

January 15, 2008

2008 as We See It Security, Terrorism and al Qaeda

On December 16, 2007, al Qaeda's As-Sahab media branch released a 97-minute video message from al Qaeda second-in-command Ayman al-Zawahiri titled "A Review of Events," in which he lists the enemies of Islam and recommends actions against the United States, the European Union, Israel and several Arab states cooperating with the West. In response to al-Zawahiri's lengthy tirade of dangerous nonsense, this issue of The Lipman Report will review the future for the global and regional struggles against terrorism. While states have achieved some major successes in dismantling terrorist networks in the past few years, the fight remains an open-ended effort. The past year has seen terrorist groups gain power and go on the offensive.

Currently, the core of al Qaeda leadership struggles to remain relevant in the ideological realm, a daunting task for an organization rendered strategically impotent on the physical battlefield. The group continues its metamorphosis from a smaller core group of professional operatives into an operational model encouraging independent "grassroots" jihadists to conduct attacks, while sometimes providing the operational commanders who organize grassroots cells. This devolution signifies a return to al Qaeda's pre-9/11 model, giving al Qaeda "the movement" a broader geographic and operational reach than al Qaeda "the group." Although dangerous, this less cohesive group lacks the operational depth and expertise of the core group and its well-trained terrorist cadre. Events during 2007 reflect this development. The thwarted but high-profile attempted attacks in London and Glasgow were plotted by these grassroots groups or by regional affiliates.

The al Qaeda franchise in Iraq has conducted hundreds of successful bombings and has a considerable experience in tradecraft and bomb making. British authorities have indicated that the men responsible for the failed attacks in London and Glasgow were linked to al Qaeda in Iraq. The coalition's list of foreign jihadists killed in Iraq shows that most of the fighters have come from places such as Saudi Arabia, Algeria, and Morocco, but also from many other countries, including the United States, United Kingdom and the European Union. If there is no possibility of seeking martyrdom in Iraq, these men and women may find another place to embrace their doom. Jihadists might opt to follow the example of the 2005

London bombers and martyr themselves in their countries of residence.

The use of suicide bombers has added a more serious dimension to the scourge of terrorism. Recent events from the 9/11 conspirators in the United States to the 2005 bombings in London point out that no country is immune to this horrific weapon that has cost so many lives recently. Although suicide bombings are primarily employed in the Middle East and Southern Asia, this tool of terrorism causes a great deal of mayhem and loss of life worldwide. It is also very difficult to prevent without drastic countermeasures that run the risk of being inconsistent and counterproductive in a democracy. The horrific murder of former Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto is the latest in the unending plague of suicide bombers murdering thousands of innocents and destroying tens of thousands of families across the globe.

To address this outrage, the United Nations General Assembly should call a special session to deal with the scourge of suicide terror. Suicide bombings should be designated as Crimes Against Humanity and put at the top of the international community's agenda. Religious leaders can no longer ignore the fact most suicide terrorists are believers and must use every opportunity to denounce this belief as nothing less than a perversion of all that is good. The world must act now in a united and coordinated effort to stop this horrific phenomenon. The volatile situation in Pakistan, a nation possessing nuclear weapons, highlights the consequences of inaction against suicide bombers.

The Asia Pacific Region

In September 2007, FBI Director Robert Mueller described three tiers of al Qaeda: Hard-core terrorists who are trying to reconstitute the organization in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq; loosely affiliated groups located in Europe and self-radicalized cells springing up in the United States. These potential recruits surf the Internet to communicate with and influence sympathetic people around the world.

While Mueller's observations had a uniquely American and European perspective, his comments can be applied to Asia and Australia. Al Qaeda has loosely affiliated groups in Indonesia, Malaysia and the

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Philippines, with several self-radicalized cells taking their cues, ideas and encouragement from the Internet and electronic communications. Additionally, racial and religious strife and violence has been common for many years in South and Southeast Asia. While the Sunni and Shiite internecine wars are most visible in the Middle East and the Asian subcontinent, Chinese, Malay, Indian, Thai conflicts have often been exacerbated by religious ideologies involving Christians, Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists. The third tier Mueller named is at present largely Islamic fundamentalists encouraged by the successes of al Qaeda in the Middle East and elsewhere. However, other groups of various political persuasions and religious beliefs also fall into the category of self-radicalized cells and are often involved in purely local issues, both political and religious.

When al Qaeda operated freely in the Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan and Northwest Pakistan, it trained many radical Indonesians, Malaysians and Filipinos in military skills, insurrection and political/religious indoctrination. Since these bases have been disrupted by the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as more aggressive activity on the part of government security forces in many countries, few Southeast Asian radicals are able to continue with such training. Some al Qaeda and other radical organization financing of these self-radicalized groups continues, but on a much more limited scale.

