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## Continued threat from global terrorist organizations

### Al-Qaeda is weakened but still resilient

*At the turn of the century, peace and prosperity had finally arrived in the Western world. A series of devastating wars and catastrophic events had given way to tranquility. Incredible scientific and medical advances were taking place while the arts and literature were flourishing. However, the peace and calm so long anticipated was shattered by a terrorist event that precipitated a prolonged period of warfare and suffering. Sound familiar? While this description may bring to mind the current state of world affairs, this situation existed at the beginning of the twentieth century when a terrorist group called the "Black Hand," led by a Bosnian Serb, Gavrilo Princip, assassinated the Archduke of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a province of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.*

*This terrorist act ignited the powder keg of Balkan unrest and precipitated a series of cataclysmic events leading to two World Wars and a Cold War that consumed almost the entire twentieth century. Will history repeat itself in the twenty-first century? Again, at the most recent turn of the century the world was enjoying a semblance of peace, and similar optimistic expectations were anticipated, but in 2001 the events of 9/11 again shattered the chances of prolonged peace. This event set off a series of events that some experts have described as a clash of civilizations. Although we are over five years removed from 9/11, the consequences of this terrorist attack are still with us and the need to understand exactly what al-Qaeda represents and its potential should be revisited lest we become complacent and unprepared.*

True to form, al-Qaeda launched an early start in 2007. Al-Qaeda's number two leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri started off the new year with a statement entitled, "Rise Up to Bring Victory to your Brothers in Somalia." A fanatical Islamic group briefly controlled Mogadishu and threatened to bring a government into power in Somalia, similar to the Taliban in Afghanistan. However some warlords and troops from Ethiopia overthrew

their brief control of Somalia. Presently the Ethiopians do not have the resources to sustain their success in maintaining the control in Somalia and the Islamic elements are still a threat. Reportedly, at least three al-Qaeda members who were involved in the embassy bombings in Africa are active with the Islamic forces in Somalia. They have been identified and the borders of Somalia have been closed to prevent their escape. This development portends that elements of al-Qaeda are still active and proselytizing Wahhabi-style Islam and securing jihad against the West. Meanwhile the situation in Afghanistan is tenuous, with a resurgence of the Taliban activity and the recent surfacing of Mullah Muhammad Omar. It was Mullah Omar and other Taliban leaders who invited bin Laden and al-Qaeda to Afghanistan to export Islamic militancy to other points in the Muslim world and to establish other Islamic nations where that religion would be practiced exclusively.

### Osama bin Laden

Like other Arab volunteers, Osama bin Laden surfaced in the 1980s to fight against the Soviets alongside the Mujahideen in Afghanistan. After the Soviet withdrawal, he returned home to Saudi Arabia just in time to witness Saddam Hussein's incursion into Kuwait. Relations between bin Laden and the Saudis deteriorated when his efforts to organize an army of Islamic militants was discouraged and the Saudis turned towards the Americans for assistance against the Iraqis. As a result of his criticism of the Saudi royal family for allowing western forces to be stationed in the land of Mecca and Medina, the holiest shrines of Islam, he became unwelcome in Saudi Arabia.

Osama bin Laden was invited to set up his operation in Sudan after the Saudis asked him to leave Saudi Arabia. At this time Sudan had become an Islamic state and the Muslim spiritual leader, Hassan al-Turabi had forged alliances with extremists in Iran and Islamic militants from all

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over the world. Like bin Laden, al-Turabi was convinced steps must be taken to cleanse the Muslim world of Western influence and U.S. puppet regimes, such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Israel. Consequently bin Laden set up shop in Sudan and ran legitimate and militant front operations there from 1991 until 1996. Al-Turabi provided bin Laden with a safe haven to conduct militant affairs unfettered by government restrictions. Estimates suggest that bin Laden had set up 23 militant training camps by 1996. Saudi Arabia, recognizing the threat extent in bin Laden's activities, utilized financial incentives to convince Sudan to expel him in 1996. At that point bin Laden pulled up stakes and moved to the Taliban-run Afghanistan. Mullah Omar and the Taliban in Afghanistan gave him even greater cover to operate than bin Laden had enjoyed in Sudan. He set up training camps and ran many successful operations, including the embassy bombings in Africa in 1998. Al-Qaeda operatives destroyed the U.S. embassies in Nairobi, Kenya and Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania. The simultaneous bombings killed 301 people and injured 5,000 more. Obviously, this was a well planned attack that reflected a high level of training, discipline and coordination.

