Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)

“The Evolving Terrorist Threat and the Importance of Intelligence to Protect the Homeland”

Introduction of CSIS Research Paper:
The Transformed Threat of al-Qaida

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Location: Washington, D.C.

Time: 8:35 a.m. EDT
Date: Wednesday, September 7, 2011

Transcript by
Federal News Service
Washington, D.C.
JOSEPH D. ROZEK (?): Good morning, and thanks for coming out on this rainy Washington morning. I had the honor introducing the first panel today, and if they’ll come out on stage?

The first panel will cover – will unveil and discuss with you the latest thought leadership paper from CSIS, “Confronting an Uncertain Threat: The Future of Al Qaeda and Associated Movements.” I’m going to very brief in my introductions. These three gentlemen are steeped in terrorism – counterterrorism. I’ve known them in the past. First and foremost would be the moderator, Juan Zarate, who was the deputy assistant to the president and deputy national security adviser for combatting terrorism; Tom Sanderson, former defense intelligence analyst for SAIC who has conducted several in-depth studies of terrorist groups for DIA; and Juan – and Ozzie Nelson, who is a former naval pilot, helicopter-type pilot. He also served on the National Security Council where he drove our nation’s strategy in maritime counterterrorism and is a – (inaudible) – of NCTC.

Juan?

JUAN ZARATE: Thank you, Joe.

Good morning, everyone.

AUDIENCE MEMBERS: Good morning.

MR. ZARATE: Good to see you all. It’s really an honor to be here, to be a part of this incredible conference today. Really a pleasure for us and a proud moment for us as well to unveil the report, “Confronting an Uncertain Threat: The Future of Al Qaeda and Associated Movements,” which is the culmination of a year-long study undertaken by Tom and Ozzie and overseen by Arnaud de Borchgrave and myself at CSIS, looking at the future of al-Qaida.

This is the culmination of a year-long series of products and work, the first product being a report in February of this year, looking at the state of al-Qaida, entitled, “A Threat Transformed.” Research was then conducted in nearly 20 countries around the world, case studies for 10 movements associated with al-Qaida, culminating then in this report, which looks to the future of the movement, not just in the next year or two, but looking out to 2025.

I want to thank the sponsors of the report that not only supported us financially and otherwise but also pushed us to look to the future of these movements – the Department of Defense, the government of Singapore – and I want to thank them for being here today. I also want to thank the senior advisory group members, a group of esteemed experts,
counterterrorism-intelligence futurists from around the world who helped advise and supervise the study. Some of them are here today.

So we’re really honored to be here today, and I want to thank Ozzie and Tom for their fine work.

The report, I think, is an important one for three principal reasons. The first, it deals, I think, in a very serious and rigorous way with what lies beyond the al-Qaida that we’ve known to date. The al-Qaida of 2011 is not the al-Qaida of 2001. And certainly looking out to the future of the movement requires in-depth study and some rigor, and this study does that. Secondly, it provides a sense of what the landscape may look like in the future, given past factors, also looking at the future environment. Finally, it challenges, I think, policymakers not just in the United States but around the world to imagine what the end of al-Qaida looks like and how we can condition the environment and the ecosystem so that that end actually comes to pass. And so I’m excited about the study. I think it’s a – an important report coming on the 10-year anniversary of 9/11 and something that is worthy of study.

The report is structured and broken up in four principal categories, and we’ll use that as the construct for our discussion here. You have the future environment looked at and studied, the future paradigms of al-Qaida, strategic shocks, and then policy recommendations, and so that will be the basis of our discussion. I’m going to pose some questions to Tom and Ozzie about the report. We’re going to welcome questions from the audience. I would ask you to submit your questions in writing; we’re not going to have a lot of time, but if you will use the note section in the back of your program to submit questions, and I’ll submit those to Tom and Ozzie, and we’ll take those at the end of this presentation.

So, with that, I’d like start, Tom, with you. You know, there’s a lot of debate, Tom, about the end of al-Qaida, especially with the death of bin Laden. Now we’re looking at the 10-year anniversary of 9/11. Tell us a little bit about the study and what it says about the current state of al-Qaida and tell us as well what the case study reviews told us about not just current state, but how this framed the future of al-Qaida study.

