

ish government, among others, has already taken this step and abjured the phrase *war on terror*. The phrase raises public expectations—both in the United States and elsewhere—that there is a battlefield solution to the problem of terrorism. It also encourages others abroad to respond by conducting a jihad (or holy war) against the United States and elevates them to the status of holy warriors. Terrorists should be perceived and described as criminals, not holy warriors. Our analysis suggests that there is no battlefield solution to terrorism. Military force usually has the opposite effect from what is intended: It is often overused, alienates the local population by its heavy-handed nature, and provides a window of opportunity for terrorist-group recruitment. This strategy should also include rebalancing U.S. resources and attention on police and intelligence work. It also means increasing budgets at the CIA, U.S. Department of Justice, and U.S. Department of State and scaling back the U.S. Department of Defense’s focus and resources on counterterrorism. U.S. special operations forces will remain critical, as will U.S. military operations to counter terrorist groups involved in insurgencies.

There is reason to be hopeful. Our analysis concludes that al Qa’ida’s probability of success in actually overthrowing any government is close to zero. Out of all the religious groups that ended since 1968, none ended by achieving victory. Al Qa’ida has virtually unachievable objectives in trying to overthrow multiple regimes in the Middle East. To make matters worse, virtually all governments across Europe, North America, South America, Asia, the Middle East, and Africa consider al Qa’ida an enemy. As al Qa’ida expert Peter Bergen has noted, “Making a world of enemies is never a winning strategy.”²

² Peter Bergen, “Al Qaeda Status,” written testimony submitted to the U.S. House of Representatives Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, April 9, 2008.