Shortly after this successful and devastating attack, al-Qaeda had the audacity to attack an American battleship off the coast of Yemen. Again this was a suicide attack. A small craft packed with explosives blew a large hole in the hull of the guided missile destroyer USS Cole, killing 17 sailors and injuring 37 more.

On September 11, 2001, al-Qaeda dispatched suicide operatives to hijack four American commercial airliners and fly them into structures in New York and Washington, D.C. Two airliners crashed into the World Trade Center and one into the Pentagon. A fourth jet crashed into an open field in Pennsylvania. More than 3,000 people died in the attacks.

In the aforementioned attacks, al-Qaeda came

after the United States with suicide bombers in cars, trucks, boats and planes. These operations involved a great deal of planning and coordination. The 9/11 operatives were recruited in the Middle East, trained in Afghanistan and met to plan the attacks in Western Europe. The fact that most of them were Saudis precluded the difficulty in obtaining visas to the United States. They slipped into the United States and successfully communicated and behaved to avoid coming to the attention of the authorities. The American authorities failed to identify them in a timely manner and our European allies were equally clueless as to the meetings and plans taking place on their soil.

Al-Qaeda has snatched most of the headlines during the past several years. Investigation has determined this militant organization has cells in about sixty countries. Al-Qaeda has many goals, most of which center on the objective to diminish American influence in the Middle East and Muslim world and particularly in Israel and Iraq. Al-Qaeda also wants to drive American troops from Saudi territory, which bin Laden and al-Qaeda consider sacred. Bin Laden and his supporters have designs on all territory in which Muslims had a substantial presence in the past, including parts of Europe, all the way from Eastern Europe to Spain. This militant network envisions the establishment of a pan-Islamic caliphate, across all Muslim lands, based on the Taliban model.

### **Al-Qaeda's recent evolution**

After 9/11, if there was ever any doubt about the danger and widespread resources of this resolute group, it quickly dissipated. The Taliban was driven out of Afghanistan, the American homeland security apparatus was reorganized, more resources were made available to the counterterrorism agencies and police departments and legislation was enacted to support law enforcement efforts.

Additionally, closer ties have been forged with

allied intelligence and police agencies to truly launch a coordinated war on terror. Even the visa regime has been reviewed. Fortunately, the American homeland has been unscathed during the past five years and the abovementioned reforms and developments have undoubtedly played a role. However, we should now reassess our position and the challenges facing our partners in this war on terror.

Al-Qaeda, as we knew it on 9/11, is on the run. They no longer have a safe haven to train terrorists and plan actions with impunity. The international community rarely hears from bin Laden. He is widely believed to be ill and hiding somewhere in Pakistan, and therefore is no longer an effective leader. Ayman al-Zawahiri remains the al-Qaeda spokesperson and he occasionally surfaces to rhetorically attack the West and rally his supporters. Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, a high ranking officer believed to be the key planner of the September 11, 2001 attacks, was arrested in Rawalpindi, Pakistan, and handed over to U.S. officials. Reportedly he is now in Guantanamo and has been convinced to cooperate, if only sporadically. Although this news appears positive and the original al-Qaeda no longer has the potential of its former status, the threat still exists and the situation may be more dangerous than ever. Al-Qaeda is no longer a hierarchical structure of control and command, but a horizontal organization with many cells, some connected, but many unconnected. These cells share similar goals and draw their inspiration from al-Qaeda and the Mujahideen who successfully humbled the Soviet Union and the United States. Although the United States has been relatively untouched since September 11, 2001, al-Qaeda supporters have launched attacks in Bali, Indonesia; Madrid, Spain; London, England; Casablanca, Morocco; Tunis, Tunisia; Istanbul, Turkey; Jakarta, Indonesia and seaside resorts in Egypt. There were also attacks in Amman, Jordan, and Beirut, Lebanon, in addition to the daily carnage in Iraq. These terrorists will continue to attack vulnerable targets.

Information emanating from Iraq reflects that five Sunni insurgent groups, all anti-Shiite and anti-U.S., have joined al-Qaeda in Iraq's umbrella organizations since mid-October. Additional information indicates other groups are edging

toward the al-Qaeda network. The commander of al-Qaeda in Iraq's "Islamic State" recently announced that scores of fighters have sworn allegiance to his group. There are several extremist groups loosely allied with the al-Qaeda network that share resources, propaganda or operations with the al-Qaeda group, but they are only loosely affiliated with each other.

