Assessing the Evolving Threat of Terrorism

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Assessing the Evolving Threat of Terrorism

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Abstract

The “war on terror” has exclusively focused on transnational terrorism since the hijackings of 9/11. Based on almost 40 years of data, this article shows that domestic terrorism poses a much greater threat to the world community. Thus, this focus needs to be reconsidered, especially because recent research shows that domestic terrorism spills over into transnational terrorism. This article also argues that homeland security and the dominance of religious fundamentalist terrorists are making the hardest-to-defend targets – private parties – the target of choice after 1999. Moreover, terrorists are increasing favoring attacking people over property. Even though terrorism murders relatively few people, it poses a supreme collective action problem for the world community.
1. Introduction

Since the four hijackings on 11 September 2001 (henceforth, 9/11), the world has spent hundreds of billions of dollars on counterterrorism measures (Sandler et al., 2009). For fiscal year 2011, the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) budget is $56 billion, with about two-thirds earmarked for homeland security against terrorism (US DHS, 2011). US proactive military operations in Afghanistan have been more costly than defensive safeguards at home. There are many other terrorism-related expenditures on military action, defensive measures, intelligence, and police investigations throughout the world. Does the threat of terrorism warrant ever-increasing outlays at a time when many industrialized countries are facing debt crises?

The daring assassination raid by Navy Seals on Osama bin Laden’s Abbottabad compound in Pakistan on 1 May 2011, followed a month later by the drone attack killing Ilyas Kashmiri (a top al-Qaida strategist), raises the question as to the current threat of terrorism. Decades of enhanced counterterrorism expenditures worldwide bring up other questions. How has the terrorism threat evolved since the start of the modern era of transnational terrorism, traced back to a high-profile hijacking of an El Al flight on 22 July 1968 (Hoffman, 2006)? What form of terrorism – domestic or transnational – is becoming more worrisome? Transnational terrorism concerns entities (e.g., victims) and the interests of two or more countries. How have terrorists adapted to homeland security and the “war on terror” during the post-9/11 era? How has the changing dominance of terrorist preferences from leftists to religious fundamentalists influenced the threat of terrorism? Are we safer today than yesterday?

The primary purpose of this article is to provide answers to these and other questions involving the threat of terrorism. Based on terrorist event data sets, we provide an assessment of the evolving threat of domestic and transnational terrorism. This assessment is often against conventional wisdom, which guides policy. In making our assessment, we account for the
rational response of terrorists to enhanced defensive and offensive counterterrorism measures, introduced before and after 9/11. In addition, we account for the changing orientation of transnational terrorists (Rapoport, 2004). What emerges from our study is a mixed picture with good (e.g., fewer transnational terrorist attacks since the mid-1990s) and bad news (e.g., each terrorist incident is more likely to end in death or injury). Rising casualties are due, in part, to the greater use of suicide terrorist attacks after 2000 (Enders and Sandler, 2012; Pape, 2005). Bad news also involves terrorists switching their attacks from property to people as defensive actions are better at guarding buildings than people (Brandt and Sandler, 2010, 2011). Over time, the most vulnerable and least defendable target of private parties is attracting a greater share of terrorist attacks. Domestic terrorism is shown to pose an ever-increasing threat, particularly as transnational terrorist incidents have declined in number. The war on terror has killed or captured many terrorists, but this war has also altered who is at risk with ominous consequences. Moreover, this war has concentrated on transnational terrorism even though domestic terrorism appears to be the growing threat. To evaluate the war on terror, society must compare the mounting costs of the war and its concomitant lost freedoms (Dreher et al., 2010; Piazza and Walsh, 2009) to the associated benefits. These benefits hinge on difficult counterfactual calculations – i.e., the level of terrorism had such countermeasures not been taken (Sandler et al., 2009, 2011).

