center Q49.

Percent of Muslims responding **No confidence** (2010)

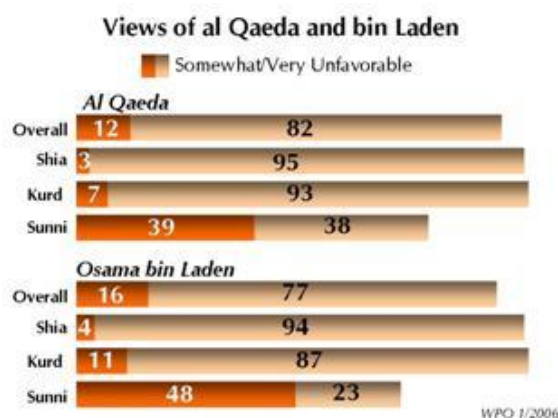


The global attitude survey released by the Pew Research Center in 2005 documents that support for bin Laden in Jordan and Pakistan has slightly increased since post-9/11 and the U.S. invasion of Iraq. For instance, the number of Jordanians having a lot/some confidence in bin Laden increased from 55 percent in May, 2003 to 60 percent in 2005. In Pakistan, 51 percent placed a lot/some confidence in bin Laden, a slight increase from 45 percent in May, 2003. Also, the poll results demonstrate that among Pakistanis, “gender is a significant dividing line with nearly two-in-three men (65%) reporting a lot or some confidence in bin Laden, compared with 36% of women.”¹⁴ Additionally, there are significant demographic variations in both Indonesia and Jordan. For instance, in Indonesia, confidence in bin Laden is higher among the more affluent than older citizens.

Whereas, in Jordan there is a reversible pattern: Confidence in the al Qaeda leader was much more apparent (56 percent) among Jordanians who are under age 35 when compared to 64 percent of their older citizens. Pew Research Center’s Global Attitudes Project also demonstrates that “public around the world reacted negatively to the Iraq war... key elements of American foreign policy have been overwhelmingly unpopular there in recent years...”¹⁵ As of 2010, 65 percent of Afghans support the idea of U.S. and NATO military efforts in fighting extremist groups. In addition, the ongoing presence of U.S. troops in Iraq cities and towns may have been resulted in lack of support for U.S. troops.

¹⁴ “Islamic Extremism: Common Concern for Muslim and Western Publics”, Pew Research Center (2009), at <http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?PageID=814>.

¹⁵ Horowitz, Juliana (2009): “Growing Concerns about Extremism, Continuing Discontent with U.S.”, at www.pewglobal.org/reports/pdf/265.pdf.

Percent of Muslims responding **Confidence** (2010)

COUNTRY	2010
Nigeria	48%
Indonesia	25%
Egypt	19%
Pakistan	18%
Jordan	14%
Turkey	3%
Lebanon	0%

4. Factors Correlated to Decrease in Support for al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden

4.1. Attacks Against Civilians by Extremist Groups

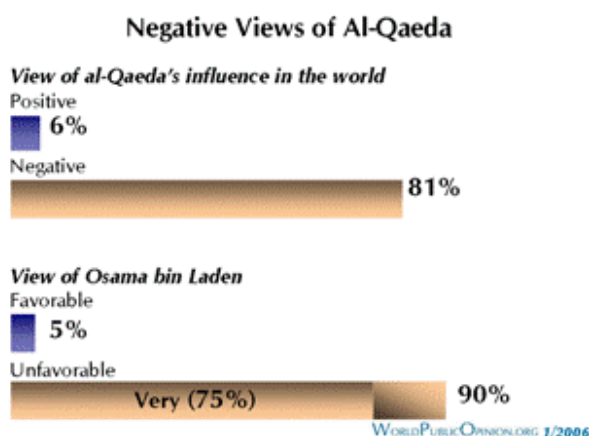
Pew research center poll released in 2009 received world-wide attention. It documents that there have been substantial declines in the percentage of support for al Qaeda and bin Laden since 2003. The drop in confidence is most apparent among Indonesia, Pakistan and Jordan. In Indonesia, confidence in bin Laden declined from 59 percent in 2003 to 25 percent in 2009. However, as of 2010 the percent of Muslims responding confidence in Indonesia still remains constant since 2009. Also, in Pakistan, the confidence has plummeted from 46 percent to 18 percent in 2009. Among Jordanians the confidence has significantly declined from 56 percent to 28 percent in 2009 to 14 percent in 2010.¹⁶ In Lebanon the confidence in bin Laden has decreased to 4 percent. However, in comparison to earlier decades the confidence in the al Qaeda leader has significantly increased in Nigeria—44 percent in 2003 to 54 percent in 2009 with a significant difference of +10. According to latest Pew Research polls released in 2010, Nigerian Muslims still express the most confidence in bin Laden. However, their overall

