The Lessons of International Cooperation in Counterterrorism

Address to the RUSI Conference on Transnational Terrorism, A Global Approach

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It takes a certain amount of arrogance, if not actual hubris, to try to sum up the lessons of cooperation in counterterrorism.   One thing is clear. Such cooperation is the key to fighting a battle that spans the globe. Every expert, however, sees that battle in at least slightly different terms, and the practice spans an amazing range of activities and skills. No one person can honestly claim to be a universal expert, or be able to select the key lessons that others should follow.

We are, after all, fighting several very different battles at the same time:

- Struggles to deal with national threats, often of very different kinds and fought on different terms;

- International struggles to defeat terrorist movements that cut across national lines, and often cultures, political systems, and religions;

- An ideological and political battle against Islamist extremism, and tensions between the West and Middle East, that act as a breeding ground for terrorism and the tolerance or support of terrorist movements;

- A struggle to deal with new forms of national and global vulnerability such as proliferation, increasing dependence on information technology and netting; critical infrastructure, and the secure, just-in-time flow of global trade.

- The problem that terrorism cannot be separated from asymmetric warfare and insurgency, state use of terrorists as proxies or false flags, or terrorist use of states as sanctuaries.

The most I can do is to highlight some of the lessons that seem to have emerged out our experience over the last few years. Some are obvious, but need repeating simply because of their priority and importance. Others are a more personal view, and ones I recognize that others may see very differently and give a different emphasis.

The Need for International Cooperation

The first lesson both the most obvious and the most important. We cannot deal with international terrorism unless we do cooperate. Terrorist groups have shown that they can easily move across national lines. They have shown that they can find sanctuaries in the nation that is the weakest link, and exploit the differences between nations and cultures as weapons.

No country can seal its own borders or rely on self-defense, and participate in today's global economy. No nation can fight terrorism throughout the world on its own. National defense and response capabilities are critical to counterterrorism but they cannot be enough. Global trade and shipping, border and port access, energy import dependence, migration, tourism, dissemination of weapons and critical technologies, real time global communication through satellite TV and the Internet, and the flow of disease are only a few of the factors that will inevitably defeat any nation or even culture that attempts to defeat terrorism by ignoring the threat to others.

More than that, we have already seen all too clearly how dangerous it is to let terrorists like Bin Laden try to provoke a clash between the Islamic world, the West, and Asia. The

one real victory that such extremist movements have won is the tension, anger, and mistrust that have followed 9/11 and terrorist attacks in Europe and Asia. The key fault line, the key vulnerability, is the tension between Jew, Christian, and Muslim compounded by the ability to exploit cultural and political differences. At every other level, the threat of violence might remain, but its impact would generally be local and its broader international impact would be acts that do nothing more than create hollow, pointless tragedies.

The Need for International Institutions That Cooperate Across Cultural, Ethnic, Regional, and Religious Lines

The corollary is that counterterrorism must deliberately cut across cultural, ethnic, regional, and religious lines. We cannot afford compartmented efforts that breed mistrust and the kind of divisions terrorists can exploit. Whatever globalism is or may become, we cannot let terrorists and extremists drive us towards some form of clash of civilizations.

As a result, the second lesson is that we need international institutions that go beyond national and regional efforts, and which create a common basis of trust and cooperation. Such institutions will have inevitable limitations. Too many nations define terrorism differently and have different ways of fighting terrorism, different cultural values, different legal standards, and different approaches to human rights. Some nations are part of the problem and not part of the solution; their regimes simply find it too tempting to try to exploit terrorists for their own interests.

Institutions like the UN, however, are the only way to cut across the fault lines that divide the world. Institutions like Interpol have long shown they can foster international cooperation in spite of national and cultural differences. Specialized groups like the world Health Organization are the only mechanism to combine the global fight against disease with the global fight against bioterrorism.

We need visible symbols of global cooperation that show the fight against terrorism is global and international. We need to institutionalize and expand cooperation in any form we can. For all of the obvious sensitivity in sharing intelligence, there are many forms of data we can share. There are many aspects of training, counterterrorism technology, and organization that can be shared and encouraged without compromising them or national capabilities.

