



The FP Survey: Terrorism

What is the state of global terrorism today, nearly a decade after the Sept. 11 attacks? **Foreign Policy** asked the top terrorism experts in the field. Here's what they told us:

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2011



By **Peter Bergen**

As we approach the 10th anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks, **FP** asked top terrorism experts to take stock of the threat posed by al Qaeda and its allies. And while the **majority of respondents** believe that al Qaeda is no stronger today than it was a decade ago, they also worry that we are only slightly safer from terrorist attack than we were the day the Twin Towers fell.

The headline finding is surprising: Experts credit nine years of the war on terror with making U.S. soil only marginally more secure -- despite the fact that only 14 Americans have died in jihadist terrorist attacks in the United States since Sept 11. Why the disconnect? Respondents were likely quite cognizant of the numerous serious "near-miss" terrorist operations targeting the homeland, from the Christmas Day 2009 plot to bring down

a passenger jet over Detroit to the botched Times Square car bomb attack in May 2010. These plans were devised by al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and the Pakistani Taliban, respectively, and were a powerful reminder that the threat from terrorism is still real.



A strong majority also predicted that there will be another **terror attack** in the United States or Europe in the next year. Given that a botched terrorist attack took place in Stockholm, a plot was averted to mount a "Mumbai-style" attack in Copenhagen, and a dozen suspected terrorists were arrested in the United Kingdom -- all since the survey was completed -- the experts were, unfortunately, probably right about this.

Read this Slide Show for the full survey results. Still, 78 percent of respondents **disagreed** with the idea that al Qaeda is stronger today than it was on 9/11.

There is a great deal of bad news for Pakistan in the survey. Overwhelmingly, the experts selected Pakistan as the country that posed the **greatest threat** to the West today, and a majority also **picked** it as the country most likely to have its nukes end up in the hands of terrorists. Interestingly, only two experts named Iran as the West's greatest threat or as a nuke proliferator to terror groups. Does this signify the end of the neoconservative notion that state sponsors of terrorism like Iran are more dangerous than groups without state sponsorship such as al Qaeda?

There was widespread agreement that "enhanced interrogation techniques" such as waterboarding are not effective, although there was something of an even split on whether closing the detention center at Guantanamo Bay would improve U.S. security.

Some of the most interesting insights came in the experts' on-the-record responses. Roger Cressey, a National Security Council official under Presidents George W. Bush and Bill Clinton, characterized the CIA's drone program in Pakistan as "the most successful counterterrorism program since 9/11," while retired French counterterrorism prosecutor Jean Louis Brugière elegantly **termed** the drone strikes "efficient, but not sufficient."

The exponential increase in drone strikes during the Barack Obama administration is one reason why former George W. Bush White House official Richard Falkenrath can say with justification that the Obama administration is "rhetorically dissimilar but substantively almost indistinguishable" from the administration that launched the drone program when it come to its policies on terrorism.

Asked to name the world's **most dangerous terrorist**, counterinsurgency expert Andrew Exum wisely named not one of the obvious suspects like Osama bin Laden but "the terrorist whose actions precipitate a war between India and Pakistan." Indeed, a "Mumbai II" is one of the most predictable challenges that Obama can reasonably

expect to confront in the next two years. And just this past week, Mumbai went on high alert for a possible terrorist attack. Bizarrely, former CIA director James Woolsey named Iranian leader Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as the globe's most dangerous terrorist, a confirmation that, at least in some quarters, neoconservatism is not entirely dead.

Finally, a number of experts had similar views about the **biggest mistake** by the U.S. government since 9/11: Several cited invading Iraq -- and the resulting failure to get the job done in Afghanistan. Variations of this view were expressed by Cressey, Brugière, diplomatic heavyweight Thomas Pickering, and CIA veteran Bruce Riedel. If this is the first draft of a historical verdict on the war in Iraq, perhaps neoconservatism is, in fact, entering its terminal stage.

Participants (65): Zachary Abuza, John Arquilla, Henri Barkey, Mohamad Bazzi, Peter Bergen, Ilan Berman, Richard Betts, Stephen Biddle, Mia Bloom, Randy Borum, Christopher Boucek, Leanne Kennedy-Boudali, Jarret Brachman, William Braniff, Jean-Louis Bruguière, Daniel Byman, Vincent Cannistraro, Roger Cressey, Gilles Dorransoro, Gillian Duncan, Clark Ervin, John Esposito, Andrew Exum, Richard Falkenrath, C. Christine Fair, Douglas Farah, Jean-Pierre Filiu, Bernard Finel, Brian Fishman, James Forest, Benjamin Friedman, Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, Fawaz Gerges, Karen Greenberg, Imtiaz Gul, Shadi Hamid, Thomas Hegghammer, John Horgan, Jo Husbands, Michael Innes, Gregory Johnsen, Bruce Jones, Patrick Lang, Matthew Levitt, Scott Malcomson, Daniel Markey, Barry McManus, John Mueller, Shuja Nawaz, Thomas Pickering, Paul Pillar, Daniel Pipes, Magnus Ranstorp, Bruce Riedel, Paul Salem, Reid Sawyer, Steven Simon, Michael Singh, Jessica Stern, Praveen Swami, Camille Tawil, Joas Wagemakers, Andrew Wilder, R. James Woolsey, Juan Zarate.

