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Western intelligence officials now believe that there are fewer than 300 surviving members of Al Qaeda, based mainly in Pakistan and Afghanistan, down from a peak of 3,000 to 4,000 fighters in the late 1990s. Most of Al Qaeda's skilled operatives and mid-level field lieutenants have been either killed or captured, depleting the ranks of seasoned fighters and effective managers, and depriving it of significant operational capability. The bulk of Al Qaeda's membership is now composed of cooks, drivers, bodyguards, and foot soldiers.

So profound is Al Qaeda's disarray that one of its field lieutenants, in a message intercepted by U.S. intelligence, had pleaded with bin Laden to come to the group's rescue and provide some leadership. His plea fell on deaf ears.

Its weakness notwithstanding, Al Qaeda groups might succeed in carrying out an attack in the short- to mid-term. If history is a guide, Zawahiri is plotting a spectacular strike to affirm his leadership and Al Qaeda's existence as well—though, despite his repeated threats to strike inside the United States in the last decade, he has failed to do so. Such an attack would mark his passage from the shadow of bin Laden to the limelight as inheritor of global jihad. Troubling as it is, this threat must not blind us to the limited challenge posed by Al Qaeda. Only a miracle will resuscitate transnational jihad of the Al Qaeda variety.

Despite its crippled state, Al Qaeda continues to loom large in the American psyche. To many Americans, 9/11 was nothing less than a turning point in American history—a feeling that has been internalized by official Washington as well. More than a decade later, few Americans and Westerners realize the degree to which their fear of terrorism and terrorists is misplaced. There can be no closure so long as ideology and reality remain confused.

And closure is badly needed: It is high time that the United States end the global war on terror and begin withdrawal of its troops from Muslim lands (President Obama's announcement of a substantial withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan is a step in the right direction). Only then will Al Qaeda, like Osama bin Laden, not only die, but finally be allowed to die. ▀

## Our Waning Confidence

*Anne-Marie Slaughter*

**T**he paradox of 9/11 is that the United States was far more confident in 2002, just a year after the attacks and with the very real prospect of more to come, than it is today, after almost a decade of no further successful attacks in America and growing evidence that Al Qaeda's power is waning. The lasting wound to the American psyche is less the horror of 9/11 itself, searing

as it was, than the dawning recognition that our traditional can-do response to defeating an enemy or fixing a problem is simplistic and inadequate. Yes, the U.S. military, law enforcement, intelligence services, border control, and many other agencies mobilized swiftly to fight and destroy the enemy that attacked us. Their achievement has been enormous and their work must and will continue. But ten years later, it has become clear that the 9/11 attacks were the first wave of a new set of distinctively twenty-first century threats and challenges: globally interconnected, complex, adaptive, unpredictable, and often simultaneous. Sending hundreds of thousands of troops abroad is no answer to those threats; indeed, the billions spent have made it far harder for us to invest in building the resilience, strength, and competitiveness we need at home.

I taught a summer course this year in which I asked the students to read and compare the U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS) documents of 2002, 2006, and 2010. Often derided as abstract exercises that do not in fact guide policy, these documents nonetheless offer valuable quadrennial snapshots of how a specific administration sees both America and the world. The transitions across the three strategies were revelatory. Looking back from the vantage point of 2011, I expected (and thought I remembered) that the 2002 NSS would be fixated on the global war on terror. Not so—it is the 2006 strategy that begins with the grim opening line from President George W. Bush: “America is at war.” By contrast, the 2002 strategy brims with confidence and conviction, captured in its tagline of creating “a balance of power that favors human freedom.” This is the document that brought us preventive war, “coalitions of the willing,” and a determination not only to stop any enemy from “impos[ing] its will” on the United States or its allies and friends, but also to ensure that U.S. forces are “strong enough to dissuade potential adversaries from pursuing a military build-up in hopes of surpassing” our power. In other words, don’t even *think* about taking us on. As much as I disagree with the substance of the strategy, I marvel at the mindset that saw the 9/11 attacks as but the latest obstacles that the United States would speedily and mightily overcome.