¹⁶ “2 Mixed Views of Hamas and Hezbollah in Largely Muslim Nation”, *The Pew Research Center* (04 February 2010), at <http://pewglobal.org/2010/02/04/mixed-views-of-hamas-and-hezbollah-in-largely-muslim-nations/>.



confidence has decreased from 54 percent in 2009 to 48 percent in 2010. Overall percentages have fluctuated over the years but the numbers still remain high in Nigeria.

The overall findings of this poll conclude that fewer respondents in Muslim countries show confidence in bin Laden today when compared to earlier years. As of 2010, 98 percent of Muslims in Lebanon express no confidence in bin Laden. One of the underlying reasons for decline may be due to awareness of political conditions; attacks against civilians by extremist groups and support for educational development. Increased awareness of political conditions has led many Muslims to change their perspective on terrorism. Many are convinced that “there is a struggle in their country between groups who want to modernize the nation and Islamic fundamentalists.” According to latest data, more individuals are “convinced of the existence of such a struggle in Lebanon (55%), Turkey (54%) and the Palestinian territories (53%) than elsewhere.” Many predominantly Muslim countries have come to support increased aid and educational assistance to end terrorism because educational attainment can meaningfully reduce support and participation in terrorism. For instance, “Lebanon (96%), Israel (93%), Indonesia (93%), Turkey (89%), Pakistan (87%) and the Palestinian territories (85%) say that it is equally important to educate girls and boys.”¹⁷



According to Terror Free Tomorrow, a growing number of Shias and Kurds express unfavorable views toward both al Qaeda and bin Laden. The data demonstrates that 95 percent of Shias and 93 percent of Kurds express very unfavorable views toward Al Qaeda. Also, 94 percent of Shias and 87 percent of Kurds express very unfavorable views toward Bin Laden. While Shias and Kurd express quite negative feelings: 38 percent and 23 percent of Sunnis having very unfavorable views of both al Qaeda and bin Laden. Overall data demonstrate that overwhelming majority of Shias, Kurds and Sunnis have lost confidence in al Qaeda and bin Laden. It is reasonable to say that although the support for the al Qaeda leader increased after U.S. invasion of Iraq, it has progressively declined in the recent years.

A declining sense of confidence in al Qaeda and bin Laden was also apparent in the results of World Public Opinion survey conducted in 2006. The data illustrates that 81 percent of Afghan people had unfavorable views of al Qaeda. Trend analysis also documents that 75

¹⁷ “Confidence in Osama bin Laden”, *The Pew Research Center* (2010), at <http://pewglobal.org/database/?indicator=20&survey=12&response=Confidence&mode=char> .



percent of the Afghan population has a very unfavorable view of bin Laden. Overall data concludes that Afghans have a remarkable negative view of both al Qaeda and bin Laden. As of 2010, Overall conclusion of the polls illustrate that most Muslim population is definitely expressing less support for al Qaeda and extremism in their countries.

Confidence in bin Laden has also declined noticeably in some countries, and less Muslims believe suicide bombings that are initially aimed at civilians are justifiable in defense of Islam. Most recent data illustrate that only a 9 percent of Pakistanis surveyed have favorable view of al Qaeda and 79 percent is concerned about extremism in their country. In fact, assassinations, bombings and attacks on civilians may have been a factor in the decline in confidence of bin Laden.

