

(Continued)

- ▶ Recent condemnations of violence and extremist religious interpretations by a few notable Muslim clerics signal a trend that could facilitate the growth of a constructive alternative to jihadist ideology: peaceful political activism. This also could lead to the consistent and dynamic participation of broader Muslim communities in rejecting violence, reducing the ability of radicals to capitalize on passive community support. In this way, the Muslim mainstream emerges as the most powerful weapon in the war on terror.
- ▶ Countering the spread of the jihadist movement will require coordinated multi-lateral efforts that go well beyond operations to capture or kill terrorist leaders.

If democratic reform efforts in Muslim majority nations progress over the next five years, political participation probably would drive a wedge between intransigent extremists and groups willing to use the political process to achieve their local objectives. Nonetheless, attendant reforms and potentially destabilizing transitions will create new opportunities for jihadists to exploit.

Al-Qa'ida, now merged with Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi's network, is exploiting the situation in Iraq to attract new recruits and donors and to maintain its leadership role.

- ▶ The loss of key leaders, particularly Usama Bin Ladin, Ayman al-Zawahiri, and al-Zarqawi, in rapid succession, probably would cause the group to fracture into smaller groups. Although like-minded individuals would endeavor to carry on the mission, the loss of these key leaders would exacerbate strains and disagreements. We assess that the resulting splinter groups would, at least for a time, pose a less serious threat to US interests than does al-Qa'ida.
- ▶ Should al-Zarqawi continue to evade capture and scale back attacks against Muslims, we assess he could broaden his popular appeal and present a global threat.
- ▶ The increased role of Iraqis in managing the operations of al-Qa'ida in Iraq might lead veteran foreign jihadists to focus their efforts on external operations. Other affiliated Sunni extremist organizations, such as Jemaah Islamiya, Ansar al-Sunnah, and several North African groups, unless countered, are likely to expand their reach and become more capable of multiple and/or mass-casualty attacks outside their traditional areas of operation.
- ▶ We assess that such groups pose less of a danger to the Homeland than does al-Qa'ida but will pose varying degrees of threat to our allies and to US interests abroad. The focus of their attacks is likely to ebb and flow between local regime targets and regional or global ones.