

Signs of progress in Iraq have left America’s top foreign-policy experts experiencing a rare sensation: optimism. But, according to the fourth Terrorism Index, the U.S. national security establishment is in sharp disagreement with the presidential candidates—and alarmed that its so-called allies may soon harbor its worst enemies.

**THE TERRORISM INDEX**

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For the first time since the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, issues of national security no longer dominate political discourse. Rising energy costs, the subprime mortgage implosion, and other domestic imperatives now monopolize the national conversation. In a recent poll conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, Americans ranked terrorism as the country’s 10th-most important priority—behind healthcare, education, and the federal budget deficit. But even as attentions shift, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have become the longest U.S. military engagements in a century, with the exception of Vietnam. Around the world, terrorists have continued to strike with deadly effect—from Athens and Paris to Beirut and Baghdad. The upcoming presidential election presents the United States with a choice about how it will seek to combat this threat, even as, somewhere, terrorists might be plotting their next attack. Wherever the war on terror may exist in the public’s consciousness, there is no doubt that it rages on.

But is it making the United States safer? To find out, each year FOREIGN POLICY and the Center for American Progress survey the very people who have run America’s national security apparatus during the past half century. Surveying more than 100 top U.S. foreign-policy experts—Republicans and Democrats alike—the FOREIGN POLICY/ Center for American Progress Terrorism Index is the only comprehensive, nonpartisan effort to poll the highest echelons of the country’s national security establishment for its assessment of how the

United States is fighting the war on terror. First released in July 2006, then again in February and September 2007, the index attempts to draw definitive conclusions about the war's priorities, policies, and progress. Its participants include people who have served as national security advisor, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, senior White House aides, top Pentagon commanders, seasoned intelligence professionals, and distinguished academics.

Although most of these experts still see a world with considerable dangers, this year's index revealed a new trend: signs of progress. For the first time since the index was launched in 2006, the experts have become more optimistic. A year ago, 91 percent of the experts said they believed the world was growing more dangerous for Americans and the United States. This year that figure fell to 70 percent, a 21-point drop in 12 months. Similarly, when asked in 2007 if they agreed or disagreed with the statement, "The United States is winning the war on terror," just 6 percent of the experts agreed. Today, 21 percent of the experts say the United States is making headway in fighting terrorism. Overall, the percentage of experts who see the threat of global terrorist networks as increasing dropped from 83 percent last year to 55 percent today. Such assessments, broadly speaking, represent the most positive scores in the two-year history of the index.

Some of this optimism might stem from what the experts see as good news in Iraq. Sixty percent of the experts, for instance, say that the so-called surge in Iraq has had a positive impact on the war effort. That figure represents a massive reversal from a year ago, when 53 percent of the experts said the surge was failing. The experts also see progress in U.S. policy elsewhere, including the Korean Peninsula. Forty-six percent of the experts believe that U.S. policy toward North Korea is positively advancing America's national security goals, a 35-point increase from two years ago and a 12-point increase in the past 12 months. More than half the experts say that U.S. policy toward China is having a positive impact, up 25 points from 2006.

The experts are not, however, without concern. On issues ranging from the war in Afghanistan to Iran to U.S. energy policy, they find worrisome trends. Perhaps nowhere is this truer than with regard to the war in Afghanistan. Eighty percent of the experts say that the United States has focused too much on the war in Iraq and not enough on the war in Afghanistan. A majority, 66 percent, continues to say that the war in Afghanistan is having a positive impact on U.S. national security, but that figure is down 27 points from two years ago. The U.S. government's efforts to stabilize and rebuild Afghanistan have been judged to be below average. Eighty-two percent of the experts say that the threat posed by competition for scarce resources is growing, an increase of 13 percentage points from last year. More than 8 in 10 experts say that the current U.S. policy toward Iran is having a negative impact on national security. And, though a large bipartisan majority agrees that creating peace between Israelis and Palestinians is important to addressing the threat of Islamist terrorism, they grade U.S. efforts at working toward that goal to be just 3.3 on a 10-point scale.