We also know from the struggle against proliferation that international institutions can be made secure enough and compartmented enough to serve some useful purposes. More than that, they can be used a litmus tests to show who cooperates and who does not. They can be made into forums that no nation can easily ignore, and open and closed dialogue can become weapons against both terrorists and states that tolerate them.

The key to success is the focus on the art of the possible and on partnership and cooperation, rather than attempting too much and having one nation or culture attempt to dominate the effort. This inevitably means that some efforts will have severe limits. The fact is that we will never fully agree on who is a terrorist, or how to fight them. We know all too well that counterterrorism is exploited as a political weapon, and can be an extension of conflict by other means.

Yet, it takes a certain kind of blindness not to see the risks in not creating such institutions, in giving them political transparency, and showing our respective cultures, religions, and political systems that there are many areas where we can cooperate. We need such cooperation at a functional level, and we need it to fight the ideological and perceptual battles necessary to deny terrorists public sympathy and support. It must be made clear that such cooperation can and is working; that no society is part of the enemy, and that counterterrorism is not being carried out in the interest of any given nation or culture.

The Strengths and Dangers of Regional Cooperation

The third lesson is that there are many things those regional centers for counterterrorism can do better than international institutions. Defining regions in terms of common interests, the same definition of terrorism, groups that are more likely to keep mutual secrets, and nations that do not support terrorism in any form, allows cooperation at a level of depth that can only be achieved by limiting the nations involved.

At the same time, such cooperation can be equally vital to building trust on a regional level. For all of the talk about clashes between civilizations, terrorists often do a superb job of exploiting national differences and tensions at the local level. They exploit them to find tolerance and sanctuary, or simply the kind of indifference, that allows them to move and operate across borders. They use them to find media they can exploit, and to hide their true nature in manipulating structures like those over Kashmir or the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Regional activity and regional cooperation are additional keys to both strengthening counterterrorism at the functional level, and creating the kind of transparency that shows neighboring nations can be trusted – and sometimes cannot.

At the same time, we need to understand that regional efforts can have serious drawbacks, particularly if they are not carried out in a broader international context.

- First, they inherently tend to divide counterterrorism by culture, religion, political system, and ethnicity. At best, they create this as a perception. At worst, they tend to create regional islands and divisions.

- Second, regions are inherently somewhat arbitrary. No matter what the regional boundaries may be, a great deal of international terrorist activity will cross them. Maps and national boundaries do not define today's terrorism or tomorrow's. The pressures that create and sustain terrorism cut across regional lines.

- Third, and this is a general lesson about cooperation in counterterrorism that applies to all international cooperation and institutions, building cooperation on regional lines often leads to hollow or symbolic institutions that are built on existing regional structures, are tied more to political correctness than effective action, and become mired in conventional diplomacy.

The political limits to action that are excusable in truly international institutions are far less excusable when they are supposed to produce specific and immediate benefits. To be rank, however, far too many regional efforts are now more symbolic than real. Some lack the funding and support they need to have any real teeth. Others are exercises in diplomatic and political correctness and meetings for the sake of more meetings:

"conference building measures." Some are exercises in bureaucratic empire building. In far too many cases, the more one works with such efforts, the less real capability and effort one finds.

The Need for Clear Measures of Institutional Effectiveness and Transparency

This leads me to a fourth lesson. Institution building is, in itself, dangerous unless it is tied to clear and transparent measures of effectiveness. The fact that many aspects of counterterrorism are secret is not a reason to keep budgets and programs secret, to fail to develop adequate measures of effectiveness, and make them open enough so that political authorities, journalists, and the public cannot judge what is and is not being accomplished.

To give one tangible example, much of the flood of US money into counterterrorism after 9/11 was wasted for all of these reasons. In fact, the US effort has in many ways expanded its incoherence and lack of integration in direct proportion to its size and the creation of new institutions designed to foster integration. The mess is compounded by a vesting increase in contract efforts and over-complex information technology systems. In at least some cases, the US is fighting its own real counterterrorists with bureaucratic terrorism.