2. Terrorism and counterterrorism

Terrorism is the premeditated use or threat to use violence by individuals or subnational groups in order to obtain a political or social objective through the intimidation of a large audience beyond that of the immediate victim. To qualify as terrorism, the violence must be directed to achieving political or social aims. Without such aims, violence may be intended for personal
gain and, as such, constitutes a criminal act. The modern study of terrorism excludes state terrorism or acts of terrorism perpetrated by a government (e.g., Stalin’s reign of terror); hence, terrorist perpetrators are individuals or substate actors. Incidents involving state sponsorship of a terrorist group are, however, considered to be terrorist acts. This sponsorship may consist of government-supplied resources, intelligence, safe haven, or logistical support (Mickolus, 1989). Terrorists want to intimidate a large audience, so that public pressure is applied to officeholders to concede to terrorist demands for change. By making their acts appear to be random, terrorists seek to amplify the true risks to the public. But, in fact, terrorist acts are well planned and adjust for risks stemming from government and private protective measures (Landes, 1978; Sandler et al., 1983). Terrorism is outside the context of legitimate warfare because of its focus on targeting noncombatants, including military personnel in passive settings (e.g., planting a bomb under the car of a US soldier stationed in Germany). Terrorism may arise from myriad causes, including foreign policy decisions (see, e.g., Dreher and Gassebner 2008; Savun and Phillips, 2009).

Domestic terrorism is homegrown and home directed in which the victims, perpetrators, and audience are from the venue country, where the attack is staged. Many suicide car bombings by the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka were domestic terrorist incidents. The assassination of a local politician by a domestic terrorist group is generally a domestic terrorist incident. By contrast, transnational terrorism occurs when a terrorist incident in one country involves perpetrators, victims, institutions, or policies of another country. If, for example, a plane is hijacked in Brazil and made to fly to Chile for political purposes, then the hijacking is a transnational terrorist incident. The hijackings on 9/11 were transnational terrorist events because the perpetrators were foreigners; the victims hailed from many countries; and the attack had global consequences. The kidnappings of Westerners in Beirut in the 1980s were transnational terrorist incidents.
More recently, the “underwear bomber’s” failed attempt to blow up Northwest Airlines flight 253 when it was landing in Detroit on 25 December 2009 was a transnational terrorist incident.

Counterterrorism comes in two basic varieties. Defensive measures harden or guard specific targets by making it more difficult for terrorists to attack these targets successfully. These measures may involve physical barriers (e.g., cement blocks in front of buildings), technological barriers, enhanced surveillance, armed guards, or prescreening of airline passengers. Defensive actions are also intended to limit terrorists’ gains from successful missions. The downside of defensive responses comes from transference, where terrorists change, say, their mode of attack in response to a defensive measure. The installation of metal detectors in airports during the first quarter of 1973 resulted in terrorists switching from skyjackings to kidnappings and barricade missions (i.e., the takeover of buildings with hostages). Similarly, efforts to fortify embassies led to increased assassinations of diplomatic personnel, when they were outside secured compounds (Enders and Sandler, 1993). For transnational terrorism, transference may involve countries augmenting border defenses in the hopes of deflecting would-be attackers to other countries. After 9/11, there has been a marked geographical transference of transnational terrorist incidents away from North America and Europe to the Middle East and Asia (Enders and Sandler, 2006). Terrorism venues have also shifted, to some extent, from high-income to low-income countries as high-income countries secured their border crossings and increased homeland security (Enders and Sandler, 2012). Defensive measures can result in a security race and overprovision, when countries vie with one another to deflect terrorist attacks abroad (Arce and Sandler, 2005; Bier et al., 2007; Carceles-Poveda and Tauman, 2011; Zhuang and Bier, 2007). If, however, countries possess assets – people and property – abroad, then the motivation to deflect attacks abroad are somewhat curtailed because their interests may still suffer (Bandyopadhyay and Sandler, 2011). By giving
prime-target countries more far-flung assets, globalization has curtailed the motives for geographical transference.

