The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) is a U.S. Department of Homeland Security Center of Excellence based at the University of Maryland. START uses state-of-the-art theories, methods, and data from the social and behavioral sciences to improve understanding of the origins, dynamics, and social and psychological impacts of terrorism. For more information on START, please visit http://www.start.umd.edu/.

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The DHS Science and Technology Directorate (S&T) recognized START at the DHS University Network Summit for START’s outstanding contributions to the security of our nation by developing the Global Terrorism Database (GTD). As DHS commented, “This resource will enable security forces to adapt strategies to counter deadly attacks.”

START worked with the Human Factors/Behavioral Science Division of the DHS Science and Technology Directorate to conduct a day-long roundtable and discussion on social science research on radicalization for the DHS Office of Intelligence Analysis (OIA). This January event involved presentations of ongoing START research to OIA analysts as well as discussions among the researchers and analysts about how social science research can be better integrated into the intelligence and policy communities.

This Spring, two START researchers, Michele Gelfand and Jonathan Wilkenfeld, were named University of Maryland Distinguished Scholar-Teachers for the 2009-2010 academic year. Michele Gelfand is a professor in the department of psychology at Maryland, and Jonathan Wilkenfeld is a professor of government and politics and director of the Center for International Development and Conflict Management.

In March, START received new funding for a project on “Threat Assessment of Terrorist and Extremist Organizations in Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand” as part of the University Research in Homeland Security Science & Technology Mission Areas Grant Program supported by the International Programs Office of DHS S&T. This project involves partners from the University of Maryland, University of New Haven, and Griffith University in Australia.

This Spring, START brought a number of speakers to the University of Maryland campus for its Career Profile Series. The Career Profile Series is designed to introduce students to careers in the field of homeland security. This Spring’s speakers included Bradford Parker, former START Fellow and analyst at DHS’s Office of Intelligence and Analysis; George Selim from the DHS Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties; and Joe Garofolo, the DHS liaison to the Maryland Coordination and Analysis Center (MCAC).

Data files for START’s Global Terrorism Database are now available to the public through the Terrorism and Preparedness Data Resource Center, accessible at www.start.umd.edu/data/gtd.
In February, START and WorldPublicOpinion.org released the findings from extensive new public opinion research in Egypt, Pakistan, and Indonesia, supplemented with additional data from Turkey, Jordan, the Palestinian Territories, and Azerbaijan. The panel for the release included Steven Kull, Director of the Program on International Policy Attitudes and the Center on Policy Attitudes; Gary LaFree, START Director; and Daniel Brumberg, Acting Director of the Muslim World Initiative at the Center for Conflict Analysis and Prevention of the U.S. Institute of Peace. The survey examined in detail public attitudes on such topics as:

- Views of terrorist attacks on civilians in general and Americans in particular
- Views of attacks on U.S. troops based in Muslim countries
- Perceptions and views of the goals of al Qaeda
- Perceptions and views of U.S. foreign policy objectives in the region U.S. military presence in the Persian Gulf

The participation of Islamist groups in the political process

The survey focused on predominantly Muslim countries, specifically Egypt, India, and Pakistan. It repeated some questions asked in START’s groundbreaking 2007 study and permitted the assessment of positive and negative trends over time in Muslim public attitudes. Insights from focus groups in several additional countries complemented the polling data.

The survey attempted to examine the roots of the negative views of the U.S. presence in countries. Although Muslim publics oppose al Qaeda’s use of terrorism, they agree with some of its goals. For example:

- A majority of respondents agreed with al Qaeda that U.S. troops should be withdrawn from Muslim countries. U.S. presence in a country was usually seen as a threat, even if its presence was requested by the local government.

Respondents often saw the U.S. as coercive, hypocritical, and unconstrained.

- A large majority perceived the primary goal of U.S. foreign policy to be control of oil.
- The majority of those polled perceived the U.S. as hostile to Islam and trying to “humiliate” Islam.
- Respondents perceived the U.S. as favoring the expansion of Israel and opposing the creation of a Palestinian State. They strongly agreed with the al Qaeda goal to cease U.S. favoritism of Israel.

Although the majority of opinions paralleled those of al Qaeda, the respondents were strongly opposed to the use of terrorist attacks, and especially attacks on civilians.

Underneath the negative feelings about the United States and its goals, there were very positive feelings about it and a strong support for goals it was seen as supporting, such as human rights, democracy, and freedom. There was an expressed hope that the United States can live up to these goals and frustrations were expressed that they do not.