Secrecy is sometimes necessary, but it is far too often a cloak for incompetence. Rather than guard methods and vulnerabilities from the terrorist, are disguises poorly managed efforts, waste or underfunding, a lack of proper planning, turf fights, and failed efforts at integration. Secrecy can never be an excuse for the need to openly prove competence and effectiveness.

The Need for Direct Nation to Nation and Multinational Cooperation

My fifth lesson is one that most practicing experts in counterterrorism are already well aware of. Formal structures of cooperation are not a substitute for bilateral and multilateral efforts that put real counterterrorists in direct cooperation with their foreign counterparts.

These may or may not be institutionalized. In general, the best efforts tend to be a mix of formal meetings and cooperation efforts with informal expert cooperation and dialogue. The key is that nations can cooperate in sensitive areas, in intelligence, and in operations, in ways that are not public but are carefully focused and have direct and immediate value.

This kind of cooperation has value at all levels, but particularly when it cuts across regions, religions, cultures, and political systems. It builds trust and effectiveness at a very different level from the public one, but this kind of trust is just as important. It makes it far easier to keep secrets, to deal with the most sensitive issues, and transfer intelligence, methods, and technology.

It most cases, this is where real cooperation in the battle against terrorism must be fought. Diplomats and those who call for formal institutions need to understand this. Valuable as

formal institutions are, they can never be a substitute for this kind of working effort by experts, and it is often an effort from which conventional diplomats, political figures, and outside experts need to be kept distant.

Parallel efforts are the key to success. And the clear priority is for nations to reach beyond the intelligence and other quiet forms of cooperation they have developed on a regional level, and build as many broader bridges across cultural, regional, and religious lines as possible.

Fortunately, there already is often far more success in such efforts than many realize. There clearly, however, needs to be more. These are areas where strong teams within an embassy, day-to-day working arrangements, established personal relations, and operational practice and exercises can help countries with limited experience and resources -- the weakest links – and have even more value between competent partners with strong common interests.

A Careful Focus on the Real Terrorists

My sixth lesson is that international cooperation must focus on real terrorists and extremists, and avoid taking actions that punish the innocent, and risk alienating those who are not extremists and terrorists.

There has been a tendency in the West, and particularly in the US, to go too far in counterterrorism and arrest, detain, and question too many ordinary Muslims and Arabs. There has been an equal tendency in the Middle East to round up too many of the "usual suspects," including legitimate critics and members of the political opposition.

Western fears of terrorism have often led to generic Western criticism of Arabs and Islam. This has sometimes been expanded to the level of vast conspiracy theories about energy, and the fear that any form of Islamic state is synonymous with extremism and terrorism

The Arab and Islamic world have reacted with denial, anger and conspiracy theories in the fact of legitimate Western concerns. They also undermine the US effort in counterterrorism in Arab eyes, and the ability of the US to cooperate with Arab ad Muslim states.

The US, in particular, will continue to face major problems because of Arab and Muslim perceptions inside and outside Iraq. A mid-December ABC-Time Oxford Research International poll found that Iraqis saw little justification for US actions as part of the war on terrorism:

> "…half of Iraqis now say it was wrong for U.S.-led forces to invade in spring 2003, up from 39 percent in 2004.
>
> "The number of Iraqis who say things are going well in their country overall is just 44 percent, far fewer than the 71 percent who say their own lives are going well. Fifty-two percent instead say the country is doing badly.

"There's other evidence of the United States' increasing unpopularity: Two-thirds now oppose the presence of U.S. and Coalition forces in Iraq, 14 points higher than in February 2004. Nearly six in 10 disapprove of how the United States has operated in Iraq since the war, and most of them disapprove strongly. And nearly half of Iraqis would like to see U.S. forces leave soon.

"Specifically, 26 percent of Iraqis say U.S. and other Coalition forces should "leave now" and another 19 percent say they should go after the government chosen in this week's election takes office; that adds to 45 percent. Roughly the other half says coalition forces should remain until security is restored (31 percent), until Iraqi security forces can operate independently (16 percent), or longer (5 percent)."