The second type of counterterrorism consists of proactive measures intended to reduce terrorist personnel, funding, or infrastructure. Following 9/11, military action against al-Qaeda’s training camps in Afghanistan is an example of such measures. Drone attacks on suspected terrorists are instances of proactive measures. A proactive campaign can be supported by foreign aid given to countries with a resident transnational terrorist group – e.g., US aid after 9/11 to the Philippines to confront Abu Sayyaf (Azam and Thelen, 2010). A retaliatory raid against a state sponsor of terrorism is also a proactive response, as in the case of the US bombing of targets in Libya on 15 April 1986 for its alleged involvement in the terrorist bombing of the La Belle discotheque in West Berlin on 4 April 1986 (Mickolus et al., 1989). Such actions are meant to deter future state sponsorship. Proactive responses may include infiltrating the terrorist group and gathering intelligence, which can compromise the group’s security and lead to arrests. Proactive measures are a public good to all potential target countries, thereby leading countries to free ride on the efforts of the prime-target countries (Sandler and Siqueira, 2006). As a result, proactive responses may be undersupplied against transnational terrorist groups. This underprovision is less of a concern for domestic terrorism, because a country cannot rely on other countries to address its domestic terrorist group(s). Proactive campaigns may also result in backlash and recruits as new grievances are created – e.g., from drone strikes that kill innocent civilians (Rosendorff and Sandler, 2004). Backlash may offset proactive underprovision.

3. **Rational terrorists**

Following the seminal work by Landes (1978), we view terrorists as rational actors who optimize an objective, subject to one or more constraints. The objective may be a benefit function that
rises with carnage from attacks, or it may be a group’s utility function that increases with media coverage and political instability associated with its terrorist attacks (see, e.g., Enders and Sandler, 1993; Landes, 1978). The terrorist constraints typically include a budget constraint, in which terrorist expenditures are less than or equal to terrorist income or resources. Terrorist expenditures for each type of attack include its price per unit times the number of attacks. A standard explosive bombing has a much smaller cost per unit than a skyjacking, which involves more planning and a larger attack squad. Counterterrorism policies can influence these per unit costs; i.e., metal detectors in airports raised the price of skyjackings relative to kidnappings. Price-induced substitutions may also involve the four targets of attacks (i.e., officials, military, businesses, and private parties). If a government provides more protection to its officials and military personnel, then terrorists will likely switch their future attacks to businesses and private parties. If, moreover, businesses provide greater cover for their employees and property, then terrorists are anticipated to switch their attacks to private parties.

Rational terrorists allocate their resources to equate the marginal benefit per unit of expense across attack modes or target types. Even though a skyjacking is relatively costly, terrorists may still choose that type of attack if the perceived marginal gain is sufficiently large. Thus, al-Qaida still wants to attack Americans on US soil despite enhanced security, because al-Qaida’s payoff from such an attack would be huge. When the dominant preferences of terrorists changed in the 1980s, this altered their perceived marginal benefit from attacking particular targets and caused predictable shifts (Brandt and Sandler, 2010). In the latter 1980s, the driving force of transnational terrorism changed from the leftists (e.g., Italian Red Brigades, Red Army Faction, and 17 November) to religious fundamentalists (Enders and Sandler, 2000; Hoffman, 2006; Rapoport, 2004). In so doing, we anticipate that transnational and domestic terrorist targeting started to favor businesses and private parties over officials and the military. This was
bolstered by the latter two target groups being softer and relatively cheaper to hit. The leftists 
wanted to maintain favor with the people, so that they minimized attacks on ordinary citizens, 
preferring to target officials and the establishment. By contrast, religious fundamentalists gained 
more from killing private parties owing to a February 1998 fatwa that made all Americans 
legitimate targets. In practice, the fatwa was extended to all nonbelievers, with private parties 
being the most vulnerable target. Since 1990, the influence of religious political movements has 
grown relative to secular movements, and this changing orientation has also put private parties in 
greater jeopardy.

