

Contact: Natalya Anfilofyeva

February 25, 2008

**Report Concludes That US Position in the GWOT Has Slipped Since 2003—
But Suggests That Tide May Be Turning against Jihadi Extremism**

The Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments has released a new report, “The Global War on Terrorism: An Assessment,” authored by Senior Fellow Robert C. Martinage.

The report concludes that the United States reached a high-water mark in the war on terrorism in 2003. At that time, the Taliban had been overthrown and al Qaeda stripped of its sanctuary in Afghanistan, ten of al Qaeda’s senior-most leaders had been captured or killed, dozens of jihadi cells had been rolled up, and several partner countries had significantly improved their counter-terrorism capabilities.

While the US has had many tactical victories since then, they have been offset by the metastasis of the al Qaeda organization into a global movement, the spread and intensification of Salafi-Jihadi ideology, the resurgence of Iranian influence, and growth in the number and influence of radical Islamist political parties. The threat has, on balance, intensified in Southwest Asia, South Asia, and Europe, according to Martinage.

“Although the United States has been successful in reducing the jihadi threat in Iraq and Afghanistan—albeit at a high cost in terms of lives, treasure, and grist for jihadi propaganda mills, that effort has had a very high opportunity cost,” Martinage states. “A sixty-country problem cannot be addressed with what is essentially a two-country solution.”

The report identifies seven strategic “pillars” required for long-term success: 1) sustaining a global “smother campaign” (i.e., hunting down terrorists, disrupting operations, severing transnational links, and impeding recruitment and training); 2) conducting unconventional warfare and covert action against state-sponsors of terrorism and terrorist groups; 3) bolstering critical states (e.g., Saudi Arabia and Pakistan); 4) maintaining a significant surge capability for large-scale irregular warfare contingencies; 5) creating and exploiting divisions within and among jihadi groups; 6) discrediting jihadi ideology and covertly promoting alternative Islamic voices; and 7) isolating extremists from mainstream Muslims.

The last three of those pillars are arguably the weakest ones in current US strategy. “The United States is losing the ‘long war’ in the madrassas, on the air waves, on jihadi websites and countless Internet chat rooms, and during Friday prayers in mosques around the world,” according to Martinage. “Not only has the US government failed to counter the portrayal of America as a predatory force that poses an existential threat to Islam; it has reinforced this jihadi narrative through continued military ‘occupation’ of Iraq, repeated missteps such as Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo, and frequent public statements by senior US government officials that are considered anti-Islamic by many conservative Muslims.” As illustrated by events in Al Anbar in 2007, however, the jihadi movement’s inherently exclusionary ideology and “un-Islamic” behavior may ultimately lead to its undoing.

#####

*The Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments (CSBA) is an independent
policy research institute established to promote innovative thinking about
defense planning and investment strategies for the 21st century.*

See our web site at <http://www.CSBAonline.org>.