A December 2005 Zogby poll showed these results went far beyond Iraq, and that the way in which the US conducted its counterterrorism effort, and was perceived as treating Muslims and Arabs was a major factor in shaping public hostility and tolerance of extremism. The poll found that 84% of Egyptians polled said their attitudes towards the US had grown worse over the last year, 62% of Jordanian, 49% of Lebanese, 72% of Moroccans, 82% of Saudis, and 58% of those in the UAE. These results tracked in many ways with polling done by the Pew Trust, and it is interesting to note the causes. When Zogby asked what the most important factor in determining Arab attitudes towards the US were, he got the following results:

Most Important Factor in Determining Arab Attitudes Towards US in 2005

Factor	Egypt	Jordan	Lebanon	Morocco	Saudi Arabia	UAE
War in Iraq	57	48	34	45	49	31
President Bush's Promotion of Democracy and Reform	4	6	16	2	9	9
Developments in Arab-Israeli Front	8	13	119	8	8	7
American Treatment of Arabs And Muslims	28	28	22	40	32	41
Other	0	3	4	2	0	5

Source: Zogby International, Attitudes of Arabs: 2005, December 7, 2005, p. 14.

The US needs to be particularly careful not to detain the innocent inside or outside the US, and treat detainees and prisoners with dignity. It needs to focus far more tightly on specifically where terrorist groups get their money and be more careful about generic and broadly structured efforts to limit charitable activity and all financial transfers. It needs to attack specific terrorist groups and leaders, and not make broad generalization.

This need for focus, however, goes far beyond the US and the West. Many in the Middle East have been careless in how they detain and treat prisoners from their own countries. They have denied the terrorist nature of extremist organizations or excused their conduct when the targets of such organizations were not fellow Arabs. In far too many cases, this has been tolerated by the same Middle Eastern states that are fighting such terrorists on their own soil.

There have been increasingly ugly elements of anti-Semitism in many of the Arab reactions in the Middle East and in Islamic world. This lack of focus on the real threat to Arab and Muslim states attacks a religion for the conduct of the political leaders of a state. It can only make the Israeli-Palestinian conflict worse, rather than help resolve it. Worse it, allow Islamist extremists to exploit a false linkage between their beliefs and goals and Palestinian cause, and reinforce both their forms of terrorism and those of extremist Palestinian groups like the Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

Regardless of the nation, region, and culture involved, counterterrorism needs to focus firmly on extremism and terrorism, and understand that every abuse of the innocent can breed more terrorists or support for terrorism. One of the key goals of international cooperation should be to find the best possible ways to attack and defeat actual terrorists with minimum impact on human rights, the rule of law, legitimate religious and charitable organizations, and the life of ordinary citizens in every country concerned.

This in no way means that the attack on terrorists and violent extremists should not be unrelenting. It does mean that every effort needs to be made to make it clear that it is only terrorists that are being attacked, to avoid alienating the innocent, and to avoid the kind of extreme action that can create martyrs and new terrorists.

The example of Lenin's brother needs to be kept constantly in mind. The Czar's secret police did a fine job of killing Lenin's brother. In retrospect, this hardly solved the problem.

This need for focus should not mean weakening the fight against terrorists. It should rather mean steadily improving intelligence collection, the sharing of information, improvements in surveillance techniques, better tracking of movements and funds, and all of the other activities that are needed in any case to improve the other aspects of cooperation in counterterrorism. The challenge is not to make counterterrorism weaker, it is to make counterterrorism better.

Dealing With the Broader Struggle

The final lesson I will raise today goes back to the issue of the divisions between the West and the Middle East, and the issue of Islamic extremism. No matter how well we cooperate in counterterrorism, this will not be enough. Such cooperation can probably deal with local and limited national threats. The problems of Northern Ireland, Basque separatism, right wing American extremisms, or Sri Lankan civil conflict are inherently self-limiting – serious as they are for all who are directly concerned.

