RAND CORPORATION

TESTIMONY

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
EDUCATION AND THE ARTS
ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT
HEALTH AND HEALTH CARE
INFRASTRUCTURE AND TRANSPORTATION
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS
LAW AND BUSINESS
NATIONAL SECURITY
POPULATION AND AGING
PUBLIC SAFETY
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
TERRORISM AND HOMELAND SECURITY

The RAND Corporation is a nonprofit institution that helps improve policy and decisionmaking through research and analysis.

This electronic document was made available from www.rand.org as a public service of the RAND Corporation.

Skip all front matter: Jump to Page 1

Support RAND

Browse Reports & Bookstore

Make a charitable contribution

For More Information

Visit RAND at www.rand.org

Explore RAND Testimony

View document details

Testimonies

RAND testimonies record testimony presented by RAND associates to federal, state, or local legislative committees; government-appointed commissions and panels; and private review and oversight bodies.

Limited Electronic Distribution Rights

This document and trademark(s) contained herein are protected by law as indicated in a notice appearing later in this work. This electronic representation of RAND intellectual property is provided for non-commercial use only. Unauthorized posting of RAND electronic documents to a non-RAND website is prohibited. RAND electronic documents are protected under copyright law. Permission is required from RAND to reproduce, or reuse in another form, any of our research documents for commercial use. For information on reprint and linking permissions, please see RAND Permissions.

TESTIMONY

New Challenges to U.S. Counterterrorism Efforts

An Assessment of the Current Terrorist Threat

Addendum

BRIAN MICHAEL JENKINS

CT-377/1

August 2012

Document submitted on August 24, 2012 as an addendum to testimony presented before the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee on July 11, 2012

This product is part of the RAND Corporation testimony series. RAND testimonies record testimony presented by RAND associates to federal, state, or local legislative committees; government-appointed commissions and panels; and private review and oversight bodies. The RAND Corporation is a nonprofit research organization providing objective analysis and effective solutions that address the challenges facing the public and private sectors around the world. RAND's publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its research clients and sponsors.
RAND® is a registered trademark.

Published 2012 by the RAND Corporation
1776 Main Street, P.O. Box 2138, Santa Monica, CA 90407-2138
1200 South Hayes Street, Arlington, VA 22202-5050
4570 Fifth Avenue, Suite 600, Pittsburgh, PA 15213-2665
RAND URL: http://www.rand.org
To order RAND documents or to obtain additional information, contact
Distribution Services: Telephone: (310) 451-7002;
Email: order@rand.org

Brian Michael Jenkins[1]
The RAND Corporation

New Challenges to U.S. Counterterrorism Efforts
An Assessment of the Current Terrorist Threat
Addendum[2]

Before the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
United States Senate

August 24, 2012

The subsequent questions and answers found in this document were received from the Committee for additional information following the hearing on July 11, 2012 and were submitted for the record.

POST-HEARING QUESTIONS FROM SENATOR JOSEPH LIEBERMAN

QUESTION 1:

For the last few years terrorism analysts have focused on a relatively stable model of violent Islamist terrorism threats, involving core al Qaeda, its affiliates and allies, homegrown terrorists inspired by the ideology of violent Islamist extremism, and Iranian-linked threats.

How concerned are you about the possibility of new terrorist groups or actors posing a threat to the homeland and are outside of this model and not on the radar screen of our intelligence agencies today? Are we at risk of "strategic surprise" with respect to new terrorist groups, and if so, what more can the government do to predict and detect such unknown threats?

RESPONSE 1:

Although al Qaeda's global leadership remains dedicated to attacking the United States and therefore represents the most salient threat to the security of Americans abroad and at home, the overall terrorist threat has become more complex. To begin with, al Qaeda itself has become a term of analytical convenience—a label applied to what in actuality is an increasingly complex

[1] The opinions and conclusions expressed in this testimony are the author's alone and should not be interpreted as representing those of RAND or any of the sponsors of its research. This product is part of the RAND Corporation testimony series. RAND testimonies record testimony presented by RAND associates to federal, state, or local legislative committees; government-appointed commissions and panels; and private review and oversight bodies. The RAND Corporation is a nonprofit research organization providing objective analysis and effective solutions that address the challenges facing the public and private sectors around the world. RAND's publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its research clients and sponsors.
[2] This testimony is available for free download at http://www.rand.org/pubs/testimonies/CT377z1.html.

array of al Qaeda-linked and al Qaeda-inspired enterprises. Some are creations of al Qaeda; others are recent acquisitions; still others claim or aspire to al Qaeda membership or are unaffiliated jihadists lumped together under al Qaeda.