Strategic models treat the interaction among adversaries (e.g., the terrorists and the 
government) or allies (e.g., two or more targeted governments) as a game, where each agent’s 
choice affects the decision of the other agent. Thus, government’s counterterrorism measures 
influence the terrorists’ campaign, while the terrorists’ campaign affects the government’s 
counterterrorism measures (Bapat, 2006; Sandler and Arce, 2003; Selten, 1988).

These rational-actor models can explain the changing threat pattern uncovered in Section 
5.

4. Terrorist event data sets

Our analysis relies on two terrorist event data sets: the *International Terrorism: Attributes of 
Terrorist Events* (ITERATE) data set, which currently covers transnational terrorist incidents 
worldwide for 1968-2010 (Mickolus et al., 2011) and the *Global Terrorism Database* (GTD), 
which currently covers domestic and transnational terrorist incidents worldwide for 1970-2008 
(National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, known as START, 
2010). For each terrorist event, these data sets code many variables – e.g., incident date, country 
location, target entity, number of casualties, people or property losses, and type of incident –
pertinent to our study. Even though GTD includes both domestic and transnational terrorist incidents, it does not distinguish between them. Recently, Enders et al. (2011) painstakingly identified the two types of events by developing a five-step procedure based on the venue country, the victims’ nationalities, and the target entity. Their procedure partitioned terrorist events into transnational, domestic, and unknown terrorist incidents. Only about 11% were not classifiable—i.e., unknown. We rely on their data division in order to assess the relative threat of domestic and transnational terrorist incidents, which results in some surprising findings. Because ITERATE has more consistent coding of transnational terrorist incidents than GTD, we primarily use ITERATE for such incidents. We rely on GTD for domestic terrorist incidents. When using GTD data, we exclude incidents involving insurgency or guerrilla warfare, internecine conflict, mass murder, and criminal acts. After 1997, GTD allows a researcher to exclude such doubtful cases. We also cull attacks that do not abide by the standard definition of terrorism—e.g., an attack that does not possess a political, socioeconomic, or religious motive.

ITERATE gathers its information from a wide variety of the world’s newsprint and electronic media. ITERATE excludes terrorist attacks associated with declared wars or major military interventions, as well as guerrilla attacks on military targets from an occupying force—i.e., attacks on US forces in Iraq or NATO forces in Afghanistan. GTD also gathers its information from the world’s newsprint and electronic media. GTD came into existence in 2001 when researchers at the University of Maryland acquired an event database on terrorist incidents, which was originally collected by the Pinkerton Global Intelligence Services (PGIS). PGIS sold its database as a subscription service to businesses that wanted to assess the terrorism risk in countries where they did business or had assets. Using ITERATE as a basis, Enders et al. (2011) showed that GTD undercounted transnational terrorist incidents for 1970-1977 and overcounted such incidents for 1991-1997. This is why we rely on ITERATE for transnational terrorist
events. GTD probably has some undercounting of domestic terrorist incidents prior to 1998, since PGIS clients were more interested in transnational terrorist attacks.

In 2006, START took over management of the database and cleaned the data from 1998 on to make it more useful to researchers. GTD coverage for 1993 is problematic, because PGIS lost the data for this year – the box of data for 1993 fell off a truck while in transit. Some of the 1993 data were reconstructed by GTD; nevertheless, the reconstructed total attacks for 1993 appear to be too small.

5. Assessing the threat of terrorism

Since the war on terror is focused on transnational terrorism, we begin with some simple statistics and a graph based on ITERATE. In Figure 1, the blue series indicates the annual number of transnational incidents (see right-hand vertical axis) for 1968-2010, while the red series depicts the average number of casualties (deaths and injuries) per transnational terrorist incident (see left-hand vertical axis) during the same time period. As shown, transnational terrorist attacks fell in number from the mid-1990s on. For the entire period, there are on average 312 incidents per year with over 500 incidents per year during much of the 1980s. This fall in annual attacks is attributed to the decline in state sponsorship following the end of the Cold War, the demise of many left-wing terrorist groups in the late 1980s, and the rise of religious fundamentalist terrorists (Enders and Sandler, 2000; Hoffman, 2006). The religious fundamentalist terrorists engaged in fewer attacks that resulted in more bloodshed, which is borne out by the rising red series. The average proportion of transnational terrorist incidents with casualties was 26% before 1990 and 41% thereafter – so each incident is now more worrisome.