THOMAS M. SANDERSON: Absolutely, Juan.

First, I’d like to thank you for all your tremendous work. You and Arnaud de Borchgrave, my boss, provided invaluable guidance and insight throughout the course of the study, and I’d also like to give a special thanks to David Gordon and to Ben Bodurian and all the research staff who really brought this all together. And it was really quite a – quite tremendous effort.

Juan, as the report’s title says, it is an uncertain threat. We’ve watched al-Qaida transform from a fairly well-defined hierarchical organization, then into a network of networks and eventually into an ideologically driven movement, and that certainly contributes to the challenge of identifying and characterizing the threat in discrete terms. Al-Qaida and associated movements presents a complex challenge to all in the U.S. and those who seek to confront it. We’ve seen in recent months, weeks and even in days senior al-Qaida leaders – at least al-Qaida
core in Pakistan, being killed or captured. And many believe that we’re seeing al-Qaida core at a tipping point, and while that may be very encouraging, I think there’s still a lot to worry about, and we heard some of that from Secretary Napolitano.

We have to very mindful of some of the realities that we see out there. The al-Qaida message was sown a long time ago; that it is very difficult to dislodge. Senior al-Qaida associated groups, al-Shabab in Somalia; Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, in Mali and Algeria; al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula, in Yemen; several other groups, Lashkar-e-Taiba in Pakistan – all are very potent and very serious threats and showing little sign of going away. In fact, I think a lot of them are well-positioned to persist or grow as threats. Furthermore, we have a(n) uncomfortable number of recent homegrown threats, something that Ozzie Nelson, my colleague at CSIS, has done a tremendous amount of work on, and we’ve seen that pop up with uncomfortable regularity over the past few months. So we do have this diminution of the threat of al-Qaida core, but we have the affiliates and the homegrowns rising in their place.

So, if you take a look at that threat and look into the future environment, you see a number of problem that – or external factors to al-Qaida that can exacerbate the challenge that we see today. Among those are demographics, resource challenges, changes in the global balance of power, innovations in technology, interconnectivity, challenges posed by identity and, of course, governance. If you take that together, the universe of al-Qaida threats certainly remains potent, not well understood enough, fueled by persistent ideology; global conditions that will enable strategy, recruitment and fundraising and communications for them. So I would say there’s some positives, but quite a few negatives that remain.

Second half of your question dealt with the case studies. Now we conducted case studies on al-Qaida core, on the homegrown threat, and then on a series of al-Qaida-affiliated groups. And in order to look forward into the future, into 2025, it’s a tremendous challenge. But you can do that and use one of the few tools at hand and that is to look historically at some of the factors that impacted the trajectories of al-Qaida and other terror groups.

So what we did is we looked at factors such as charismatic leadership, foreign troop presence, the sponsorship from outside groups, safe havens; and then in order to project in the future with some accuracy, we had to carry those factors forward in order to – excuse me – in order to help define and make our five paradigms or five scenarios in the future a reality. So that’s why we did the case studies.

Contributing to that or complementing our effort to get a real sense of what’s happening presently and in the future is the fieldwork that we did. Ozzie and I, Dave Gordon and Zack Fellman went to Europe, spent a month in Africa, travelling across six countries – Southeast Asia, South Asia, Central Asia and Russia, and western China in Xinjiang – to look at that. So taken together, we took those historical factors, the future paradigms, defined those factors going forward, the fieldwork and the current threat assessment of al-Qaida and that’s how we came up with what we see as the threat today.

MR. ZARATE: Perfect. Tremendous amount of work.
Ozzie, a core part of the study is looking at potential paradigms for the evolution of al-Qaida and associated movements. Can you talk a little bit about what those paradigms look like and what the study projects in terms of potentials for the future of al-Qaida?

RICK “OZZIE” NELSON: Sure, thank you, Juan. And again, thanks to all my colleagues who helped participate on the study; really happy with how it turned out.

We – obviously there’s an infinite number of possibilities of how al-Qaida might look in the future. Our goal was to put a couple – a sample set out there for policymakers, for analysts to react to: to say, ah, that’s never going to happen, or that could happen, but maybe in a different time or a different place and different location. And obviously extrapolating from where we are now in history to where we may be in 2025 is a really poor predictor. But you have to base it somewhere, and that’s where we kind of started with al-Qaida core and the construct that Tom laid out.

