Muslim Public Opinion on the US Military in Counter-Terrorism Interventions

Dr. Clay Ramsay, Research Director
Program on International Policy Attitudes, University of Maryland

Looking at the war on terrorism overall, the US's primary counter-terrorism intervention has been the deployment of military forces in Afghanistan and Iraq--with a widening of its military footprint in the Arabian Peninsula, in and around the Arabian Sea, Central Asia and Pakistan. Polls of national populations in Islamic countries can tell us much about possible side effects of this power projection. The talk is based on data from START's international public opinion survey, conducted December 2006 through February 2007 in Morocco, Egypt, Pakistan and Indonesia. (For full details see http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/apr07/START_Apr07_rpt.pdf).

When people in these countries were asked whether they approved or disapproved of attacks on US troops in Iraq, large majorities in Egypt and Morocco did approve. However, in Pakistan and Indonesia, only a third or fewer approved. This pattern was repeated when respondents were asked about attacks on US troops in Afghanistan or the Persian Gulf countries. Which theater US troops were in made little difference to responses, within or across countries.

Most respondents did not view the US war on terror as a protective reaction against a threat. Instead they viewed it either as a type of *realpolitik* to further US interests, or as part of a project to weaken and divide Islam. Since majorities in these Islamic countries tended to see the war on terrorism as a project directed against them, they did not vary their judgments particularly about US troops in different contexts.