The belief that some threats are increasing while others are ebbing may help explain why, over the long term, the experts' views about the threats we face remain consistent. As in the previous indexes, a large majority of experts—71 percent—continues to say that a terrorist attack on the scale of 9/11 is likely or certain within the next decade. As has also historically been the case, an even larger majority—85 percent—continues to expect a smaller-scale attack akin to those that occurred in Madrid and London within the next 10 years. It's a reminder that, though the public's priorities may shift, the war on terror continues.

## A Surge of Support

What a difference a year makes. When the index's experts were asked a year ago about the so-called surge of U.S. troops into Iraq, 53 percent believed was doing little good. Today, 60 percent of the experts see the surge as a reason for progress. Seventy-nine percent say the surge helped to lift Iraq's economy. Nearly 9 in 10 say the surge benefited Iraq's security. And about half say that surge assisted Iraqi political reconciliation.

But don't confuse this change of heart with unconditional support. Despite being more positive about the surge's gains, the experts do not want the surge to continue. A large majority, 87 percent, does not want to see the United States add more troops to Iraq. Nor does a majority believe the status quo can persist—62 percent do not think that current troop levels should be maintained. Instead, almost 70 percent recommend that the majority of U.S. forces be withdrawn and redeployed to Afghanistan and the Persian Gulf in the next 18 months. Perhaps most tellingly, when asked what the most important U.S. policy objective during the next five years should be, only 8 percent of the experts listed a stable, secure Iraq. Whether out of frustration or just plain exhaustion, it appears many in the foreign-policy community just want to move on.

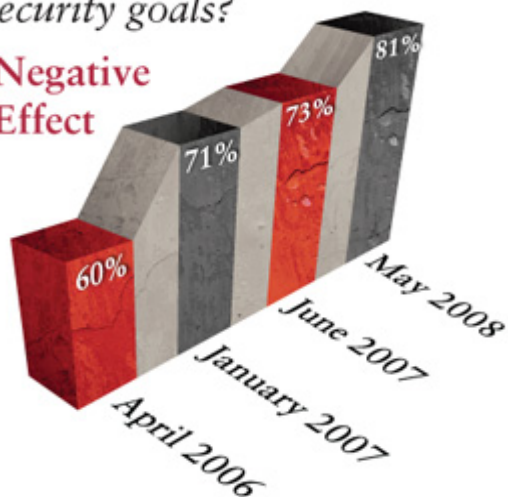


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*How has U.S. policy toward Iran advanced U.S. national security goals?*

**Negative Effect**



*Is it likely that Iran would transfer nuclear weapons to terrorists?*

**Yes**



### **The Tehran Timeline**

What is the principal strategic outcome from the war in Iraq? According to the index's experts, it's not the end of Saddam's dictatorship, a rise in militant Islam, or even a war-torn Iraq. Rather, almost half of the experts say that the most important outcome is the emergence of Iran as the most powerful country in the Middle East. Worse, three quarters of the experts believe that the threat posed by Iran's nuclear ambitions is rising.

The U.S.-led war has not only benefited the United States' chief regional nemesis, but the experts are no longer optimistic that Washington knows what to do about it. Their confidence that U.S. policies can adequately address the Iranian threat has never been lower. The experts give U.S. policy toward Tehran an average grade of just 2.8 on a 10-point scale, where 10 means the United States is doing the best possible job. More than 80 percent of the experts, including 69 percent of conservatives, believe that U.S. policy toward Iran is negatively affecting America's national security goals. This appraisal represents the most critical view of U.S. policy toward Iran since the index began two years ago.





# CANDID CANDIDATES

SEN. JOHN MCCAIN

EXPERTS

SEN. BARACK OBAMA

## WITHDRAWAL FROM IRAQ

*"I believe that...if we do set a date for withdrawal, al Qaeda will then win and we'll see chaos and genocide in the region."*

—Feb. 3, 2008

Nearly **7 in 10** support a drawdown and redeployment of U.S. forces in Iraq.

*"[W]e can bring our troops out safely at a pace of one to two brigades a month...[and] that pace translates into having our combat troops out in 16 months' time."*

—July 3, 2008

## THE SURGE

*"The surge has succeeded and we are, at long last, winning this war."*

—July 25, 2008

Almost **90 percent** believe the surge has had a positive effect on Iraq's security.

