



# Fact Sheet

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## The Obama Administration Is Leading a Tough, Smart Fight to Confront Global Terrorist Threats and Keep America Safe

The Obama Administration, in partnership with Congress, is carrying out a comprehensive counterterrorism strategy to keep America safe and confront al Qaeda and other global terrorist threats. Through a strong interagency approach at home and a more aggressive, multilateral approach around the world, the Administration has disrupted numerous terrorist plots aimed at our homeland, significantly disrupted al Qaeda, brought dozens of terrorist suspects to justice, begun to reverse the Taliban's momentum in Afghanistan, and has taken out some of the world's most wanted terrorist leaders in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and other strategic regions.

### *Using a Comprehensive, Integrated Counterterrorism Strategy, the Administration has Significantly Disrupted al Qaeda's Operational Capacity and Diminished the Terrorist Threat*

**The Administration has built new partnerships and expanded cooperation with key allies around the world to disrupt and dismantle al Qaeda and other global terrorist networks.** The Obama Administration has worked to strengthen ties with traditional allies and build new partnerships with other nations around the world to achieve the common objective of eliminating global terrorism. Through this approach, it has bolstered international resolve against terrorist threats and built an effective international coalition to combat terrorism not just in South Asia and the Middle East, but around the world - from the Horn of Africa to Europe.<sup>1</sup>

**The Administration is beginning to reverse the momentum of the Taliban in Afghanistan.** Following years of neglect and incoherent policies in the region, the Obama Administration has put in place a fully-resourced, comprehensive plan to integrate military, civilian, and intelligence resources toward a clear and narrowly defined goal: "to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and to prevent its capacity to threaten America and our allies in the future." Recently, General Petraeus, Secretary Gates, Secretary Clinton and other leading national security officials have reported that we are

beginning to make progress in turning the tide against the Taliban insurgency and building the framework for long-term security in Afghanistan.

Our forces are making progress militarily by increasing pressure against the Taliban, as well as by forging new and lasting relationships with Afghan communities. An increasing number of Afghans are working in cooperation with our troops by voluntarily reporting information regarding IEDs and by helping build schools and bazaars in previous Taliban strongholds. With the arrival of the 30,000 additional troops President Obama called for last December, our servicemen and women now have the necessary tools and resources they require to begin creating a lasting and stable space for governance and development for the Afghan people. However, success demands that the Afghan troops and government take responsibility for their own country. Coalition forces, in conjunction with our Afghan partners, are making headway in pushing the Taliban out of population centers and beginning to establish secure areas where communities can thrive. Our forces are targeting those who threaten to undermine the country's stability and those who seek to intervene and derail progress. Many challenges remain in Afghanistan and ultimately, the Afghan government will need to take action to root out corruption, increase accountability, and provide the necessary services for the Afghan people. Nevertheless, Coalition operations are making progress in creating the space necessary for the Afghans to take such steps.

**The Administration has eliminated some of the most wanted terrorists across Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Somalia, Indonesia, and other parts of the world.** As part of its comprehensive counterterrorism strategy, the Administration has expanded the use of targeted strikes and raids against key Taliban, al Qaeda and affiliated terrorist leaders. This strategy has proven effective in eliminating dozens of al Qaeda leaders and high-level terrorist operatives across the world, including: Baitullah Mehsud, the leader of the Pakistani Taliban killed in Pakistan in August 2009; Tahir Yuldashev, the leader of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and a close ally of al Qaeda, killed in the Taliban-controlled South Waziristan in September 2009; Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan, leader of al Qaeda in East Africa (AQEA), killed in September 2009; Noordin Muhammad Top, the leading figure in the South Asian terrorist group Jemaah Islamiyya, killed in September 2009 in Indonesia; Abdul Ghani Baradar, the Taliban deputy and military commander captured in Pakistan in February 2010; Hussein al Yemeni, a senior al Qaeda commander alleged to have played a central role in the December attack on the CIA base in Khost Province, killed in March 2010; and Abu Ayyub al-Masri and Abu Umar al-Baghdadi, senior leaders of al Qaeda Iraq, killed in April 2010. Al Qaeda and related organizations have suffered serious setbacks with the loss of these top leaders.