So we put ourselves in 2025 and we looked around and said, what could al-Qaida look like? The first scenario is one, and we call it the reemergence of al-Qaida core. We’re obviously being very successful, as been reported in the media, about bringing the end of al-Qaida core. What if there’s a construct where, in another part of the world, we see al-Qaida come back in 2025? It is a centralized movement as it once was 10 or 15 years ago, and it is a global leader of this – of this jihadist movement.

The second scenario is one we call the rise of the affiliates. Obviously it’s, you know – the affiliates – the al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula pose the greatest threat in many ways to the United States. Well, we’re talking about a group of militant – militant groups that are aligned and are working not so much under a common ideology or common narrative the al-Qaida core brings, but more of a – relationships by convenience, a sharing of tactics, techniques, procedures and resources. And again, we’re pointing – we’re talking about al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula, al-Shabab and al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb.

The third scenario, one – as just Tom pointed out, that we’ve written about in the past, that I find most troubling, is the rise of the individual or small cell domestically inside Western countries in particular, even any democracy. And it’s these individuals that are inspired by a narrative, by a common ideology, but aren’t receiving any operational guidance per se. These are the individuals that – you know, some people say that there’s no such thing as self-radicalization – but these are individuals that were radicalized through the Internet; they would communicate through the Internet, as we’ve seen with how social media’s been used over the last month or so; and then responding and going to – crossing the line and going to violent action.

Scenario number four is where we see al-Qaida take over a role as a state actor, where you see them carve out some part of a country or even an entire country, where they’re actually providing governance or providing judicial services or providing social services. They have a militia, and they’re actually operating and have taken over that country.

And then the last scenario’s kind of a little bit different than the first four, in that we say a scenario where al-Qaida kind of goes away: not that Islamic militancy goes away, but the
common ideology, the common narrative that al-Qaida needs, which is that the U.S. and the
West are at war with Islam, kind of disintegrates and the threat of Islamic militancy goes back to
the regional and even the local level. And we kind of looked at the scenario slightly differently
so that we could, you know, pose some ways of maybe we can get out of our way – and the U.S.
government, the international community – how we can precipitate the end of al-Qaida and
maybe not take actions that may keep that from happening.

MR. ZARATE: That’s good, Ozzie, and I think one of the interesting things about the
report, too, is that the conclusion that these paradigms aren’t mutually exclusive: that you could
have the emergence of a number of them at the same time or in ways that affect each other.

MR. NELSON: Absolutely.

MR. ZARATE: It’s interesting. Tom, again, predicting the future’s impossible and
proves folly when you try to do it. But the report not only sets out the paradigms but also sets
out future shocks that could impact the evolution, not just of al-Qaida but how the United States
and other countries deal with the problem. Can you talk a little bit about that section and why it
was important?

MR. SANDERSON: Absolutely.

These are what we call strategic surprises. Now, the report has a component that looks at
the future environment in which we lay out a number of factors that we can look at in a linear
fashion and sort of determine how they may affect and impact the environment – define it in
2025. But what we also understand is that there are surprises that are out there. They may be
events that are not unknown to us or not a surprise, but when they happen, they provide
tremendous change.

Some of the examples related to al-Qaida would certainly be the 2006 invasion of
Somalia by Ethiopian forces. This really propelled al-Shabab to the forefront. Also the U.S.
invasion of Iraq energized a foreign fighter pipeline. It also helped create al-Qaida in Iraq.
Those are some of the examples that we have to think about as we move forward with the – with
the paradigms that Ozzie laid out. Some that are better known historically – the collapse of the
Soviet Union, the introduction of nuclear weapons – these are things that quickly changed
mindsets, changed calculations and changed how people viewed the environment. So we know
that, even with the five paradigms – the five scenarios that we put out there, there could be things
that would change it. And so we listed and developed a number of these – seven of them – and
we also understand that this number is basically infinite. You could come up with all sorts of
different things. But we did this so that we could show that projections about 2025, as detailed
as we can make them, can change quickly and overnight and in profound ways.

MR. ZARATE: We had some fun thinking about this.

