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## Not-so-subtle reminders of terrorist threats to come

On the surface, the war in Afghanistan, and perhaps the war on terrorism generally, seemed to grow increasingly remote from most people's lives in recent weeks.

After the Taliban's swift defeat, the difficulty of consolidating victory drew little attention. And while Osama bin Laden and the al-Qaeda leadership escaped, they at least were on the run, with their organization wounded. At home, meanwhile, with the six-month mark since Sept. 11 just a week away, terrorists have yet to strike a second blow.

But deeper currents emerging in the past few days expose any newfound sense of security as false.

On Saturday, U.S. forces in Afghanistan took on their toughest action to date — a reminder not just that the war isn't over, but also that the endgame is not yet clear.

Then on Sunday, *The Washington Post* reported that the Bush administration has grave concerns about al-Qaeda's access to nuclear or radiological weapons.

This follows other sobering news:

- The administration has set up a secret, bunkered shadow government to keep the country running in the event of a devastating attack on Washington.
- U.S. military advisers will be dispatched to Yemen, site of the 2000 attack on the USS Cole, and to the former Soviet republic of Georgia, which faces a Muslim insurgency. Advisers are already in the Philippines.
- Reports continue to suggest that the administration is preparing to attack Iraq.
- And the escalating conflict between Israel and the Palestinians continues to undermine U.S. objectives.

The most alarming, of course, is the nuclear threat, and it bears directly on what is happening elsewhere. Until al-Qaeda is destroyed — ending its ability to mount a complex operation — defensive measures such as the radiation monitors the administration is deploying will provide little reassurance.

Yet, the growing worldwide nature of the war suggests how difficult that task will be.

Afghanistan illustrates the complexity of the problem. U.S. troops are more directly involved in combat today than in past operations, presumably because Afghan fighters have allowed Taliban and al-Qaeda leaders to escape previous traps. While there seems to be no other choice, they are fighting in an area that favors guerrillas, the very area where successful opposition to Soviet occupation began. Unless al-Qaeda can be rooted out quickly and Afghans can be trusted to execute the operation, the danger of repeating the Soviet experience becomes vivid.

More broadly, the neophyte government of Hamid Karzai is already facing challenges from warlords. Tens of thousands of peacekeepers will be needed to maintain order, with U.S. involvement in some form.

Iraq, Yemen, Georgia and the Philippines pose similar problems. Collectively, they risk further inflaming Muslim sentiment against the U.S., which can achieve military victory more easily than it can maintain peace.

Sept. 11 forced the administration to respond forcefully, making up policy as it went along. It has managed that task brilliantly. But as more



I am a

Male

seeking a

Female

Age

18

to

35

Ethnicity

Any

Asian

Black

Hold down CTRL for multiple selections

Near Zipcode

Go!

months go by, greater clarity of objective will be needed.

When will we have won? For now, the answer still isn't clear. That won't work forever.