The fact is, however, that we also need cooperation in dealing with the causes of the kind of global terrorism that has emerged out of Islamist extremism. Moderate regimes in the Middle East have fought this battle far longer than the West. In many cases, however, they have not yet moved to deal with the necessary political and economic reforms. In some cases, it has been easier to tolerate extremism as long as it did not attack domestic political targets, or focused on Israel and the West.

There has been a great deal of denial of the need to reform religious practices and education, and the pace of change has been too slow. Survey after survey of public attitudes has shown that terrorists and extremists have far more public tolerance and support than they would have if government made the proper effort to confront these groups at the political and ideological level and to educate their peoples.

A survey by the A report by the Pew Global Attitudes Project, published on July 14, 2005, found, for example, that the peoples of both the West and Middle East saw other religions as a major source of violence.

What was even more disturbing, however, was that a majority of those polled in Jordan, Indonesia, Lebanon, Turkey, and Morocco did not see Islamist extremism as a threat to their country. The number that saw violence against civilian targets as justified had dropped in many countries since 2003, but if one counts those who saw such violence as justified rarely, sometimes, and often, it is still 88% in Jordan, 58% in Lebanon, 18% in Morocco, 44% in Pakistan, and 20% in Turkey. Similarly, the percentages of those polled who still express "a lot" of confidence in Bin Laden were still 60% in Jordan, 26% in Morocco, 51% in Pakistan, and 7% in Turkey.

Arab and Muslim states have been slow to recognize they must openly challenge extremism on a religious and ideological level. They have not confronted those who preach hatred against Christians and Jews and define any Muslims who disagree with them or have more secular values as polytheists and apostates. Muslim and Islamic states must fight these battles, not just battles against those who directly perform acts of terrorism.

The West has equal obligations. As has already been touched upon, the US needs to look beyond 9/11 and see the Arab and Islamic world as whole, not simply the acts of a few extremists and terrorists. The US, however, has become the symbol of all forms of action in the Middle East, while Europe faces different problems. Europe must deal with Muslim immigrants as full citizens whose cultural values must be given the same respect as Christianity and Judaism.

The problems rose by European attitudes toward immigration and Muslims are another source of support for terrorism and extremism. The same report by the Pew Global Attitudes Project found that most Europeans, with the exception of Poland (42%) feel that Muslims in their country want to remain distinct from the general population (Germany 88%, Russia 72%, Spain 68%, Netherlands 65%, Great Britain 62%, France 59%). The US's public attitude was split, 49% of Americans felt that American-Muslims wanted to remain "distinct."

It also found the majority of Europeans think the immigration from the Middle East region is a bad thing, and oppose Turkey's bid to join the EU. The percentages opposing Muslim immigration from the Middle East were 67% for the Netherlands, 81% for France 81%, 76% for Germany, 44% for Britain 44%, 32% for Spain, and 26% for Poland 26%.

There is as much need for educational reform and religious tolerance in the West as in the Arab and Islamic worlds. Respect for different cultures and religions needs to be taught, and be the subject of dialog, at every level.

The West, and particularly the US, needs to aid and encourage evolutionary reform in the Arab and Islamic worlds, and not seek to impose it. Cultural and political values are not universal, and cannot be suddenly imposed on hundred of millions of people. Political legitimacy is not defined by democracy, but by effective governance that meets the needs of all the people.

Terrorism cannot be defeated without counterterrorism, but counterterrorism alone can never defeat ideas and the causes of terrorism. There is a political and ideological battle that must be fought as well, and it must be fought on the basis of mutual respect and tolerance. It will take years, and perhaps decades, to create the level of respect, tolerance, and trust we need, but there are no years that any of us can afford to waste.