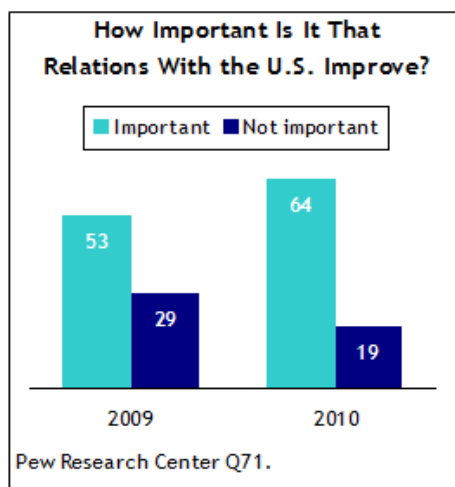
4.2. U.S. Humanitarian Aid

The rise of anti-Americanism in the 21st century has greatly influence how America is perceived by rest of the world, especially among predominantly Muslim countries. Many express interests in improving relations with the U.S. “Moreover, many endorse U.S. assistance for the Pakistani government in its fight with extremist groups. Nearly three-fourths of those interviewed (72%) would support U.S. financial and humanitarian aid to areas where extremist groups operate.”¹⁸ Majorities of Muslims also favor the idea of the U.S. supplying logistical and intelligence support to combat extremists groups. An interesting pattern that was documented in the data is that declining public support for bin Laden and al Qaeda doesn’t necessarily connote that the public support U.S. war on terror. For instance, Pakistanis still have unfavorable views on U.S. itself however, if Americans were to change their foreign policies it may be possible to reverse people’s resentment toward the U.S. According to the findings of the Pew Global Attitude Research Project (2007);

- “December 2002 - America's image slips, although goodwill towards the U.S. remains
- June 2003 - U.S. image plunges in the wake of the Iraq war
- March 2004 - No improvement in U.S. image, some worsening in Europe
- June 2005 - U.S. image improves slightly, although still negative in most places; and anti-Americanism is becoming increasingly entrenched
- June 2006 - Show little further progress - in fact some back sliding. Even as the publics of the world concurred with the Americans on many global problems.”¹⁹

¹⁸ Horowitz, “Growing Concerns...”, *op. cit.*

¹⁹ “America’s Image in the World”, *Pew Research Center* (14 March 2007), at <http://pewglobal.org/commentary/display.php?AnalysisID=1019> .



Improvement of America's image worldwide is critical to decrease in support for al Qaeda and bin Laden. It was documented that a greater majority of supporters of bin Laden and al Qaeda (eight in ten) consider improving country's economy, independent judiciary and free press. Civilian death caused by terrorist attacks and U.S. humanitarian aid following natural disasters such as tsunamis and earthquakes also increased participation in democratization in predominantly Muslim countries like Indonesia and Pakistan.





For instance, “In the first poll in Pakistan since the earthquake of October 8, 2005, Pakistanis now hold a more favorable opinion of the United States than at any time since 9/11, while support for Al Qaeda in its home base has dropped to its lowest level since then.”²⁰ It is extremely important for policy makers to note that U.S. should maintain international stability through communication. “Instead of simply turning up the volume of its message, United States should provide mechanisms for Americans and the world’s Muslims to talk to one another”²¹. U.S. humanitarian interventions can result in favorable views. Legitimacy of the U.S. can be restored and public support for al Qaeda and bin Laden can be decreased by the implementation of following recommendations. Despite giving America constantly low ratings, 65 percent of Pakistanis believe that it is important to improve relations between Pakistan and U.S.

