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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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.
START Seminar: Osama Bin Laden and the Globalization of Terror

The START Seminar Series returned to the University of Maryland, College Park, in November with a presentation by Steve Coll, President and CEO of the New America Foundation. The New American Foundation is a nonprofit, nonpartisan public policy institute launched in 1999 that invests in new thinkers and new ideas to address the next generation of challenges facing the United States. The foundation focuses on key issues including the next social contract, economic growth, education, energy and environment, family and children, fiscal policy, foreign policy, health policy, ownership and assets, political reform, retirement security, telecom and technology, and trade and globalization. For more information on the New America Foundation, see http://www.newamerica.net/.

Coll is a well-established journalist and is currently a staff writer for the New Yorker in addition to his work at the New America Foundation. He spent 20 years as a foreign correspondent and senior editor at the Washington Post and has won many awards throughout his career, including two Pulitzer Prizes. His first was awarded for explanatory journalism for his series with David A. Vise on the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission. He received the second in 2005 for his book, Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001.

For this START Seminar, Mr. Coll shared his knowledge on “Osama Bin Laden and the Globalization of Terror” with the audience of more than 150 people at the University of Maryland. In his discussion, Mr. Coll covered the family background of the Bin Ladens, Osama’s radicalization, his relevance as a communicator, and the extent to which his work was a product of globalization. He also discussed the variance in how Osama’s friends and family perceived his early actions versus how they are commonly perceived abroad.

To access the audio or video recording of the event, see http://www.start.umd.edu/announcements/announcement.asp?id=117.

START Seminar Series

The START Seminar Series brings leading experts in the field of homeland security to the University of Maryland campus each semester to brief the campus community and public on hot topics related to terrorism.
In conjunction with the 2008 annual meeting of the National Communication Association (NCA, www.natcom.org), START and the National Communication Association Forum (NCA-F) co-sponsored a day-long pre-conference on November 20 in San Diego that explored communication dilemmas in advance of a real or perceived terrorist threat. Conference sessions addressed (1) how communication needs in anticipation of terrorist threats compare with those for natural disasters; (2) how the press and public officials can best communicate news of foiled threats to their publics; (3) the problems various stakeholders confront in communicating about imminent attacks; and (4) to what extent publics can be made a part of the pre-event planning and problem-solving process.

An innovative multi-media discussion technique pioneered by the late CBS journalist Fred Friendly and made familiar by the award-winning Fred Friendly Seminars (FFS, www.fredfriendly.org) animated the sessions. FFS features a novel method of framing extensive research in terms of hypothetical situations drawn from real-life scenarios. Clips from FFS videos Bio-Attack, City Under Siege, and Reporting on Terrorism invited critical thinking and discussion throughout the day.

START researchers played a key role in the conference. Lisa Keränen, of the University of Colorado at Boulder, and lead researcher on the START project “Textual Analysis of Electronic Media Coverage of Homeland Security-Related Risks,” served as the lead conference planner with assistance from former START Fellow and PhD candidate Hamilton Bean. Key panelists included START researchers, Elaine Vaughan of the University of California, Irvine, and Monique Turner of the University of Maryland. Participants included communication scholars, emergency managers, journalists, and public information and law enforcement officials. Student participation was also strong.

A poster session rounded out the day. The prize for best poster was awarded to Kimberly Cowden of North Dakota State University for her poster, “Perceptions of Risk and Crisis Communication among Vulnerable Populations.”

For more information on the NCA-F/START Conference on Emergency Pre-Event Communication, see http://www.start.umd.edu/announcements/announcement.asp?id=112.
In November, START convened a one-day workshop to synthesize and extend current understanding of how the use of IEDs by terrorist actors spreads across time, space and actors. Although there has been sparse research in the diffusion of terrorist tactics, the literature on the diffusion of innovations and other practices is robust, and the workshop drew on the long history of research in this area to inform its activities.

Although improvised explosive devices (IEDs) have long been staple weapons of violent non-state actors who lack access to the sophisticated armaments produced by military manufacturers, such weapons have only relatively recently risen to the upper strata of concern among those responsible for dealing with the tactical manifestations of the terrorist threat. It is therefore hardly surprising to find that there is a relative scarcity of past analytic and scholarly material examining terrorists’ weapon selection, particularly in the case of improvised explosives. This is especially true when one considers the behavioral and decision-making aspects of weapons selection and how these relate to broader contextual factors.

One area where the social and behavioral sciences, and specifically START, have the potential to make a substantial contribution is in understanding how the use of IEDs, particularly in terrorist campaigns, spreads from one actor and geographic location to another. Studying how IED use is chosen and diffuses will undoubtedly also have much broader application for the understanding of terrorist behavior, since it necessitates exploring general mechanisms of tactical innovation and weapons selection.

