

taking coordinated operations.”³ The *National Security Strategy of the United States* boldly stated, “The al-Qaida network has been significantly degraded.”⁴ These arguments were regularly repeated after 2001. “Al Qaeda’s Top Primed to Collapse, U.S. Says,” read a *Washington Post* headline⁵ two weeks after Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the mastermind behind the September 11 attacks, was arrested in March 2003.⁶

Our analysis suggests that these claims were overstated. A growing body of work supports our conclusion. For example, the 2008 *Annual Threat Assessment of the Director of National Intelligence* reported that, “Using the sanctuary in the border area of Pakistan, al-Qa’ida has been able to maintain a cadre of skilled lieutenants capable of directing the organization’s operations around the world.” It also noted that “Al-Qa’ida is improving the last key aspect of its ability to attack the US: the identification, training, and positioning of operatives for an attack in the Homeland.”⁷ The 2007 national intelligence estimate, *The Terrorist Threat to the US Homeland*, similarly noted that the main threat to the U.S. homeland “comes from Islamic terrorist groups and cells, especially al-Qa’ida, driven by their undiminished intent to attack the Homeland and a continued effort by these terrorist groups to adapt and improve their capabilities.”⁸ Bruce Riedel, who spent 29 years at the CIA, acknowledged that “Al Qaeda is a more dangerous enemy today than it has ever been before.”⁹

³ Pervez Musharraf, *In the Line of Fire: A Memoir*, New York: Free Press, 2006, pp. 273–274.

⁴ George W. Bush, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, Washington, D.C.: White House, 2006, p. 8.

⁵ Dana Priest and Susan Schmidt, “Al Qaeda’s Top Primed to Collapse, U.S. Says: Mohammed’s Arrest, Data Breed Optimism,” *Washington Post*, March 16, 2003, p. A1.

⁶ Priest and Schmidt (2003).

⁷ J. Michael McConnell, *Annual Threat Assessment of the Director of National Intelligence for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence*, February 5, 2008, p. 6.

⁸ Office of the Director of National Intelligence and National Intelligence Council, *The Terrorist Threat to the US Homeland*, Washington, D.C., 2007, p. 5.

⁹ Bruce Riedel, “Al Qaeda Strikes Back,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 86, No. 3, May–June 2007, p. 24.