Perceptions of Religious Violence by Western and MENA Country
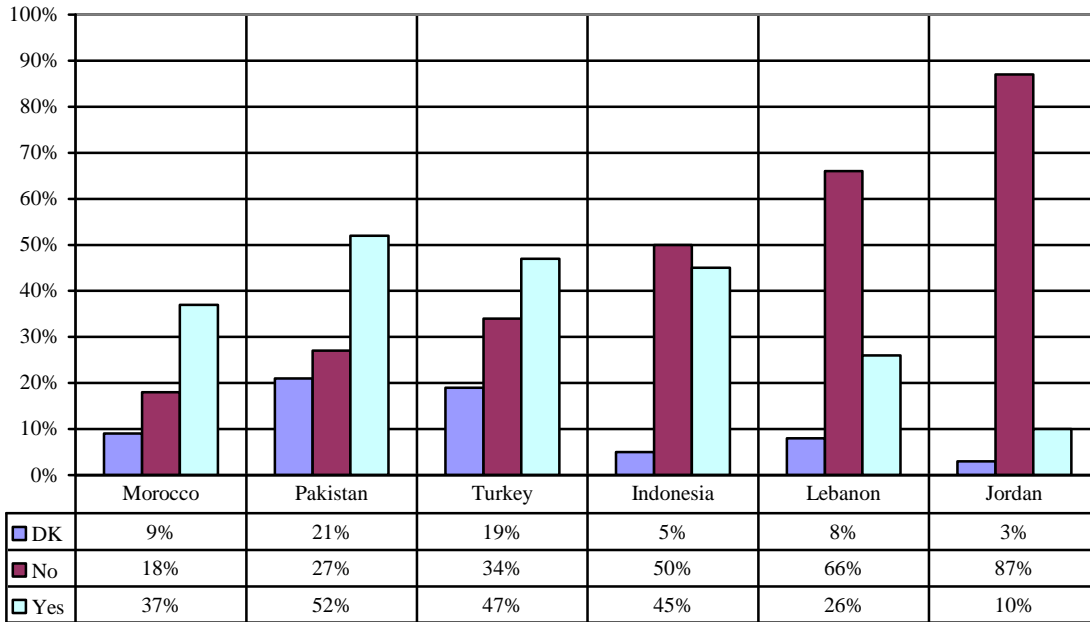
Which Religion Is Most Violent?

	Islam	Judaism	Christianity
Netherlands	88%	2%	3%
France	87%	2%	2%
Spain	81%	4%	2%
Germany	79%	3%	2%
Poland	77%	5%	3%
India	73%	2%	5%
Russia	71%	10%	3%
US	67%	4%	9%
Great Britain	63%	4%	8%
Canada	61%	4%	8%
Jordan	1%	98%	1%
Morocco	3%	83%	5%
Lebanon	18%	66%	15%
Indonesia	11%	63%	10%
Pakistan	6%	51%	4%
Turkey	15%	20%	46%

Source: The Pew Global Attitude Project, "Support for Terror Wanes Among Muslim Publics, July 14, 2005.
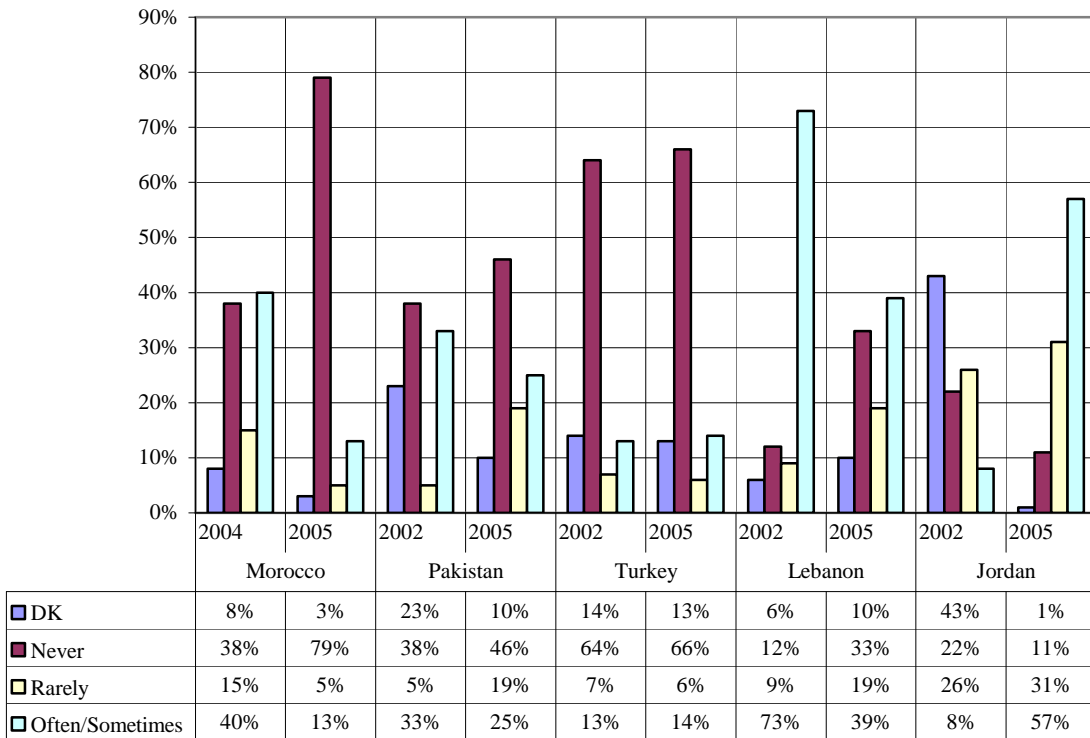
- **Westerners and people in India chose Islam as the most violent religion.**