MR. SANDERSON: We sure – we sure did. We came up with quite a few provocative
strategic shocks or surprises. The first – and again, some of these are not unpredictable, but
when they happen, they just bring dramatic change. So keep that in mind, please.
Al-Qaida and associated movements detonating a weapon of mass destruction: We can all imagine what sort of impact that would have on counterterrorism planning, on relationships, on the movement of people, on intelligence. And that would be tremendously disruptive.

One scenario is Pakistani and Saudi Arabian governments falling to radical forces and what this dramatic development would be, and a lot of people say this is unlikely. But I’d like to remind people, how many people predicted the Arab Spring? And that is a very strong example of how you need to understand that things can come essentially out of the blue. So that was a second one that we had.

We saw some terrible violence in Norway just a couple of weeks ago. What if there is widespread violence against Muslim communities across the Europe and this draws fighters from around the world into Europe? This could be precipitated by a depression in Europe. But I think actually we dodged a bullet when the gunman in Norway, as terrible it was for him to kill those individuals, if he had focused or targeted Muslim communities in Oslo or other places, then I think we would have had a tremendous battle ongoing.

Israel and Iran going to war: Again, not a surprise; people talk about this all the time. But if it were to happen, the calculations we have, I think, would go out the window.

Palestinian statehood and the recognition of Israel: What would this do, similar to the Arab Spring – what would it do to al-Qaida’s ideology and to their mantra? It would really upset it in significant ways.

One of the more interesting ones that we came up was the dissolution of OPEC, combined with advances in hydrocarbon technology and efficiency and product design, and what this would do if certain states, particularly in the Middle East and in the Persian Gulf, were marginalized by this and what impact that would have on al-Qaida and associated movements.

The final one we came up with is a – is a favorite of mine and, that is, al-Qaida striking China. And I think a lot of people would say that is a tremendous surprise, but think about it this way – and you also look at future environment description of a global shift in power: If you are al-Qaida and you are looking out at the far enemy, those states or those powers that perpetuate bad government – governance in the eyes of al-Qaida and you think about, who’s most damaging to the global Muslim community, to the Ummah? Well, the United States, Western Europe – these are typically the countries that al-Qaida identifies.

But, as that power shifts to the East and you think about China’s footprint around the world, they also are perpetuating governments that are seen as inimical to al-Qaida’s strategy and to their narrative. And not only that, do you have – you have China in western province of Xinjiang actually making it – making life pretty difficult to Muslim communities and to the – known as the Uighurs out there. And I went out there and went to the border with Tajikistan, looked at the communities out there, and there’s a tremendous amount of discord. So if you’re al-Qaida and you’re thinking about who is most difficult for you in the future, it could in fact be
China because not only does it combine the issue of supporting apostate governments in the Middle East, but it’s also killing or imprisoning Muslims at home.

MR. ZARATE: And China racing for resources around the world.

MR. SANDERSON: Absolutely.

MR. ZARATE: And we’ve seen al-Qaida target Chinese sites. We saw this in Norway a year ago.

MR. SANDERSON: Absolutely. And you do have some militants from Western China in the East Turkestan Islamic Movement who have gone down in to Pakistan; they’ve conducted attacks alongside the Taliban and al-Qaida. So this is not too far-fetched. It is a possibility.

MR. ZARATE: Interesting.

Ozzie, I think one of the most challenging parts of this study is the – kind of the so what? What do you do about all this section, sort of the policy recommendations. Can you talk a little bit about some of the core recommendations? Because I think sometimes there’s a view out there that less is more or that the West should not do anything, that we should allow al-Qaida to implode, to allow its ideology to wither and die. Talk about the policy recommendations and conclusions section, if you could.

MR. NELSON: Thanks, Juan.

This is a challenging. If the U.S. government/international community has moved – started to move in this direction in many ways. So to some of you in the audience, this may not be anything new. We advocate for a more aggressive and more expedient pursuit of these objectives.

The first one that we talk about is what we call a global over-watch construct. And that is, since September 11th, a majority of our counterterrorism policies have been grounded in a few key hot spots, and our resources have been allocated to basically two hot spots: Iraq and Afghanistan. But that’s no longer a viable CT, counterterrorism construct, for obvious reasons. We don’t have the political capital to do that anymore; we don’t have the economic or financial capital to do that anymore. But we still have to position ourselves to be against, to fight the threat of terrorism and particularly the al-Qaida brand of terrorism. And what we call for is an increase of these resources outside of those areas, and so that the U.S. government and its international partners establish capabilities well beyond the trouble spots, to anticipate where that might be.