Partnerships for a Safer World: DHS University Network Summit

START played a key role in the Third Annual DHS University Network Summit in March. The Summit showcased the partnerships and collaborations that the Department of Homeland Security’s university-based Centers of Excellence have made in a number of homeland security areas. START participated by providing panelists, plenaries, moderators, and posters for the conference of over 1,000 attendees.

A key feature of START’s work at the summit included the release of an update of the Global Terrorism Database (GTD). The GTD is an open-source database including information on terrorist events around the world. The updated database includes over 80,000 incidents from 1970 through 2007. Unlike many other event databases, the GTD includes systematic data on domestic as well as transnational and international terrorist incidents that have occurred during this time period. The GTD is available to the public via an online interface (http://www.start.umd.edu/start/data/) in an effort to increase understanding of terrorist violence so that it can be more readily defeated.

Student posters were displayed throughout the day on Tuesday, and a number of students were invited to present their START research. Erin Miller, a graduate student at START, received the award for second place in the poster competition.

In April, Brian Michael Jenkins presented at the University of Maryland campus to an audience of faculty, staff, students, and the public on the threat of nuclear terrorism. Jenkins is a senior adviser at RAND, a non-profit research organization committed to improving policy and decision-making through research and analysis. Jenkins is also the Director of the National Transportation Security Center at the Mineta Transportation Institute, and since 1997 has directed the institute’s continuing research on protecting surface transportation against terrorist attacks. Recent publications by Jenkins include Will Terrorists Go Nuclear? (2008), Unconquerable Nation: Knowing Our Enemy, Strengthening Ourselves (2006), Aviation Terrorism and Security (2005), and Three Years After: Next Steps in the War on Terror (2005).

According to Jenkins, nuclear terrorism is the act of terrorists using nuclear weapons, while nuclear terror has been created by the public, based on our fear of nuclear terrorism becoming a reality. It is not threat-driven, but instead developed through the imagination of a supervillian. He argued that nuclear terror precedes nuclear capabilities.

Jenkins highlighted the challenges in countering nuclear terrorism due to the difficulty of estimating low-probability, high-consequence events such as nuclear terrorism. He explained that we are basing our nuclear concern on intentions, not capabilities.

Jenkins also discussed how the attacks on September 11, 2001, fundamentally altered our perceptions of terrorism. There was an immediate shift from threat-based concerns to vulnerability-based concerns. It led us to resort to “do-it-yourself doom,” including creating websites that allow you to enter your zip code and plot the devastation that would result from a nuclear attack.

Jenkins pushed the audience to consider the difference between acquisition and actual use of nuclear weapons. For the United States in World War II, acquisition and use were two separate decisions. Other states also acquired nuclear weapons without plans of immediate use. However, we assume that once terrorists gain nuclear power that they will use it.

Deterrence and its feasibility was also addressed in Jenkins’s presentation. He discussed different views based on very real memories of WWII, the use of suicide tactics, and the relative inability to retaliate.

He also encouraged the audience to consider the true difficulty in obtaining and successfully using nuclear weapons. He recommended that deterrence efforts focus not only on terrorist decision makers, but also on possible suppliers of fissile material, builders of the device, state sponsors of terrorism, states that may be held responsible for the attacks and retaliated against, terrorists’ allies, and terrorists’ own perceived constituents.

Jenkins concluded by congratulating START and individual scholars for their work, especially for their dedication to understanding terrorist motives, noting that such research has created a change in counter-terrorism strategies and has encouraged many in the homeland security field to begin examining motives.

After the general presentations, Jenkins sat down with Maryland students for a more informal gathering. Most of the students were in the Terrorism Studies Minor, and they had the opportunity to delve into the subject of his presentation and learn more about career paths within the homeland security field.

The START Seminar Series is an initiative by START to bring leading experts in the field of homeland security to the University of Maryland Campus each semester to present their research to an audience of students, faculty, staff, government employees, and the public.
As part of the curriculum for the class Responses to Terrorism, students in START’s Terrorism Studies Minor at the University of Maryland traveled to the site of the World Trade Center attacks in 2001.

As they traveled to New York, the students watched 9/11, a documentary of New York City firefighters and their participation on September 11, 2001. Following the documentary, the students began the discussion of September 11th and responses they had studied in their coursework.

Upon their arrival at the Tribute WTC Visitor Center, students were led around the site by two tour guides, both of whom had experienced the attacks on September 11, 2001, in different ways. Maryleah worked for the Port Authority in the second World Trade Center tower. On September 11, she safely evacuated the second building but was caught in the debris from the collapse of both buildings. May’s husband was a New York City firefighter, who was lost that day in the first tower. As they led the students around the construction site of the new buildings, both shared their experiences on that day and afterward.