- **People in Muslim countries chose Judaism as the most violent.**

- **Turkey is the only exception where Christianity was chosen to be most violent.**

Muslim Public Attitudes Toward Terrorism-I

Do Muslims feel that Islamic extremism is a threat to their country?

	Morocco	Pakistan	Turkey	Indonesia	Lebanon	Jordan
DK	9%	21%	19%	5%	8%	3%
No	18%	27%	34%	50%	66%	87%
Yes	37%	52%	47%	45%	26%	10%

Is violence against civilian targets is justified?

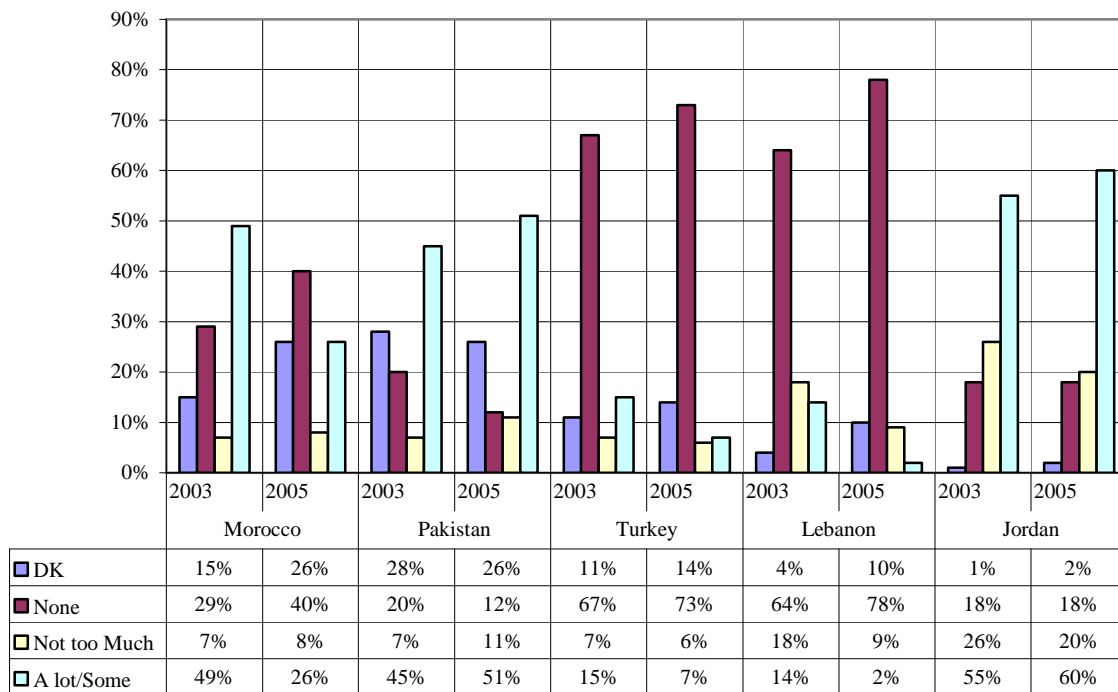|	Morocco		Pakistan		Turkey		Lebanon		Jordan	
	2004	2005	2002	2005	2002	2005	2002	2005	2002	2005
DK	8%	3%	23%	10%	14%	13%	6%	10%	43%	1%
Never	38%	79%	38%	46%	64%	66%	12%	33%	22%	11%
Rarely	15%	5%	5%	19%	7%	6%	9%	19%	26%	31%
Often/Sometimes	40%	13%	33%	25%	13%	14%	73%	39%	8%	57%