The tendency of analysts to connect all jihadist terrorism with al Qaeda turns otherwise obscure groups into a cause for concern and reinforces al Qaeda's own propaganda efforts to assert its leadership over a diverse host of organizations. A more complicated order of battle in the turbulent wake of the Arab uprisings will oblige analysts to become more discerning. An al Qaeda connection should not be the sole lens of analysis and criterion for U.S. concern.

As I mentioned in my testimony, the United States also confronts the threat of Iranian-sponsored and Hezbollah terrorism, which growing tensions with Iran and events in Syria could exacerbate. And the violence in northern Mexico, although criminally motivated, includes the use of terrorist tactics.

Beyond these obvious foreign threats, there are two potential sources of terrorist violence in the United States. They receive nowhere near the attention paid to al Qaeda, and because they are domestic in origin (as opposed to homegrown terrorists inspired by al Qaeda's ideology), domestic intelligence operations targeting these groups tend to be more delicate. One threat stream comprises anarchist extremists currently exploiting economic distress and public anger. The other stream, itself an array of groups, includes people with anti-federal-government sentiments, white supremacists, and a variety of hate organizations.

Although they continue dark themes that ebb and flow in American history, these attitudes have recently found only occasional expression in violence. For political reasons, authorities appear reluctant to apply the same scrutiny to these groups that they apply to al Qaeda-linked activity. Moreover, some of the more controversial assertions of federal authority depend upon legislation that is expressly linked to al Qaeda and the Taliban (the Authorization of Use of Military Force of 2001 and the National Defense Authorization Act of 2012) and therefore cannot be applied to the purely domestic groups. Beyond the letter of law, there are greater political risks in confronting these entirely homegrown extremists, which may explain why they receive only a fraction of the attention devoted to al Qaeda-inspired terrorism.

QUESTION 2:

The evolution of the Mexican drug cartels and other transnational criminal networks into conglomerates that no longer specialize in one kind of crime, and the growing evidence of links

between these criminal conglomerates and terrorism organizations, pose a significant threat to national and international security. As we look to the future of homeland security and how to best meet this evolving threat, it is important that we focus on aligning our law enforcement agencies on all levels to achieve a greater unified response.

a. How troubling are these links between organized crime and terrorism, and what do they mean for the future of our homeland security enterprise?

b. What do you believe the Department of Homeland Security and other key federal agencies need to do in order to proactively confront the evolving threat of transnational organized criminal networks?

RESPONSE 2:

As I indicated in my earlier testimony, Mexico's criminal conglomerates pose a threat to the United States. A push to take control of retail drug traffic in the United States could import the horrendous quality of violence seen in Mexico. Clearly, the cartels must be an intelligence-collection priority requiring the same collaboration between national intelligence agencies and local law enforcement that we have seen in the realm of terrorism.

Connections between the criminal conglomerates and terrorist organizations are certainly possible, but I have personally seen very little evidence to indicate an active relationship. Some of the terrorist tactics employed by Mexico's cartels—car bombings, beheadings—resemble Middle Eastern terrorism, but that may be the imitation of tradecraft.

Hezbollah has a presence in Mexico, as it does in the United States, but this appears to be more related to financial crime than to terrorism. And, of course, we have the reported effort by Iranians to enlist the assistance of Mexican criminals in an assassination attempt against the Saudi ambassador in Washington.

There also are prior examples of links between Hezbollah criminal networks and terrorist attacks in Argentina, while Colombia's FARC employed terrorist tactics, engaged in drug trafficking, and had connections with other foreign terrorist organizations. So the idea of links between criminal networks and terrorist organizations is not far-fetched.