5. Policy Implications

Violence against civilians and terrorist attacks in countries such as Indonesia, Morocco, Lebanon and Turkey result in strong opposition to both al Qaeda and bin Laden. However, there are still sympathizers and supporters who have confidence in bin Laden. According to Ulil Abshor Abdala, chairman of the Islamic Liberal Network, “For some youth Usama Bin Laden is like Che Guevera, it does not matter what you say, he is a hero to them. Our challenge is how to limit the extent of this heroic admiration among the youth.”²² In other words, the key is to find measures to limit the number of sympathizers and supporters of bin Laden and al Qaeda. First, policy makers should consider that there is still strong opposition to U.S-led efforts to combat terrorism. Utilization of military forces can result in new resentments and grievances therefore, it is extremely important for western countries to rebuild a good relationship with Muslim nations. This will lessen the chances of terrorist exploiting resentments and grievances to spread their radical ideologies. Second, the U.S. should attempt to be more culturally sensitive toward Muslims. We must take necessary measure to create an atmosphere of cultural understanding, promote inter-faith understanding and endorse a culture of peace, tolerance and hope among various ethnic groups. A range of policy instruments that do not interfere with cultural norms should be initiated to counter the propaganda of al Qaeda and bin Laden. According to the World Public Opinion Poll (2006), “Overwhelming majorities in predominantly Muslim countries say the controversy over the publication of cartoons depicting Muhammad was the result of “Western nations’ disrespect for the Islamic religion.”²³ Decision-makers should strongly consider on finding ways to reduce western hostility and antagonism toward Islam. This may not help in reducing antipathy toward the United States and the Western nations but also reduce the number of supporters and sympathizers extremist groups. Third, it is vital for U.S. policy makers to educate the general public that undermining Islam is not a key objective for U.S. foreign policy. In other words, we must send a clear message that we are not engaged in a war against

²⁰: “Dramatic Change of Public Opinion in the Muslim World”, *Terror Free Tomorrow* (2005), at <http://www.terrorfreetomorrow.org/article.php?id=71>.

²¹ Krause, Peter and Van Evera, Stephen: “Public Diplomacy: Ideas for the War of Ideas”, Harvard Belfer Center, *Discussion Paper, 09-10* (September 2009), at http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/publication/19550/public_diplomacy.html.

²² “Muslim Support for bin Laden Falls”, *Fox News*, 14 July 2005, at www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,162563,00.html.

²³ “Large and Growing Numbers of Muslims Reject Terrorism”, *Worldpublicopinion.org*, 30 June 2006, at http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/international_security_bt/221.php?nid=&id=&pnt=221&lb=brme.



Islam. “At the heart of Arab attitudes are resentment of US policy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict and deep mistrust of America's intentions in Iraq. The views expressed by the Arabs polled underline how urgent it is for US policymakers to try to counter the negative views of America in the region”²⁴ It is critical to increase awareness of the fact that the U.S. is not at war with Islam. U.S. should also attempt to gradually eradicate its forces from Islamic countries. Civilians should be educated that long-term U.S. military forces in Iraq are not there to destabilize the region and their culture. This may facilitate in promoting globalization and democracy among Muslim nations. These regimes should promote tolerance and reverence to the Islamic culture and its people. Reshaping U.S. foreign policy may also result in improving the image of U.S. and greater decline in support for bin Laden and al Qaeda.

Use the Pakistani Army to Fight Extremist Groups?			
	2009 %	2010 %	Change
Support	53	49	-4
Oppose	24	20	-4
DK	22	30	+8
Pew Research Center Q109.			

Fourth, the image of the U.S. is tremendously negative among predominantly Muslim countries such as Pakistan. For instance, latest poll results released in 2010 demonstrate that 49 percent of Pakistanis still believe that they should use their country's army to fight extremist groups. Therefore, U.S. counterterrorism strategies should adopt appropriate measure to incorporate both hard and soft policies that will improve the outlook of America while diminishing the appeal of al Qaeda and bin Laden. “Although the U.S. cannot change its foreign policies solely on the basis of public attitudes abroad, the costs of actions must be understood and factored into the policy assessment.”²⁵ In other words, the U.S. policymakers should alternative measures to counter the negative images associated with its foreign policies. Measures should be taken to strengthen cooperation and to improve cultural and trade exchanges between the West and Islamic countries.

These are range of policy instruments that may improve relations between the U.S. and predominantly Muslim countries,

International humanitarian agencies should also provide more support in reconstructing nations affected by terrorism. We must create a partnership between practitioners of de-radicalization, Islamic theologians and academic researchers with theoretical and methodological background. U.S. efforts against combating terrorism should

²⁴ Telhami, Shibley: “Arab Public Opinion on the United States and Iraq”, *The Brookings Institution* (Summer 2003), at http://www.brookings.edu/articles/2003/summer_forceandlegitimacy_telhami.aspx.