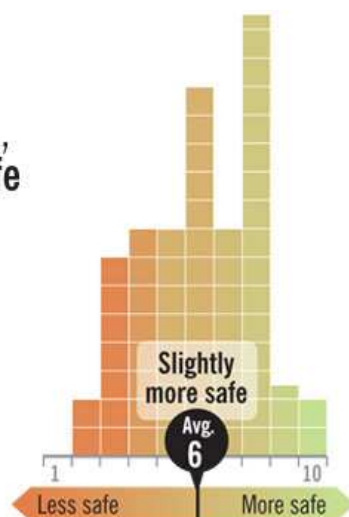
ASIF HASSAN/AFP/Getty Images

Almost a decade after Sept. 11, 2001, is the United States **more or less safe** from the threat of terrorism?

(On a scale of 1 to 10: 1 square = 1 response)

What one thing could the United States do to **make itself safer** immediately?

"No one thing will make us safer." -14% of the experts



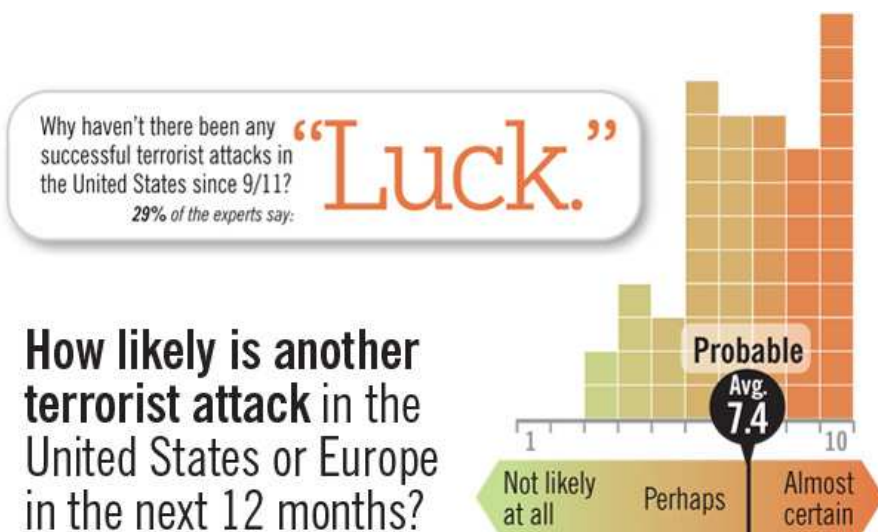
The most dangerous terrorist in the world is _____

“someone we have not yet identified (which is part of what makes him dangerous).”

-Paul Pillar

“the terrorist whose actions precipitate a war between India and Pakistan.”

-Andrew Exum

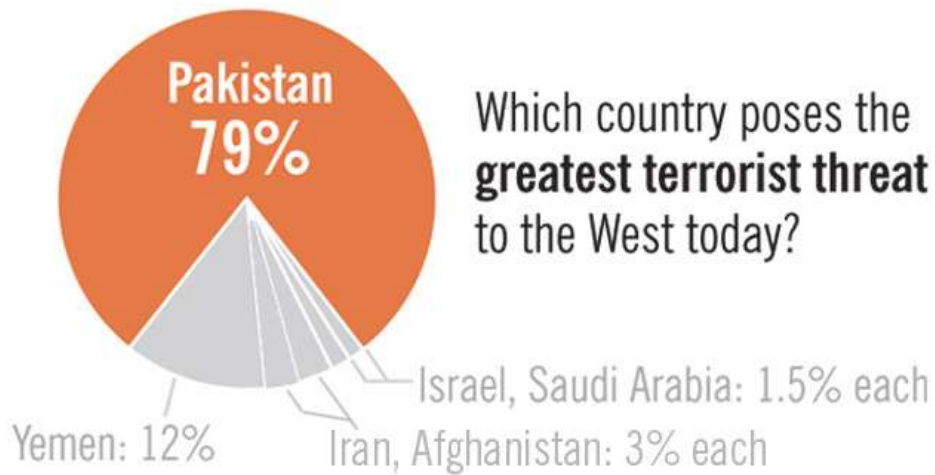


The world is devoting **too much time** and attention to the problem of terrorism.



Al Qaeda is stronger today than it was on 9/11.





Only **20%** think it is necessary to win the war in Afghanistan. A quarter ask, “How are we defining win?”

87% believe it is possible to negotiate with the Taliban

From which country are **nuclear weapons or materials** most likely to land in the hands of terrorists?



The U.S. drone campaign in northwestern Pakistan is _____

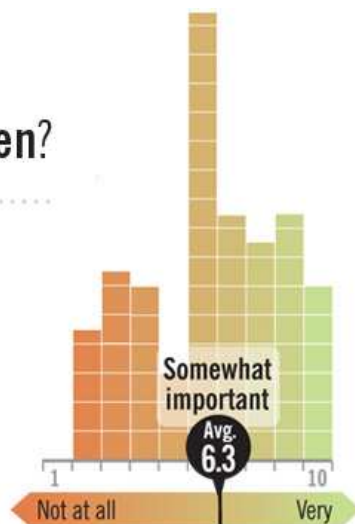
“undermining U.S. national security in the long run and inspiring American and European Muslims to join the global jihad” —*Mia Bloom*

“efficient, but not sufficient” —*Jean-Louis Bruguière*

“killing many Taliban and key figures, but they are being replaced” —*Gillian Duncan*

How important is it to kill or capture **Osama bin Laden**?

83%
believe Osama bin Laden is in Pakistan.



If we could have done one thing differently since Sept. 11, we should have _____

“kept our focus on Afghanistan and finished the job there” —*Roger Cressey*

“built on the enormous sympathy for the U.S. after 9/11 by building stronger international coalitions against terrorism” —*Joas Wagemakers*

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*Peter Bergen, co-editor of the **AfPak Channel**, directs the National Security Studies Program at the New America Foundation. His most recent book is **The Longest War: The Enduring Conflict between America and Al-Qaeda**.*

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