[Figure 1 near here]
For 1968-2010, the annual number of deaths is just 373, while the annual number of injuries is 718. This translates into 1.2 deaths per transnational terrorist incident and 2.3 injuries per transnational terrorist incident. These death and injury amounts must be put in perspective. On the US highways, over 30,000 people lose their lives each year in road accidents. Globally, just under a million people die from malaria each year. Clearly, in the case of transnational terrorism a lot of money is being spent on a security problem with a relatively small body count. Of course, this body count would be a good deal greater had defensive and proactive counterterrorism measures not been applied. The death toll could potentially be much higher if terrorists were to obtain weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear and radiological bombs (Levi, 2007). In their Copenhagen Consensus study, Sandler et al. (2009), however, showed that defensive measures after 9/11 returned less than ten cents on a dollar spent after accounting for the counterfactual associated with the number of attacks in the absence of such measures.

In Figure 2, the bottom red series displays the proportion of transnational terrorist attacks that end in casualties during 1968-2010. There is an upward trend in this series from the late 1990s on, consistent with the increasing dominance of the religious fundamentalist terrorists and their drive for greater carnage. For comparison, we depict in brown the proportion of domestic terrorist incidents that ended in casualties based on GTD data for 1970-2008. The striking difference is that domestic terrorist incidents are more apt than transnational terrorist attacks to result in casualties; the domestic casualties series is always above the transnational casualties series. There is also an upward drift in the domestic series in the last twenty years. Before 1990, 51% of domestic incidents ended in casualties, while after 1990, 65% of domestic incidents resulted in casualties. Annually, there are 1,224 domestic terrorist incidents, which is about four times the number of transnational terrorist attacks, despite the proclivity for PGIS to undercount.
domestic terrorist attacks during the first half of 1970-2008. Annually, 2,348 people died and 3,574 were injured by domestic terrorism, which translate into 1.92 deaths and 2.92 injuries per incident. The greater domestic carnage is also due to a greater preponderance of suicide attacks after 1990. On average, a suicide terrorist attack kills twelve times as many people as a conventional attack (Pape, 2005). By every measure, domestic terrorism poses a greater concern than transnational terrorism; but because these attacks are localized involving victims, venue, and perpetrators from the same country, the international community is unconcerned.

Recent work by Enders et al. (2011) showed that domestic terrorism spills over to transnational terrorism as local terrorists seek greater world recognition for their cause. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, for example, the Palestinian terrorists, who were engaged in a domestic terrorist campaign with Israel, staged some of their attacks in Europe – e.g., the 1972 Munich Olympics massacre. Such heinous attacks not only made their grievances known worldwide, but also resulted in greater recruitment (Hoffman, 2006). Blomberg et al. (2011) emphasized that the most influential transnational terrorist groups mixed domestic and transnational terrorist attacks, with a reliance on domestic attacks since domestic targets are softer. Terrorist campaign mixing of the two kinds of incidents means that any war on terror must consider both types of terrorism. This consideration is bolstered by the spillover of domestic terrorism into the international arena.