²⁵ Shibley Telhami: “U.S. Policy and the Arab and Muslim World”, (Summer 2002), at http://www.brookings.edu/articles/2002/summer_middleeast_telhami.aspx.



not be to dominate Islamic nations, undermine Islam and to gain control over their oil resources. U.S. should take a fair position when dealing with Muslim-majority countries and consider the interests of those nations when reshaping U.S. foreign policy. Nevertheless, cultural sensitivity and sovereignty should be taken into consideration when pursuing these approaches.

6. Discussion

Al Qaeda and its radical ideology of global jihad may be plummeting. This may be a result of “its central leadership thrown off balance as operatives are increasingly picked off by missiles and manhunts and, more important, with its tactics discredited in public opinion across the Muslim world”²⁶ Emile Nakhleh, the former Head of the CIA believes that al Qaeda is having a difficult time recruiting new members, raising terrorist funds but most importantly, they are having difficulty justifying the killings of innocent civilians. Audrey Kurth Cronin, a professor at the National War College also argues that al Qaeda “is in the process of imploding... this is not necessarily the end... but the trends are in a good direction...whether it should change the American counterterrorism policy, remains wide open...”²⁷ Furthermore, some specialists also believe that the organization is on a “downhill slope” and this may be a result of military operations of killing terrorist leaders such as Al Shabab, a leader of a Somali organization associated with al Qaeda and Noordin Top, Indonesia's most wanted Islamist militant. However, drone attacks by the C.I.A could lead to more Anti-American sentiments among the Muslim population. These attacks might threaten terrorist operations and possible new recruits however, threat of air attacks can create constant psychological fear among the general public.

The data from the Pew Global Attitudes Project which demonstrates that positive ratings for bin Laden has plummeted when large numbers of innocent civilians became the victims of terrorist attacks and al Qaeda-style violence. For instance, the slaughter of civilians by a group called *al Qaeda in Mesopotamia* and bombing of hotels in Jordan may have motivated the general public to support American forces. In addition, al Qaeda has been unable to provide any realistic resolution to local issues such as “unemployment, poverty, official corruption and poor education...people realized Bin Laden has nothing to offer....”—Peter Mandaville, a professor of government and Islamic Studies at George Mason University.²⁸

²⁶ Shane, Scott: “Rethinking Our Terrorist Fears”, *New York Times*, 26 September 2009, at http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/27/weekinreview/27shane.html?_r=1.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*



Despite these arguments, al Qaeda still appeals to its sympathizers and supporters. However, as of 2010, fewer Pakistanis are concerned about extremist groups taking over their country. Although al Qaeda may be losing their popular support in majority of countries, terrorism will not go away any time soon. As counterterrorism expert, Bruce Hoffman notes “Al Qaeda’s core demographic is young hotheads aged 16-28, and I still don’t think it had lost its appeal to that demographic...terrorism ends, sure but with Al Qaeda it may be 50 years, and we are only eight years away from 9/11....”²⁹

U.S. military operations against al Qaeda may keep terrorist operatives from coming up with an attack similar to or larger than 9/11 however, this does not mean that its allies will discontinue imitating bin Laden’s radical ideology.

“The lack of a successful spectacular attack from AQ in the last few years means they become yesterday’s news - they need to keep a high profile and being on the run makes that harder and harder - hence they lose the public over time. Of course the government’s actions against them helps, but perhaps this is another way to understand what is happening and it means that if so their profile could rise again if they pull off another 9/11 style attack....”³⁰

Despite the decentralization of the Jihad movement we can argue that it has shifted to the internet. According to data, the overall support for bin Laden has declined however, more than half (54%) of Nigerian Muslims still have confidence in bin Laden. In addition, “Lebanese Shias are about twice as likely as Sunnis to endorse suicide bombing (51% vs. 25%)”³¹ and the public support for Suicide Bombings is still high among the Lebanese Muslims.

In addition, although the physical center of the Jihadi movement has weakened over the years, it has shifted to the virtual world with increasing number of female users. “Bin Laden has given others a narrative, a grand struggle, and he is given them tactics as well...”³² said Mandaville. Prime examples of this are the South Asian websites and forums that imitate

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Ballard, James, Personal Communication, 12 October 2009.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*



Arab websites in their quest for a virtual *ummah* (community). Al Qaeda literature has also expanded into different languages such as English, German and French and has created a virtual *ummah*. Websites that promotes extremist ideology can turn passive supporters into active supports.