*"President Bush [said] that the surge in Iraq is working, when we know that's just not true."*

—Jan. 28, 2008

## AFGHANISTAN

*"Our commanders in Afghanistan say they need at least three additional brigades...[and they] must get them."*

—July 15, 2008

Nearly **7 in 10** support a redeployment of U.S. troops from Iraq to Afghanistan.

*"I will send at least two additional combat brigades to Afghanistan..."*

—July 15, 2008

## ENERGY SECURITY

*"I believe it is time for the federal government to lift these restrictions [on domestic energy exploration] and to put our own [oil] reserves to use."*

—June 17, 2008

**Three in 4** do not endorse relaxing environmental standards for oil and gas drilling. Nearly **2 in 5** experts, however, support stricter fuel efficiency standards.

*"[We] have to get serious about increasing our fuel efficiency standards and investing in new technologies."*

—April 16, 2008

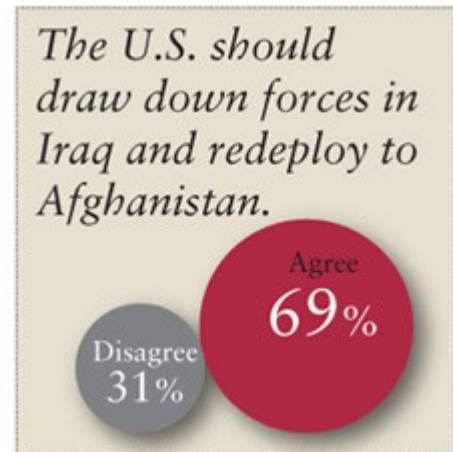


## Bordering on Neglect

A year ago, the experts said Iraq was the mission most in danger of failing. Today, however, they have set their sights on the war in Afghanistan. Last year was the deadliest on record since the U.S. invasion in 2001, with a 33 percent increase in attacks since 2006. This spring, Taliban raids along the country's border with Pakistan jumped from 60 to roughly 100 a week.

It comes as no surprise then that nearly a third of the index's experts now sees the war in Afghanistan as having a negative impact on U.S. national security, up from 20 percent last year and a mere 4 percent in 2006. They grade the administration's policy decisions there at just 4.3 on a 10-point scale, where 10 represents the best possible performance. Iraq itself, the experts say, may be partially to blame for the troubles in Afghanistan. Eighty percent of the experts, including 63 percent of conservatives, believe that the United States has focused too much on Iraq and not enough on Afghanistan. And nearly 70 percent would like to see a redeployment of U.S. forces from Iraq to Afghanistan (and other parts of the Persian Gulf) in the next 18 months.

The costs of the Afghan campaign are likely to extend beyond the sacrifices made by troops on the ground. Almost 1 in 3 experts believes that, in 10 years' time, the war in Afghanistan will have weakened the power and credibility of the United States. Nearly the same number, 32 percent, believes that the nato alliance will be weaker as a result of the war. One in 3 says that the war has already proven that nato is obsolete. Asked how to turn the situation around, roughly 1 in 4 experts says more alliance troops must be deployed fast. As in Iraq, a surge in troops might be what Afghanistan—and NATO—desperately needs.



## The Breeding Ground

Pakistan seems to be moving from bad to worse. With the assassination of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, the ousting of President Pervez Musharraf's ruling party in the February elections, and a string of deadly terrorist attacks, the country has been beset with instability during the past year.

For a majority of the experts, that instability is making Pakistan a country fraught with risk. A large majority, 69 percent, of the experts considers Pakistan the country most likely to transfer nuclear technology to terrorists. A year ago, 35 percent of the experts said that Pakistan was the country most likely to serve as Qaeda's next home base. Now more than half share this fear.

The index's experts are not impressed with how the United States is attempting to address this challenge. They give U.S. policy toward Pakistan a score of just 3.7 on a 10-point scale. Sixty-six percent believe that U.S. policy toward Pakistan is having a negative impact on America's national security, an increase of 13 points from a year ago. The highest percentage of experts says that, over the long term, correcting course will require the United States to support efforts to integrate the tribal areas into the rest of Pakistan, to increase U.S. development assistance, and to condition U.S. aid on Islamabad's willingness to confront militants.