**The Administration has targeted the core of the al Qaeda organization, killing at least 20 senior operatives and hundreds of militants in the Afghanistan/Pakistan region.** The Administration has adopted an aggressive and focused use of surgical missile strikes against al Qaeda terrorists operating in ungoverned areas along Afghanistan's border with Pakistan – considered by our Intelligence Community to be the core of the al Qaeda organization and the most dangerous component of the al Qaeda network. According to media reports, more than 50 so-called surgical strikes were launched in the region in 2009 and over 75 strikes have been reported so far in 2010 – a considerable increase from the 36 attacks conducted in 2008 and the total of nine strikes conducted throughout 2004-7. This approach has proven effective for pressuring al Qaeda's leadership and weakening its operational capacity: according to analysis from the New America Foundation, such strikes have killed between 650 and 1,000 militants in Pakistan since January 2009, including at least 19 senior operatives.<sup>2</sup>

The month of September 2010 saw the largest spike in reported strikes yet, with nearly as many strikes in one month as in all of 2008. The increased pace of strikes is reportedly designed to target and disrupt the Haqqani Network, one of the most lethal elements of the Afghan insurgency.<sup>3</sup>

**The Administration's aggressive efforts have placed unprecedented pressure on al Qaeda leaders in Pakistan and Afghanistan and significantly weakened their ability to plan sophisticated operations.**

- **CIA Director Panetta assessed that counterterrorism operations in Afghanistan and Pakistan have al Qaeda “on the run.”** Director Panetta described the impact of increasingly aggressive attacks against al Qaeda in the tribal regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan, stating that “Those operations are seriously disrupting al-Qaeda... It’s pretty clear from all the intelligence we are getting that they are having a very difficult time putting together any kind of command and control, that they are scrambling. And that we really do have them on the run.”<sup>4</sup>
- **Echoing Director Panetta’s evaluation, Director of the National Counterterrorism Center (CTC) Michael E. Leiter asserted that counterterrorism operations in Afghanistan and Pakistan have dramatically weakened al Qaeda.** Director Leiter recently described operations in Afghanistan as ambitious and effective. “We’ve had some incredible successes” and al Qaeda “is weaker today than it has been at any time since 2001.”<sup>5</sup>
- **U.S. commanders say that Pakistani offensives against Taliban strongholds have placed an unprecedented strain on the Taliban and helped stem the flow of militants into Afghanistan.** Major General Curtis Scaparrotti, commander of NATO ISAF in eastern Afghanistan, recently described the impact of stepped-up Pakistani operations against the Taliban, stating “I think overall the effects that we see is that it is putting a strain on our common enemy... We know that they are having more difficulty with their supplies, their finances, their leadership.” Further, he noted that Pakistani and NATO action along the Afghan-Pakistan border has led to a real decline in Taliban activity there.<sup>6</sup>

### ***Using an Aggressive Interagency Approach, the Obama Administration has Vigilantly Defended America at Home***

The Administration has committed to using every national security weapon in our arsenal to counter terrorist threats to our homeland – turning to the most effective and appropriate tool to respond to each threat. As Attorney General Holder asserted, “...we are at war against a dangerous, intelligent, and adaptable enemy. Our goal in this war, as in others, is to win. Victory means defeating the enemy without damaging the fundamental principles on which our nation was founded. To do that, we must use every weapon at our disposal. Those weapons include direct military action, military justice, intelligence, diplomacy, and civilian law enforcement. Each of these weapons has virtues and strengths, and we use each of them in the appropriate situations.”<sup>7</sup>

**The Administration has disrupted several terrorist plots on our homeland, including what counterterrorism officials have termed the most serious threat against the United States since 9/11.** In partnership with U.S. and international intelligence and law enforcement officials, the Obama Administration has effectively prevented and disrupted numerous plots inside the United States, including a near-operational plan to attack the subway system in New York City as well as several other plots against U.S. military personnel, federal buildings, and innocent American civilians.