This process is very similar to any other social organization. For example, a religious organization, an honor society, a human rights group or any other social organization that fosters an environment and develops social attachments to the other members of the group can function in a similar way. Some members join but after some time they may drop out from the group. However, others join and over time perhaps become less active participants. Nevertheless, there may be a handful of members who become extremely dedicated to the organization as “active participants.” There is something that is unique about these members, making them stand out from the rest of the group. This same notion can be applied to a terrorist organization. A terrorist organization is very similar to the nature of the exchange relation that occurs in a primary group where the members share close, personal relations during a long period of time.

This transformation process is critical because individuals are exposed to the Islamic caliphate, distortion of doctrines can be motivated to internalize the radical ideology. As a result, these individuals can be transformed from sympathizers to more committed supporters into active participants. While counterterrorism is succeeding, we must also pay attention to the next generation of supporters because we still have many potential converts and the key is to counter the communication process in its tracks. Although al Qaeda may remain out of the spotlight, more new groups are finding their way into the spotlight. As we rethink our terrorist fears we must also consider that “At some time the beards grow gray and the AQ of yesterday is replaced by newer generations of AQ II (version two)...”³³

Scott Atran (2004) finds that there is “no evidence that most people who support suicide actions hate Americans’ internal cultural freedoms, but rather every indication that they oppose U.S. foreign policies, particularly regarding the Middle East.”³⁴ Nevertheless, according to the former President, Jimmy Carter, President Obama’s victory in winning the Nobel Peace prize determines that “It is a bold statement of international support for his vision and commitment to peace and harmony in international relations. It shows the hope his administration represents not only to our nation but to people around the world.”³⁵

7. Conclusion

There are two causal reasons that may contribute to the decrease in support for al Qaeda and bin Laden. First, violence against civilians by extremist groups has led to a considerable decline in support for suicide bombings among many individuals. Majority of the Muslim publics surveyed express strong rejections toward suicide bombings and believe that it is never justified in defense of Islam. Second, U.S. humanitarian, intelligence, logistical and financial support to where al Qaeda operates is significantly correlated to decline in support for extremist groups and bin Laden. Majority of the public surveyed believe that it is critical to improve relations between their countries and the U.S. For instance, some Pakistanis

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Atran, Scott (2004): *Trends in Suicide Terrorism*, at www.sitemaker.umich.edu/satran/files/atran-trends.pdf

³⁵ Associated Press: “Political Figures React to Obama’s Nobel Prize Win”, at <http://cbs4.com/politics/obama.peace.prize.2.1238115.html>.



endorse U.S. aid for their government in its fight against extremist groups and believe that they would favor drone attacks against extremist leaders.

There are two fundamental reasons correlated to increase in support for al Qaeda and bin Laden. First, opposition to U.S.-led war on terror has dramatically increased since 2003. Many Muslim individuals surveyed believe that U.S.-led war on terror has contributed to their deteriorating economy. In addition, there is little enthusiasm for drone attacks targeting extremist leaders mainly because many civilians believe that these attacks are conducted without the approval of their governments. Many Pakistanis believe that U.S. and NATO should withdraw their troops from their country, thus support the idea of using their country's army to fight terrorism.

Secondly, lack of awareness about political conditions that give rise to terrorism and increase support for extremist ideologies have lead to the rise of extremisms around the world. Though there is a long-standing concern about extremism, many are concerned about U.S.-led efforts to combat terrorism, both globally and in Pakistan particularly. When people are stripped of their human rights, alienated and are subjugated by various negative social circumstances, they are more likely to become vulnerable candidates for radicalization and recruitment to participate in terrorism. To tip the scales in favor of counter-terrorism efforts, there is still much to be done through a global integrated approach to minimize supporters and sympathizers. Partnership should be built between governments, academia and the Muslim communities. We must think beyond security measures, understand why individuals become radicalized, and address social conditions favorable to the increase in support for extremist leaders and groups. As a global community, we must learn from one another and identify global best practices in order to maximize success and minimize failure.