Note that the 2002 strategy was issued in September of that year, after we had toppled the Taliban in a short and decisive military campaign, but before we invaded Iraq. The attacks of 9/11 were terrible, and the nation would henceforth be much more focused on fighting terrorism, but we had responded quickly and effectively and had both the Taliban and Al Qaeda on

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the run. The world was still ours for the making. In President Bush's phrase, "The United States will use this moment of opportunity to extend the benefits of freedom across the globe."

Four years later, the 2006 NSS is consumed by the global war on terror—that vain effort to stuff a twenty-first-century networked global threat into a twentieth-century Cold War frame. Other than conveniently and falsely linking the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, it was a frame that not only obscured major geopolitical shifts in Asia, Latin America, and Africa but also relegated the central challenges of the twenty-first century to the periphery. At the very end, the final two-page section is captioned, "Engage the Opportunities and Confront the Challenges of Globalization." Here at last comes mention of pandemics, environmental destruction, and illicit trade in drugs, nuclear materials, human beings, and

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sex. Over the four years that followed, the "challenges of globalization" proceeded to bring us the global financial crisis; the outbreak of the H1N1 virus; veterans of the Sunni Iraqi insurgency spreading terrorist techniques across Europe and the Arab peninsula; drug cartels spreading violence and weakening state institutions from Mexico

through Central America to West Africa; and morally and politically dangerous levels of food insecurity caused by global investments in biofuels, high oil prices, and climate-change induced droughts and floods.

Bush's afterthoughts thus necessarily became Obama's starting point. The 2010 strategy strikes a completely different chord; its bumper sticker is "National Renewal and Global Leadership." The document itself makes explicit that national renewal is a prerequisite for continued global leadership. For President Obama, Americans "live in a time of sweeping change" and must rise to meet and shape the transition. Globalization has brought opportunity, democracy, and peace among great powers. But it "has also intensified the dangers we face—from international terrorism and the spread of deadly technologies, to economic upheaval and a changing climate." His is a vision of possibility but also of great uncertainty, of global problems that *all* nations must do their part to help solve. The Obama mantra, for all would-be players on the global stage, is "with power comes responsibility."

A striking sign of the change that has occurred is that the 2010 NSS's broader outlook is shared by at least some members of the military. Captain Wayne Porter and Colonel Mark Mykleby wrote an article this past spring while serving

as staff members to Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mike Mullen (albeit in their personal capacity). Published under the pseudonym “Mr. Y”—a reference to George Kennan’s classic 1946 article on the Soviet Union, published under the byline “X”—it makes the case for “a national strategic narrative,” a document that would explain to Americans where the United States is going in the world and how it can get there. The crux of their argument is that we have moved from a closed system that is not subject to external shocks and in which it was at least broadly possible to think about directing and controlling events, to an open system that is exposed to unpredictable external forces and in which the best we can hope for is to build reserves of credible influence that will allow us to shape and respond effectively to ever-accelerating global forces. Credible influence, in turn, requires resilience, adaptability, sustainability, competitiveness, and fealty to our values. We face no challenge greater than the renewal of our own strength and spirit.

Those were qualities we seemed to have in abundance in the days of grief and solidarity immediately following the 9/11 attacks. That sense of unity and national purpose dissipated as life returned to normal. “Terror” did not prove a foe capable of rallying the nation. But a strategy of “national renewal and global leadership” is also insufficient unless it can be tied directly to a larger narrative that connects future American goals with past American values and can point to concrete examples of success. I propose a narrative of self-reliance, sustainability, and stewardship, building on the growing number of bottom-up community initiatives to renew natural, material, and spiritual resources. September 11 focused the nation on an external enemy attacking our values and our way of life. A decade later, the will to renew must come from within. ▀

## From Ground Zero to Tahrir Square

*Avishai Margalit*

**W**illiam Hague, the British foreign secretary, recently made three interesting claims: The Arab Spring is more of a defining event of our time than 9/11; the Arab Spring was “the answer to some of the anger of 9/11, the violence of 9/11”; and “the real nature of the Arab world is expressed in Tahrir Square, not at Ground Zero.”

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