But if the experts agree on what is needed in the long term, there is almost no consensus about what to do if the United States must act quickly. Asked if the United States should take military action in Pakistan if there is a chance to capture or kill high-ranking members of al Qaeda, assuming Islamabad has not given the ok, 65 percent of the experts say they are unsure which course of action is correct. In a country so volatile, there appear to be more dangers than easy answers.



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## Conclusion

### *America's Foreign-Policy Experts Are More Optimistic About the War on Terror—But Disagree with the Presidential Candidates on Key Issues Majority Thinks Pakistan Will Become Next al Qaeda Stronghold*

For the first time since the Terrorism Index's launch more than two years ago, America's foreign-policy experts are more positive about the U.S.-led war on terror. Yet most still see a world with considerable dangers, according to a bipartisan survey produced by FOREIGN POLICY magazine and the Center for American Progress.

The fourth FOREIGN POLICY/Center for American Progress Terrorism Index—published in the September/October issue of FOREIGN POLICY and available today at [ForeignPolicy.com](http://ForeignPolicy.com) and [AmericanProgress.org](http://AmericanProgress.org)—is the only comprehensive effort to determine the American foreign-policy establishment's assessment of the U.S. government's fight against terrorism. More than 100 foreign-policy experts, both liberals and conservatives, participated in the survey.

- **Fewer experts now say that the world is becoming more dangerous for Americans and the United States**, from 91 percent in 2007 to 70 percent this year—a 21-point drop in 12 months. Although still a minority, more experts believe we are winning the war on terror—21 percent of the experts compared with 6 percent last year.
- **Experts are more optimistic about Iraq and the surge.** Sixty percent of experts now say the surge is promoting U.S. security—up from 17 percent last year. In 2007, 10 percent of experts named the Iraq war as the greatest threat to U.S. security. In May 2008, not a single expert did.
- **Experts' assessments differ from presidential candidates' on key issues.** Although nearly 7 in 10 experts support a drawdown of U.S. troops from Iraq in the next 18 months, Republican Sen. John McCain opposes setting a date for withdrawal, saying that if U.S. forces pull out, “al Qaeda will then win and we'll see chaos and genocide in the region.” Democratic Sen. Barack Obama, for his part, has continued to criticize the so-called surge of U.S. troops in Iraq, even though almost 90 percent of experts believe it has had a positive effect on Iraq's security.
- **A bipartisan majority (69 percent) says that the United States should redeploy forces from Iraq to Afghanistan and the Persian Gulf.** With last year the deadliest on record for Afghanistan since the U.S. invasion in 2001, 80 percent of the experts, including 63 percent of conservatives, report that the United States has focused too much on Iraq and not enough on Afghanistan.
- **More than half of the experts name Pakistan as the country most likely to become the next al Qaeda stronghold.** That's up from 35 percent last year. In addition, a large majority (69 percent) of the experts considers Pakistan the country most likely to transfer nuclear technology to terrorists.
- **A strong majority (74 percent) believe U.S. energy policy is having a negative impact on U.S. national security.** The administration received its lowest grade—a 2.2 out of 10—on U.S. energy policy since the index began in 2006.

## **Methodology**

The Terrorism Index is based on the results of a survey designed by the Center for American Progress and FOREIGN POLICY. Participants in the survey were selected by FOREIGN POLICY and the Center for American Progress for their expertise in terrorism and U.S. national security. No one currently working in an official U.S. government capacity was invited to participate.

The nonscientific survey was administered online from April 21 to May 22, 2008. In the survey, respondents were asked to self-identify their ideological bias from choices across a spectrum: very conservative, conservative, somewhat conservative, moderate, somewhat liberal, liberal, and very liberal. Thirty-four people identified themselves as some level of conservative, 39 identified as moderate, and 44 identified as some level of liberal. To ensure balance, the survey was weighted according to ideology to make the number of weighted liberal respondents equal to the number of conservative respondents. Moderate and conservative respondents remained unweighted.

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Roger Cressey	William Nash
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