And this doesn’t mean necessarily building capabilities in countries. It means enhancing our international partnerships and our relationships, law enforcement constructs, civil-military relationships, and even the intelligence and the pure military relationships as well so that we’re in a proactive and more ahead of – ahead of the threat.
One of things that’s been – our policy – counterterrorism policies, throughout their history arguably, have been plagued by is that we get full-fledged commitment of resources after the fact. What we need to do is commit these resources earlier on in the front – in front of the – in front of the threat and with the theory that over time this will cost us less money, and we’ll be able to keep the threats from actually metastasizing themselves. And so what we – that’s the overarching construct.

And then we go – and we note that – some of the common themes from all of the scenarios that we pick out, that the U.S. government and, again, the international community have to focus on, and these are things no matter how al-Qaida moves forward that are so key to ensuring the ultimate demise of the organization. And the first is directed action against the leadership.

Leadership remains incredibly important to any organization. And certainly leaderships can be replenished, but if you’re spending time trying to replenish your leadership, you’re not spending time planning and conducting attacks. And if you look at bin Laden, one of the things that we don’t know – we don’t know if al-Qaida is – actually has achieved the status of a self-sustaining movement yet or if it’s actually going to fail with the fall of his cult of personality. And that’s something we’re going to have to see going forward.

The second is the issue of networking. Obviously a lot of the militants that we face now developed relationships primarily in Afghanistan during the Soviet war. Where else might these relationships and this networking being created? Is it happening in Yemen right now? Is it happening in Somalia? These are the individuals who are going to get the operational experience that perhaps 10 or 15 or 20 years from now can lead that resurgent al-Qaida – resurgent al-Qaida core that we mentioned earlier on.

The third issue that we talk about is the issue of safe havens. This is not a new issue to the U.S. government and the international community, but not enough is being done. And we’re not just talking about physical safe havens, we’re talking about micro-havens, such as refugee camps, micro – we’re talking about virtual safe havens, such as the Internet. We have to be much more aggressive and assertive in what we’re doing to eliminate militant activity in those – in those areas.

And then lastly and arguably most importantly is what the United States government has struggled with, I think, and I thought that was one of the ironic pieces out of the Abbottabad intelligence was that bin Laden also that they were losing the strategic communication campaign, and the whole time the U.S. government thinks that they’re losing. So somebody’s got to be winning, but over at the end of time, the al-Qaida movement is inspired by the narrative. The toxic narrative is the fuel for this larger movement, and we need to continue to place our resources against that, to eliminate that the U.S. and the West is at war with Islam, in order, once and for all, to remove the fuel. And by removing that fuel, that larger narrative that unites all these disparate groups, it will push the threat back down to the regional, back down to the local level ultimately, and that’s the goal with this – with this – with that kind of construct.

MR. ZARATE: Very good. That’s a great overview. Thank you both.
Now we’re going to open it up for questions, Rob. We’ve got a couple handwritten. If you have – we’ve got about 10 minutes, I think. So if you have any more, Rob can take those.

Let me just take the moderator’s prerogative and ask one. One criticism of this report could be – somebody who doesn’t read it could say, look, you’re arguing for perpetual war here. You’re assuming that al-Qaida will actually exist and its ideology will have resonance in 2025. So is it – is this a prescription for perpetual war?

MR. SANDERSON: Well, Juan, I would answer by saying many of the conditions that contributed to the rise of al-Qaida and to the rise of al-Qaida-associated movements and to the homegrowns still exist and they are very likely to exist. As we go to a world of 9 billion people over the next 30, 40 years, constrained resources, the demographics, the population bulges, the continued marginalization ethnically, socially, politically, economically of Muslim communities, but lots of others as well, you’re likely to see individuals who will be susceptible to the messages that al-Qaida puts out there. And I think that’s a reality, no doubt about it. I think it’s great and we should recognize the advances that we’ve made against this group and its network. But nonetheless, so many of those factors will persist.