Source: The Pew Global Attitude Project, "Support for Terror Wanes Among Muslim Publics, July 14, 2005.

Muslim Public Attitudes Toward Terrorism-II

Do you support Violence against Civilians in Defense of Islam?

	Morocco	Pakistan	Turkey	Indonesia	Lebanon	Jordan
2002	--	33%	13%	27%	73%	43%
2004	40%	41%	15%	--	--	--
2005	13%	25%	14%	15%	39%	57%
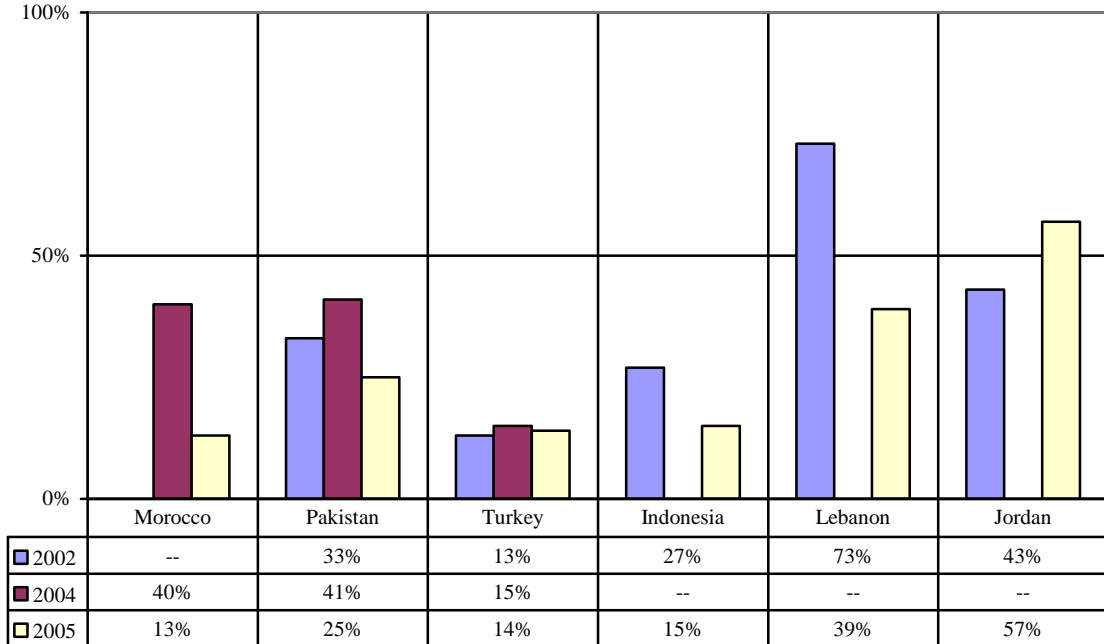
Do you have confidence in Osama bin Laden?

	Morocco		Pakistan		Turkey		Lebanon		Jordan	
	2003	2005	2003	2005	2003	2005	2003	2005	2003	2005
DK	15%	26%	28%	26%	11%	14%	4%	10%	1%	2%
None	29%	40%	20%	12%	67%	73%	64%	78%	18%	18%
Not too Much	7%	8%	7%	11%	7%	6%	18%	9%	26%	20%
A lot/Some	49%	26%	45%	51%	15%	7%	14%	2%	55%	60%

Source: The Pew Global Attitude Project, "Support for Terror Wanes Among Muslim Publics, July 14, 2005.