Intelligence indicates that these groups have recently explored stronger, more formal ties with al-Qaeda in Iraq. Previously, the al-Qaeda group was "essentially losing" in Iraq. Foreign recruits made up the majority of the group and its leader, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, was Jordanian, limiting its appeal among Iraqis who resented outsiders. Al-Qaeda in Iraq is virulently anti-Shiite and became a refuge for aggrieved and beleaguered Sunnis, especially after the provocative bombing of the Askariya Mosque in Samarra, one of Shiite Islam's holiest shrines. Al-Qaeda in Iraq is in the ascendancy and will be a force of considerable concern, depending on the outcome of the conflict in Iraq. Unfortunately the situation in Iraq was recently described as "grave and deteriorating" by the President's Iraq Study Group.

Three of the most important issues in the world at this time have a terrorism dimension. The Middle East situation has become more complicated with the rise of Hamas in Palestinian politics. Hamas' primary claim to infamy is the March 2002 suicide bombing that killed 22 Israelis during a Passover Seder. In Lebanon, we see a similar phenomenon with Hezbollah playing a larger role in Beirut. Hezbollah is one of the first groups to employ the suicide bomb as a weapon of choice. During 1983, Hezbollah detonated a suicide car bomb outside the American Embassy in Beirut, killing 63 people. Later that year Hezbollah carried out a suicide truck bombing at the U.S. Marines barracks in Beirut that killed 241 marines and 60 French soldiers. Recently an Israeli military intelligence official stated that "dozens, if not hundreds" of al-Qaeda operatives had arrived in Lebanon. The third major problem is Iran, a nation that has never stepped back from support of terrorist elements in its struggle with the West and now is moving toward the production of nuclear weapons.

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### What is al-Qaeda today?

In the five years since September 11, 2001, the U.S. government has spent more than \$400 billion on its global war on terrorism, concentrating on state sponsors of terrorism and terror groups. Al-Qaeda still remains the government's top terrorist concern, as the group aspires to have the type of global network it had prior to 9/11. Although crippled, al-Qaeda is quite resilient, placing its emphasis on inspiring and trying to mobilize similar groups, establishing links to have these satellite groups drive al-Qaeda's agenda. This is why we recently witnessed terrorist activities by militant Sunni Islamist groups in Algeria, Morocco and Somalia. A great concern at this time is the growing sophistication of al-Qaeda and its affiliated groups. The British airliner plot is an example of their resourcefulness and tenacity to avoid detection in their execution of terrorist acts. The group's growing technological sophistication is a trend that will continue to challenge the authorities, especially in view of the ample evidence available showing that these terrorist groups are still trying to acquire various forms of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). A chilling example is the al-Qaeda operative, currently in Malaysian detention, Yaazid Sufaat, who was tasked to develop and deploy a biological weapon in Southeast Asia.

The United States is now a more difficult target to damage than it was five years ago. Meanwhile the terrorist groups are still in business and continue to attack softer targets throughout the world. There seems to be more of them than ever and they are more sophisticated than ever and there is evidence to support the fears they are attempting to obtain WMDs. There is no doubt that the American homeland is still their most desirable target, and these groups are actively searching for newer and more sophisticated techniques to exploit vulnerable targets. Recent research regarding our vulnerabilities indicate our ports, transportation system, energy supply system, chemical plants and refineries, cyber infrastructure, agriculture and water supply systems need to be reviewed and the security enhanced. A recent publication by a security expert claims that we are still unprepared for the next terrorist attack or natural disaster, suggest-

ing that we are living on borrowed time because our adversaries are resilient and tenacious in continuing to plot against us. To date we have avoided another catastrophe like 9/11, but we must remain vigilant and resourceful to prevent another successful attack that could come in many forms, radiological, chemical, biological or a cyber attack.

### The Time for Urgency is Now®

*Security threats are always present, whether terrorists or natural phenomena. Complacency is a common reaction to an absence of recent disasters, but this is the most dangerous approach to a security plan. A sense of urgency is important to effectively meet and defeat the unique challenges that each danger may cause. Neglecting a serious security plan will cause great chaos to businesses, organizations and institutions when the emergency occurs. It may even destroy an organization.*

*Businesses, governments and private citizens must all prepare for the worst. Those who are prepared and who have carefully planned for security dangers will not only be more likely to prevent such threats, but will also be capable of responding to a crisis to minimize human and economic costs.*



The Lipman Report Editors