MR. ZARATE: Good.

All right, Ozzie, I’ve got a specific question for you from the audience.

MR. NELSON: (Chuckles.)

MR. ZARATE: Can you expand on the concern about domestic – U.S. citizens who embrace radical, violent teaching by Muslim leaders and others in the U.S. similar to the Fort Hood case? What more can be done to monitor and to prevent such activities?

MR. NELSON: No, that’s a great question. I think that the issue of domestic extremism, radicalization is going to challenge the United States and challenge our discussion about civil liberties and privacy and security like no other issue has because that’s the crux of the issue – is really that balance. And it makes the law enforcement’s community job almost impossible because of this – you know, some – an organization like the FBI has to protect the individual rights, you now, protect our civil rights, but at the same time, they also have the mission of preventing attacks, terrorist attacks inside the United States. So if they wait too long to take action, they fail in their mission. If they get too early in the cycle, then there’s people who say they were entrapped, and the FBI was – you know, they wouldn’t have conducted these attacks. Makes it very difficult.

And what ultimately you’re trying to do is that you have an individual who’s radicalizing, who’s online and getting this content, and he takes that jump from rhetoric to violent action. And the law enforcement community has to determine when that actually is going to happen, and it’s almost impossible. So some of the things that we’re going to have to do is basically twofold: One is whatever we – resources we think that we’re putting against the Internet, it’s simply not enough. And it doesn’t mean, you know – it doesn’t necessarily mean taking down websites and
violating people’s civil rights; that’s not what it means. It means patrolling the Internet, you
know, and treating the Internet as a space that’s being to use to incite violence and to get people
to cross that line from rhetoric to violent action, and we have to understand that’s what it’s being
used from.

And then the other thing we need to focus on too is these intermediaries, these individuals
who may be disenfranchised for whatever reason, that use the Internet to find likeminded
individuals to further become disenfranchised. But ultimately what’s required is for an external
actor to come in and get them to cross that line from violent rhetoric to violent action. And that’s
the individual like Anwar al-Awlaki, a U.S. citizen, a very – a policy problem for the United
States. What do you do with Anwar al-Awlakis of the world? We need to have a very clear and
distinct policy about those types of individuals that are getting these Americans to cross that line
to violence.

MR. ZARATE: And I think there’s some very interesting studies under way at places
like MIT and elsewhere, looking at the role of influencers in social media and online and how
that influences people’s behavior and mobilizes individuals.

I’ve got a couple questions here that are related. Let me try to fuse them.

This part asks about the study folks here and al-Qaida obviously and Sunni radical
organizations. Did you also consider other non-Sunni groups, such as Hezbollah? And then
related to that a question about, you know, as the CT threat has changed, what groups still
present a direct threat to the United States as we look at the landscape?

MR. : OK. Good.

MR. SANDERSON: Well, I’ll give my own answer, and then Ozzie can add his.

We had limited resources, limited scope and limited time despite having a superb
advisory group and research team; can only look at certain at certain issues and that was – the
topic we decided was al-Qaida and associated movements and that is a huge group of individuals
and groups to look at. So I –

MR. ZARATE: And by that, again, to reiterate, it’s not just the al-Qaida core.

MR. SANDERSON: Yeah. Sure.

MR. ZARATE: It’s also the inspired individuals – (inaudible) – itself.

MR. SANDERSON: AQAP in Yemen, Jemaah Islamiyah in Indonesia, Lashkar-e-Taiba
in Pakistan, AQI in Iraq – lots of groups and that included a lot of travel. So we couldn’t take
the entire universe of terrorism that’s out there. But having said that, you know, we recognize
Hezbollah as a serious threat and also secular terrorism round the world is also a very significant
threat.
As far as groups that do continue to serve as a threat – that was the second part of the question –

MR. ZARATE: Right.

MR. SANDERSON: – there’s no doubt about it that AQAP, al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula, is a serious threat. Many people think it’s more significant than al-Qaida core. They’re able to get an individual on an airplane into the United States who nearly blew himself up and over 200 passengers, December 25th, 2009. They tried to – and with the thanks – thanks to the help of the Saudi intelligence service, blew two of their plans to send toner cartridges with bombs in them into aircraft over the United States. So a group like that is very significant.