**Target choices of terrorists**

Next, we turn to the transference problem involving terrorists’ target choice, foreshadowed in Section 3. In Figure 3, the cumulative number of transnational terrorist attacks is displayed for the four target types. In the late 1960s, left-wing and ethnic-nationalist terrorists were dominant. Their grievances were primarily with officials, who symbolized the authority that these terrorists
rejected, so that transnational terrorist attacks initially favored attacking officials. As shown in Figure 3, these attacks also hit business targets, usually as a target of opportunity for extortion purposes. Businesses began to protect their assets, so that transnational terrorists increasingly turned to attacking private parties over businesses (Brandt and Sandler, 2010). The 1980 crossover point, where private party attacks overtook business attacks, also corresponds to the start of state sponsorship and the hiring of more bloodthirsty terrorists (e.g., the Abu Nidal Organization – see Hoffman, 2006). The next crossover came in 1999 when attacks against private parties overtook attacks against officials. This last crossover is hypothesized to stem from two drivers: the increasing dominance of religious fundamentalist terrorists and the rise in homeland security. The gap between the red and blue cumulative series continues to grow. In part, homeland security has driven terrorists to target the most vulnerable and hardest-to-defend target – ordinary citizens. This is not a good outcome. Policymakers must consider how to address this unintended consequence.

[Figure 3 near here]

Domestic terrorism presents a somewhat different targeting problem, because there is generally less dominance of religious fundamentalists (Blomberg et al., 2011). Left-wing, right-wing, and ethnic-nationalist terrorists are important drivers of domestic terrorism. This suggests that security changes may be more important than the changing dominance in terrorist tastes in explaining crossover points.

[Figure 4 near here]

In Figure 4, we display the cumulative number of domestic terrorist incidents for the four target types. Before 1981, the three primary targets – business, officials, and private parties – traded places with one another as the most preferred target of the terrorists. In 1979, private parties overtook business targets; in 1981, private parties overtook official targets. From 1981
on, private parties are the prime target of domestic terrorists. Private parties continued in recent years to grow as the prime target. The leveling off of business attacks after 1992 is likely due to protective measures. Unlike transnational terrorism, private parties became the target of choice at a much earlier period. We hypothesized that private parties were favored domestically because they are the hardest to defend and present extortion opportunities. Domestically, private parties and officials have maintained the first and second target position, respectively, for thirty years. The large diversity of terrorist interests at the domestic level makes for a different pattern of targeting than at the transnational level. Homeland security must account for these different patterns.

**People versus property attacks**

Terrorists may target people, property, or both. If an attack injuries or kills people and damages property, we classify it as a people attack. Because property is easier to harden than people, we anticipate that heightened security will shift attacks from property to people for all four target types. In the case of transnational terrorism, this anticipated shift should also be generated by state sponsorship in the 1980s and the rise of the fundamentalist terrorists in the 1990s, both of which favored greater carnage. Based on ITERATE, Figure 5 distinguishes the percentage of attacks against people (in red) and those against just property (in blue). Until 1990, there is a distinct mixture of people and property attacks. The preponderance of property attacks for many years before 1978 has to do with the dominance of the left-wing terrorists, who wanted to minimize casualties. After 1992, the percentage of people attacks is larger than property incidents except for one year when these percentages matched. There is a marked rise in people attacks since 1997. In part, this is hypothesized here to reflect protective measures and the rise of the religious fundamentalist terrorists.
In Figure 6, we display the people and property percentages for successful transnational terrorist attacks – i.e., those where the mission was completed as planned. After 1992, the people series is always above the property series. Clearly transnational terrorists are responding appropriately to risks and are going for soft targets. In recent years, another inferred downside of homeland security is this switch to targeting people as key buildings and monuments are fortified. The growing percentage of successful attacks, which is calculated by summing the percentages of the two series, underscores that terrorists are well trained and their missions are well planned. In 2010, a larger percentage of missions failed, which is reflected by the downturn of both series. This is a positive payback from homeland security.

In Figure 7, people and property attacks are distinguished for domestic terrorist incidents. Surprisingly, the mix between people and property attacks displays a pattern very similar to that of transnational terrorist incidents, displayed earlier in Figure 5. After 1992, there is a larger share of domestic terrorist attacks directed against people than against property. Except for 1987-1991 when the two types of attacks were almost equally balanced, people attacks have, as a percent, exceeded property attacks since the start of fundamentalist terrorism, traced by Hoffman (2006) to late 1979. The surprising thing is that this shift to people targets is also characteristic of domestic terrorism; previously, this shift had only been recognized for transnational terrorism (Enders and Sandler, 2000). Even though there is a greater mix of terrorist ideologies at the domestic level than at the transnational level, this favoring of people attacks over property attacks has occurred. Greater protective measures for buildings may also be driving this shift.