Workshop participants included:
• Jeffrey Bale - Monterey Institute of International Studies
• Mia Bloom - University of Georgia
• Martha Crenshaw - Stanford University
• Joshua Freilich - John Jay College of Criminal Justice
• Michael Kenney - Pennsylvania State University
• Gary LaFree - University of Maryland
• Richard Legault - University of Maryland
• Jeffrey Lewis - Ohio State University
• Steven Markham - North Carolina State University
• Clark McCauley - Bryn Mawr College
• Samuel Musa - National Defense University
• Stephen Veyera - Federal Bureau of Investigation

During the workshop, participants achieved three objectives:
• To explore the social elements involved in the diffusion of IED use among and between terrorist organizations, including those factors influencing learning and adaptation.
• To synthesize a knowledge base from relevant fields upon which to build future research.
• To develop operationally-relevant preliminary findings and recommendations that can be communicated to practitioners.

START plans to use workshop as a springboard to generate and inform future research on this complex topic.
In December, Linda Bourque of UCLA and Dennis Mileti of the University of Colorado at Boulder, presented the findings of their completed survey on disaster experiences and preparedness at the National Press Club in Washington, DC. Corey Gruber, Assistant Deputy Administrator of the National Preparedness Directorate (NPD), a component of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), provided the DHS / FEMA perspective on the research findings and how research is translated into practice.

The National Survey of Disaster Experiences and Preparedness, under funding from DHS through START, and from the National Science Foundation, surveyed a representative sample of 3,300 households in the continental United States to answer four questions:

1. What have Americans done to prepare for terrorist acts and disasters?
2. What steps have Americans taken to avoid or reduce exposure to terrorism?
3. What motivates Americans to prepare for terrorism in particular, to prepare for disasters in general, and to avoid terrorism risk?
4. How can policy and programs to increase public readiness for terrorism accomplish more?

Strong and clear evidence was discovered about the fundamental processes that motivate Americans to prepare. Conclusions included:

- There is minimal variance among responses from high-risk respondents (NYC, DC, LA) and low-risk respondents (rest of country).
- There are few significant differences across ethnic groups among behaviors reported.
- Americans do few actions specifically because of terrorism but do substantially more for other reasons.

Study documents from the survey (cited below) are available for download at http://www.start.umd.edu/publications/ as “reports”.


An audio-recording of the event, as well as links to all of the meeting materials and C-Span coverage of the event are available through the START website at http://www.start.umd.edu/announcements/announcement.asp?id=123.
In January 2009, Katherine Worboys, START’s Assistant Director for Education, and Amber Stoesser Lesniewicz, START’s Educational Programs Associate, traveled to Europe with 20 University of Maryland students as part of the Winter Study Abroad Course, Counterterrorism in the European Union. The course included five days in Den Haag, The Netherlands, one week in Munich, Germany and two days in Vienna, Austria. The purpose of the course was to expose students to how counterterrorism agencies in European Union countries operate from both the academic and practical perspective. Learning objectives included development of knowledge pertaining to:

- The impact of both terrorist attacks and the threat of terrorism on individuals and groups within parts of Europe;
- Terrorism prevention, deterrence, and interdiction efforts in parts of Europe and within the United Nations; and
- Domestic preparedness, emergency management, and first responders within parts of Europe.

While in Den Haag, the group met with Mark Dechesne, a former START Visiting Fellow, who coordinated lectures from Leiden University faculty at its Centre for Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism. These talks included discussions of the history of Dutch terrorism and counterterrorism and how Dutch intelligence agencies work in accordance with one another to form a counterterrorist policy. In addition to lectures from professors at Leiden University, students toured the United States Embassy in Den Haag as well as the International Criminal Court. Students also took cultural excursions to many locations around The Netherlands including the Maluku Museum in Utrecht to learn about the Moluccas train hijackings of the 1970s.

After a ride on a night train to Munich, students learned about the practice of counterterrorism from municipal Munich police forces as well as the Bavarian police and GSG-9—the German version of SWAT. This lecture series was coordinated by Robert Mizia of the Bavarian Strategic Innovation Center. Students toured many of Munich’s sites including the Olympic Stadium, the site of the tragic 1972 Olympic massacre of Israeli athletes. Additionally, students learned about Munich’s past as the birthplace of Nazism and the Neo-romantic architecture of Neuschwenstein Castle in the Bavarian Alps.

Finally, students rounded out their trip to Europe with a stop in Vienna to visit the United Nations Headquarters in Vienna. While at the UN, a guest lecturer from the UN Office of Drugs and Crime spoke about the UN’s role in terrorism prevention. Back at Maryland, students completed papers that analyzed and assessed the implementation of one of the country’s counterterrorism policies. For more information about the trip or to read the syllabus, please check START’s Syllabi Repository at www.start.umd.edu/education/syllabi.

“I was delighted that the presentation in Austria summed up our trip so nicely by stressing the importance of international cooperation in the fight against modern terrorism. Coming from learning about micro-strategies for counterterrorism in Germany and national policies in the Netherlands, the global effort that we learned about in Vienna was a third tier of counterterrorism effort that I found particularly fascinating. The presentation was extremely relevant to our interests, and the speaker explained a number of international legal policies in a way that we could all understand and relate to.”

– Jennifer Wright, UMD Class of 2009
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The Global Terrorism Database

The Global Terrorism Database (GTD) is an open-source database presenting information on terrorist events around the world since 1970 (currently updated through 2004), including data on where, when, and how each of almost 80,000 terrorist events occurred. ▶