**The Administration has brought dozens of terrorist suspects to justice, incapacitating some of the most dangerous terrorists with links to al Qaeda and other extremist groups.** The Obama Administration has successfully brought to justice dozens of suspected terrorists, including Aafia Siddiqui, the Pakistani national who attempted to kill U.S. military service members fighting in Afghanistan; Najibullah Zazi, linked with al Qaeda and charged with conspiring to use a weapon of mass destruction in the United States; David Headley, the Pakistani-American charged for his role in terrorist plots, including the November 2008 terrorist attacks in Mumbai; and most recently, Faisal Shahzad, the naturalized Pakistani-American who attempted to detonate a car bomb in New York's Times Square. In 2009, more than 30 individuals charged with terrorism violations were successfully prosecuted or sentenced in federal court – more than in any year since 2001.<sup>8</sup>

**The Administration has substantially improved human intelligence collection doctrine and tactics, enabling our counterterrorism officials to better connect the dots and stay ahead of our adversaries.** President Obama has worked in partnership with military, intelligence, and law enforcement officials to bolster our human intelligence collection capabilities and streamline the way in which terrorist threats are identified, pursued, and analyzed. The Administration has put in place a more effective and integrated approach to facilitate the collection of reliable and actionable intelligence on al Qaeda and other terrorist organizations which has helped to disrupt plots and prevent future attacks. It established a High-Value Detainee Interrogation Group (HIG), bringing together experts from across the law enforcement and intelligence communities to carry out strategic interrogations of high-value targets. The HIG has already participated in successful interrogations of terrorism suspects, including would-be Times Square bomber Faisal Shahzad who admitted to investigators that he planned to carry out another bombing attack days later. As a result of these steps, the Administration has been able to successfully elicit critical, actionable intelligence on terrorist threats to our country and its interests: suspects have provided key intelligence on al Qaeda and other terrorist groups as well as terrorist operations and plots in Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Arabian Peninsula, the United States and Europe.<sup>9</sup>

**The Administration has worked to ensure that our military, intelligence, and law enforcement officials have all the resources and tools they need to keep America safe.** The Obama Administration has provided significant funding increases in support of counterterrorism activities in the Department of Defense, the Intelligence Community, and the Department of Homeland Security to ensure that our country is as prepared as it can be to defend against both domestic and global threats.

**The Administration has continually honed our strategy in the face of evolving threats and changing realities on the ground.** The Obama Administration has worked to revise, hone, and review its counterterrorism procedures to combat an evolving threat from al Qaeda, its affiliates and sympathizers. The Administration is continually reviewing our security system to incorporate best practices, identify shortfalls, and advance concrete steps to address

any deficiencies. It has adopted reforms to improve our intelligence community's ability to gather, share and effectively act on intelligence; strengthen our homeland defense technologies and procedures; and improve the capacity of law enforcement to keep the American people safe.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Remarks by the President at the Acceptance of the Nobel Peace Prize, [12/10/09](#); Secretary Clinton, *Interview with CNN*, [2/4/10](#); Daniel Benjamin, *The Obama Administration's Counterterrorism Policy at One Year*, [1/13/10](#).

<sup>2</sup> *New York Times*, [1/17/10](#); New America Foundation, [3/17/10](#); New America Foundation, [9/27/2010](#).

<sup>3</sup> *LA Times*, [9/28/10](#).

<sup>4</sup> *Washington Post*, [3/18/10](#).

<sup>5</sup> *New York Times*, [6/30/2010](#).

<sup>6</sup> AFP, [4/14/10](#).

<sup>7</sup> Attorney General Holder, Letter to Senator Mitch McConnell, 2/3/10.

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, [1/26/10](#).

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, *The Criminal Justice System as a Counterterrorism Tool: A Fact Sheet*, [1/26/10](#).

<sup>10</sup> Remarks by the President on Strengthening Intelligence and Aviation Security, [1/7/10](#).