After touring the site, the students met with START researcher, Joshua Freilich, and guest speakers at John Jay College of Criminal Justice. The guest speakers from 9/11 Families for Peaceful Tomorrows, Alissa Torres and Bruce Wallace, shared their experiences of loss on September 11 and how they have developed projects to serve others and assist them in their recovery. Alissa Torres created a graphic novel to tell the story of her experience on September 11. Bruce Wallace created 121 Contact, a program that connects children in Baghdad with students in the United States and gives them the opportunity to share their experiences through email. Both discussed how their responses helped them to grieve in constructive ways.

Following the 9/11 Families for Peaceful Tomorrows presentations, William Parkin, a graduate student at John Jay, and START Pre-Doctoral Fellow, shared his research on Suicide Missions in the U.S., which was developed from the Extremist Crime Database (ECBD), funded by START and created by START Researchers, Joshua Freilich of John Jay, and Steven Chermak of Michigan State University.

“\nI never imagined I’d get so much out of touring Ground Zero, which I had already visited a few years ago. Hearing the tour guides share their personal stories with us, complete strangers, face to face, added a powerful and intimate element to the experience that I’ll never forget. It really put meaning behind all terrorism studies and the hard work START is involved with.”

- Teresa Gutierrez
In March, START, in conjunction with Johns Hopkins University, participated in a Center for Talented Youth event at the University of Maryland, focused on International Security. The Center for Talented Youth (CTY) is an organization that develops educational programming for academically gifted students in 7th through 10th grade and their parents. Each year the CTY program holds a number of events across the country within various theme areas. START’s program, International Security, focused on the many concerns of keeping nations safe and secure. For the March event, over 100 students and families participated, traveling from as far away as Memphis, TN and Boston, MA.

The day-long event began with a welcome address and introductions from Ian Reynolds, CTY Director of Family Programming, and START’s Assistant Director for Education, Kate Worboys Izsak. The University of Maryland’s Anwar Sadat Professor for Peace and Development, Shibley Telhami, served as the keynote speaker and spoke to the families about the evolution of the current international security climate. One parent commented, “Dr. Telhami did a nice job of bringing his talk to the level of students and placing events in the historical context with which the students might not be familiar. [It was] great to be able to benefit from someone with such experience.”

For the remainder of the morning, parents and students attended a number of presentations by START and University of Maryland students and researchers. Current START fellow Christine Muller led parents and students in an examination of the cultural implications of 9/11, while former fellow Stephanie Kaplan addressed the Iraq War. In addition, University of Maryland graduate student Erin Miller discussed the myths and realities of terrorism, and START adjunct lecturer Alistair Millar explained some of the finer points of counterterrorism tactics. Rounding out the morning, Jennifer Nuzzo of the Center for Biosecurity demonstrated public health concerns in the face of terrorism while Dr. Bob Buchanan of the University of Maryland’s Center for Food Safety and Security Systems discussed the threat to food sources.

Following a lunch break, students and parents dispersed to attend separate sessions. For parents, University of Maryland graduate student Susan Fahey prepared a discussion of *Paradise Now*. Parents indicated that the film about two Palestinian men planning a suicide attack on Israel and discussion were “thought provoking” and “worthwhile.” Meanwhile, students attended one of two simulations prepared by the ICONS Project. The first simulation, led by Audrey Tetteh of ICONS, challenged students to take on the role of varying interest groups in Nigeria to create a cohesive oil policy for the region. The second simulation, run by START’s Educational Programs Associate Amber Lesniewicz and START’s Executive Director Kathie Smarick, introduced students to a crisis scenario in which third party organizations must manage a terrorist and refugee crisis in Kurdistan. Students indicated that the simulations “strengthened problem solving and negotiation skills” and helped them tie in information that they had learned throughout the day and apply it to an international security situation.

To close the day of experiencing the challenges of international security, START Director Gary LaFree shared with the participants the role that research plays in policy making. LaFree spoke about START’s growing presence in the policy arena and how cutting-edge research on the human causes and consequences of terrorism benefits national security. After LaFree’s presentation, students and parents took tours of Maryland’s campus.

Parents and students alike found the day to be intellectually engaging and beneficial. Several students expressed interests in working with START in the future. In evaluations of the program one parent wrote, “It was interesting to see terrorism studied from a social science viewpoint, as a discrete phenomenon, separate from its military/political influences.”

“I learned a lot during this program and am moved to help prevent biochemical attacks on America.”  
- a student participant
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