Such alliances pose risks to both sides. Organized crime tends to be a conservative provider of illegal goods and services, which, in the case of drugs, provides a continuing cash flow. Alliances

with terrorists bring unwanted heat and additional adversaries, and the rules change from prosecution to destruction. Whatever money terrorists offer must be weighed against the increased risk to continuing profits and organizational survival. Good intelligence about nascent connections will bring opportunities to drive this point home.

For terrorists, allying with criminals increases the risk of betrayal. Large criminal enterprises are more penetrated with informants than are terrorist conspiracies. And lacking the terrorists' organizational zeal, ordinary criminals are more likely to cooperate with authorities.

Again, to deter or preempt any future alliances between criminal conglomerates and terrorist enterprises will require extremely good intelligence and perhaps closer cooperation between those engaged in dealing with organized crime and those engaged in combating terrorism. In addition to overall strategy, there may now be some legal issues worthy of exploring.

POST-HEARING QUESTIONS FROM SENATOR CLAIRE McCASKILL

QUESTION 1:

The panel discussed how our increasingly interconnected world empowers small groups and continues to shape potential threats, including cyber dangers, terrorism, and transnational crime. On 9/11, there was no Facebook or Twitter, and cell phone use was a fraction of what it is today. Technology changes do not just affect our adversaries; they also affect our vulnerabilities and how we as a nation feel the effects of an attack.

a. In your view, over the next 5-10 years, how will the same technological and societal forces that transform the threats we face also impact the effects of an attack or other incident?

b. What new vulnerabilities are we likely to face as a nation over the next 5-10 years?

c. Do such changing technological and societal forces also present new opportunities for resilience?

RESPONSE 1:

This is a fascinating question worthy of lengthy exposition. For now, I can offer only a few observations based on technology's contribution to terrorism in the past.

Technological developments have benefited both terrorists and governments in ways that were not predicted four decades ago when terrorism in its contemporary form emerged as a new mode of conflict. Small arms and bombs, terrorists' primary weapons, however, have changed little since then. Mumbai, a city of 20 million people, was virtually paralyzed for more than two days by ten terrorists armed with essentially a World War II arsenal. The basic chemistry of explosives remains unchanged. There have been incremental developments in miniaturization, less-detectable compounds, and methods of concealment, but an underwear bomb is hardly high-tech.

Shoulder-fired precision-guided missiles have been a concern since the 1970s. They have been used by terrorists, mostly in conflict zones. They remain a concern, especially with large numbers of such weapons missing from Libya's arsenal and perhaps Syria's in the future.

Terrorist use of chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons was a cause for concern 40 years ago. Terrorists in Japan dispersed crude nerve gas, but that turned out to be a one-off event not yet replicated (although al Qaeda reportedly did contemplate the use of poison gas in some of its attacks). Terrorist plots involving very small quantities of ricin continue to surface. None of these have been carried out. But we have the example of the deaths and significant disruption caused by the dispersal of small quantities of anthrax through the mail in 2001.

The deliberate dispersal of contagious diseases remains a health concern. Genetically engineered super pathogens, invulnerable to any treatment, pose a theoretical longer-term threat.

Terrorists have not gone nuclear, although al Qaeda did attempt to acquire fissile material. While nuclear weapons remain a theoretical terrorist ambition, there is no evidence of any current acquisition effort.

Neither have we seen the deliberate dispersal of large quantities of radioactive material. The currently fashionable scenario of terrorists setting off a high-altitude nuclear blast creating an electromagnetic pulse that knocks out all electronics, pushing the country into a post-Apocalyptic stone age, is, in my view, far-fetched.

Doomsday scenarios of terrorists with weapons of mass destruction have remained the property of novelists and Hollywood scriptwriters. Terrorism has escalated over the past 40 years, but not because of technological developments. What terrorists did on September 11, 2001, they could have done (more easily) in 1971.

Because such events have not occurred is no reason to say that they will not occur some time in the future, but it does suggest that they may be either harder to execute than we imagined or less attractive to terrorists than we think.