Another contrast
Finally, Figure 8 shows the proportion of domestic terrorist attacks with casualties as a share of total terrorist events with casualties, based on GTD data and the division of domestic and transnational terrorist incidents. This proportion has been on the rise and varies between 70% and 90% since 1985. This is further evidence that domestic terrorist events are the lion’s share of attacks that kill and maim people. The associated transnational terrorist proportion, not shown, is the mirror image of the domestic series and is declining over time. As a result and based on Figure 2, domestic terrorism is becoming relatively more deadly compared with transnational terrorism. In the early 1970s, transnational terrorism accounted for the lion’s share of attacks with casualties.

[Figure 8 near here]

6. Policy conclusions

For transnational terrorism, enhanced defensive counterterrorism precautions and the increasing dominance of religious fundamentalist terrorists have made the hardest-to-defend targets – private parties – the terrorists’ target of choice after 1999. This makes public places – shopping malls, department stores, public squares, and public transport – likely attack venues. For domestic terrorism, private parties have been the prime target since 1981. Targeting differences between domestic and transnational terrorism can be useful in directing homeland security resources. For all target types, there is also an increased targeting of people over property, which makes defensive measures more challenging. As defensive action becomes more difficult and costly, more resources must be put into proactive measures that dismantle terrorist groups and their infrastructure. For transnational terrorism, this raises a collective action problem because prime-target nations are more likely to act, with other nations taking a free ride against a common terrorist threat. Moreover, offensive measures must not generate new grievances by
hurting bystanders or innocent civilians.

Domestic terrorism is shown to be a growing threat when compared with transnational terrorism. Because domestic terrorism tends to induce more transnational terrorism (Enders et al., 2011), global actions need to address domestic terrorism. That is, the war on terror must not only focus on transnational terrorism as it has done in the past. Domestic terrorist groups often graduate to attacking foreign targets at home and abroad as a way of gaining attention.

Our analysis puts the threat of terrorism in perspective. When compared to civil wars and health exigencies, terrorism kills and maims relatively few people. This means that nations and the global community must think more carefully about the allocation of resources to the various challenges, including terrorism, that confront the world. In our current debt-ridden world, countries must resist overspending on defensive measures that merely displace the terrorist attack abroad.

Terrorism is the consequence of lots of different movements and actors, especially at the domestic level. Current trends and patterns of attacks started well before 9/11, so that the death of Osama bin Laden, whose lines of communication had been severely challenged since October 2001, will change nothing. Retaliatory attacks by terrorists following his death will dissipate rapidly, with perhaps one large-scale attack planned for the anniversary of his death some time in the future.
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*Global Terrorism Database (GTD)*, CD-ROM. College Park, MD: University of Maryland.


Figure 1. Number of Transnational Terrorist Incidents and Number of Casualties per Incident, 1968-2010

- Casualties per Incident
- Number of Incidents
Figure 2. Proportion of Transnational and Domestic Terrorist Events with Casualties

- ITERATE Transnational
- GTD Domestic

Percentage


1970-2008
1968-2010
Figure 3. Cumulative Number of Transnational Terrorist Incidents by Target Type, 1968-2010

- Private Parties
- Officials
- Business
- Military

Cumulative Number of Incidents

Figure 4. Cumulative Number of Domestic Terrorist Incidents by Target Type, 1970-2008
Figure 5. Transnational Terrorist Attacks: People versus Property, 1968-2010
Figure 6. Successful Transnational Terrorist Attacks: People versus Property, 1968-2010

- People
- Property
Figure 7. Domestic Terrorist Attacks: People versus Property, 1970-2008
Figure 8. Proportion of Domestic Terrorist Events with Casualties to Total Terrorist Events with Casualties, 1970-2008