Al-Qaida in Iraq’s still doing a tremendous amount of mayhem and then al-Shabab in Somalia. But I think Ozzie could point to a few others as well.

MR. NELSON: Thanks. You know, Juan, the group that troubles me the most – obviously al-Qaida Arabian Peninsula – as Tom – is a very direct threat to the United States. But the one, I think, ultimately has the most power to change the map geopolitically is Lashkar-e-Taiba in Pakistan – that’s an organization that Juan and I talked about – because they have the ability to basically bring two nation-states to nuclear confrontation, given they’re – and they’re highly capable, they’re very skilled, and they have the support arguably of a nation-state. I find that particularly troubling.

Inside the United States, I think it’s important, as we tackle this issue of this – of this Islamist militancy or this embrace of the al-Qaida ideology inside the United States, we look at extremism at general. One of the scenarios that I use – I ask individuals when was the last time there was a domestic act of terrorism using – an act of terrorism using an airplane inside the United States? And you know, people say, well, it was 9/11. Well, actually, in my opinion, it was Joseph Stack, the individual who stole – well, rented a Cessna, equipped it to explode, crash it in the IRS building and killed two federal employees. Now that hasn’t been determined to be an act of terrorism; I think that it is. If he had been a – an Arab male or a Muslim, we would be viewing that incident very, very differently. So the issue of extremism inside the United States is, I find, particularly problematic.

MR. SANDERSON: Juan, I would just add one thing. I see my former boss Steve Raider (ph) here, and we looked at WMD terrorism starting in 1998, before the Defense Intelligence Agency, and the three case studies that we looked at were not Islamist terrorism. They were the Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh cult that used salmonella in Oregon, the Aum Shinrikyo cult in Japan, and then the Sri Lankan – the Tamil Tigers use of chlorine gas against the Sri Lankan armed forces. So there is a good indicator that terrorism goes well beyond al-Qaida and its associated movements.

MR. NELSON (?): Right.

MR. ZARATE: And in the future environment, a blending of these threats could be a huge threat and problem.
I think we only have a couple minutes left. There’s one very specific question here about specific types of weapons, radio frequency weapons. I want to expand it; just quickly get a 10-second, 15-second answer from each of you about the role of technology in the future and impacting al-Qaeda and the study. How did – how did you incorporate technology into this?

MR. NELSON: I mean – well, two issues first: There’s widespread, you know, acknowledgement of the role of intersocial media and the Internet. Again, it is – it is changing faster than our policy and our laws can; and our senior leaders still, I don’t think, understand and comprehend the Internet and the power of the Internet and social media like the digital natives who have grown up with it. And that’s something that we have to change.

And the second, which we touch on a little bit and Tom just did as well is the issue of the WMD. This technology, particularly as it relates to biological weapons, is now widely available on the Internet. It empowers the individual to take action for whatever cause they may (see ?).

MR. SANDERSON: Well, and technology, as we all know, is neutral. The good guys and the bad guys can use it. And I think that we’re putting power out there that individuals can take up, as Hank Crumpton says, and give them the power that only states had in the past. And I think that’s dangerous, and I think that individuals can manipulate that technology faster than we can. Improvised explosive devices – think about how quickly insurgents in Iraq were able to modify those and how slow and how long the response was by the United States to counter that. So I think actually technology is often to the advantage of terrorists before it is to the United States or those confronting it.

MR. ZARATE: Fantastic.

I’ll just note for the audience and for folks who may be watching on TV that the – there’s a text box – and actually some very good text boxes in here on different issues – terrorist financing. But there’s one on the new social media and AQAM future on page 22.

And then finally there was a final question on the impact of the Arab Spring on AQAM. We don’t have time for it, but I will point you to another text box on page(s) eight and nine as well as to an article that Dave Gordon and I co-wrote in The Washington Quarterly on that topic.

So, with that, I want to thank you all. We want to thank the audience and everyone for bearing with us on the unveiling of this very important report, again, “Confronting an Uncertain Threat: The Future of Al Qaeda and Associated Movements,” looking out to 2025.

Tom, Ozzie, research team, everybody involved – we want to thank you again. Thanks to the sponsors. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

MR. : Thank you.

(END)