Modern society is filled with vulnerabilities. Electrical power grids, waterworks, pipelines, air traffic control systems, emergency communications, vital infrastructure managed through the Internet are all seen to be vulnerable to terrorist attack, although we have very few examples of physical sabotage or destruction via the Internet. Again, these targets may be harder to attack than we imagine or terrorists may be more interested in simply racking up high body counts with bombs in easily accessible public places.

Technological developments also have clearly benefited the government side. Thousands of cameras linked to central monitors, including smart cameras that signal suspicious movement or the absence of movement have facilitated remote surveillance. Tracking technologies have greatly improved. Weapons and explosives can be detected at greater distances. Technology enables facial recognition and the detection of subtle physiological indicators of possible malicious intent.

Technological advances have enabled governments to intercept, collect, collate, and analyze vast quantities of data. Information systems serving commercial needs amass tremendous amounts of personal information. In fact, the technology for almost total social control exists, although its implementation is appropriately resisted to preserve civil liberties.

Terrorists have exploited the Internet for purposes of propaganda, recruiting, instruction, and clandestine communications. They have used the Internet to create online communities of like-minded fanatics and to recruit virtual armies. Thus far, however, they have had difficulty in activating these would-be warriors, most of whom seem content to express their convictions vicariously.

The Internet has made instruction in bomb-building more accessible than going to the library or a bookstore, but terrorists in the pre-Internet 1970s built explosive devices that worked, something today's terrorist distance-learners seem to have great difficulty doing. At the same time, the Internet offers authorities insight and investigative leads and has led to the arrest of terrorist plotters. In sum, the Internet is a wash.

So who is ahead overall? Technology theoretically has put more destructive power into the hands of smaller and smaller groups, while at the same time theoretically increasing the power of the state to monitor the activities of its citizens. Technology has not given the terrorists a strategic advantage, nor has it enabled states to effectively suppress terrorist adversaries.

The one dimension where terrorists have benefited is that of cost. Terrorists are free riders. They exploit existing technology. Protecting society is more costly. Aviation security provides the most obvious example. Terrorists need only to build one small bomb and recruit one determined bomber, while society has to protect hundreds of commercial airports, thousands of daily flights, millions of passengers. It is an unequal exchange, leading to the conclusion that terrorists can bankrupt governments with the burden of security—but that hasn't happened either.

QUESTION 2:

Generally speaking, how can we create a government that is more flexible, more nimble, and more capable of adapting to the evolving threats you have described? What general qualities should such an organization have?

RESPONSE 2:

When discussing government, adjectives like "flexible," "nimble," and "adaptive" are not the first that come to mind. Governments are large, unwieldy human enterprises that must represent and reconcile diverse views and interests. It is not easy to get things done in government, especially in a society that is inherently skeptical of government institutions.

At the same time, America's record isn't too bad. Our political institutions have repeatedly co-opted the potential constituencies of past terrorist movements, left and right, while suppressing the terrorists themselves. America has successfully assimilated immigrant populations that came with built-in quarrels connected to the old country.

As for institutions, the 9/11 attacks brought about fundamental changes in laws, government organization, and deeply ingrained bureaucratic cultures to produce a remarkably successful, albeit controversial, worldwide and domestic counterterrorist effort. Not surprisingly, it took several years to do this, and the system is still not optimally effective. It must be reconciled with a free and open society—frankly, I have some misgivings here.

In an effort to prevent further terrorist attacks, this nation has created a vast internal security apparatus, unprecedented in our history, and conceded extraordinary authority to the Executive branch of government. In the likely absence of a clear end to this undertaking, these institutions may accumulate even further power. And that is a cause for concern.

QUESTION 3

Even more important than discussing future threats in the context of this hearing is for government agencies to have the capacity and institutional processes to evaluate future needs on a recurring basis. Do you believe the current processes to produce the QHSR or NIE are sufficient to examine evolving homeland security threats and the government structures we have in place to meet them?

RESPONSE 3

It is a good question, but I can't offer an informed answer here. I have reviewed NIE products in the past, but I believe that the process has changed. And I was not involved in the QHSR. Reflecting the fact that we are dealing with fast-moving subject matter, the number of reports provided by federal agencies to local law enforcement, generally dealing with near-term assessments and immediate trends, has increased enormously.