Nevertheless, the terrorism outlook for the Asia-Pacific region in 2008 is decidedly grim. Countries in South and Southeast Asia are likely to face intensifying attacks this year from terrorist networks and insurgent movements drawing strength from the deepening political, social and religious disenchantment among local populations and from the continuing rise of global fundamentalist terror networks that offer resources, expertise and ideological inspiration for local militant groups.

In view of the recent assassination of the former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto in Rawalpindi, Pakistan deserves special attention as a contender for the title of the most dangerous country on earth. The government of Pakistan and terrorism experts initially designated al Qaeda as responsible for this horrific and provocative crime as well as the suicide bombing that killed over 150 people in Karachi on the day Bhutto returned from

exile. The alleged culprit has been identified as a Taliban warlord called Baitullah Mehsud who operates a terrorist haven along the north-western frontier with Afghanistan. This lawless frontier area not only provides a refuge for al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden, but jihad academies have been established in this area to train suicide-bombers. Mehsud leads one of many groups enriched by Afghani drug money and encourages global jihad. This area of Pakistan has become a magnet for Pakistani and foreign jihadist terrorists and has allegedly supplied dozens of suicide bombers for attacks in Pakistan during 2007.

When all the explosive ingredients are factored into the equation such as ethnic tensions, sectarian divide between Sunni and Shia Muslims, lawless areas dominated by the Taliban allowing al Qaeda to operate as in pre 9/11 Afghanistan, a weak and unpopular government and a country allowing the nuclear scientist A. Q. Khan to operate without restraint, Pakistan indeed deserves the "most dangerous place" designation.

Iran's continued support for the terrorist organizations Hamas and Hizballah and their reportedly continued efforts to produce a nuclear weapon places this country in the same category as Pakistan. In addition, their elite military organization, the Revolutionary Guards, designated a terrorist organization by the United States, could potentially interfere with shipping traffic in the Strait of Hormuz. Since 40 percent of the world's oil flows through this strait from the Persian Gulf, this creates a potentially precarious economic situation.

Since so much of the world's cargo flows through Asian ports like Singapore and Hong Kong, these port authorities take cargo security very seriously. Their program uses the US Custom-Trade Partnership Against Terrorism standards, European standards and standards of every other country which has adopted a cargo security program. Due to the combined efforts of the Port of Singapore Authority, a commercial entity operating the port, as well as the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore and Singapore Customs, government agencies, Singapore has stringent cargo security programs and practices. The defect inherent in any of the standards is that they are enforceable only in their home country, and cargo in transit through such a port is always subject to risk from the point of origin.

To help combat terrorism, many foreign government counterintelligence, law-enforcement and security agencies, such as the Australian Security Intelligence Organization (the equivalent of the FBI's counterintelligence division), the FBI, the Department of Homeland Security, the CIA and the DIA have been invited to assist Asian countries in meeting the modern terrorist threat. These organizations are invited, warmly welcomed and engaged to a significant level with local authorities.

Australia and Asia suffer from all three tiers of Al Qaeda terrorist activity, plus violence over local issues, encouraged and emboldened by other terrorists' successes, propaganda and exhortations via the Internet and other media.

Europe and Northern Africa

According to public opinion polls, terrorism has been a major concern for governments and citizens of the European Union for many years. In fact, many European countries rank terrorism as a greater concern than nuclear proliferation.

Since the 1960s, Europeans have been the targets of terrorist attacks conducted by indigenous and transnational terrorist organizations. Throughout the years, terrorist organizations carried out airline hijackings, bank robberies, bombings, kidnappings and assassinations. Until the collapse of the Soviet Empire, many of these terrorist groups were supported by East Bloc and Middle East states, thus allowing terrorists to spend more time on operations and less on logistics. State-sponsored terrorist groups had easy access to documents, money, weapons and training facilities.

After many years of chaos and indiscriminate terrorism, public outrage among European citizens forced European politicians to put more resources into fighting these groups. As a result, law enforcement capabilities were brought to bear on European terrorist groups. International law enforcement cooperation also improved, resulting in the arrest, prosecution and sentencing of hundreds of members and supporters, including the hardcore leadership. As a result, many of these European indigenous terrorist groups were virtually shattered or eliminated.

The post September 11, 2001 world and the war in

Iraq have brought another type and level of terrorism threat to Europe and North Africa, commandeered by large non-integrated immigrant populations and loose independent Islamic fundamentalist groups. Some of these Islamic militants are inspired philosophically by al Qaeda and trained in Iraq in the insurgency movements. Reports published concerning terrorist acts carried out and/or intercepted by law enforcement and intelligence authorities in the United Kingdom, Spain, Italy, Germany, Belgium, Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia show that some of the participants had direct connections to the al Qaeda leadership, while others were inspired by information and radical Islamic writings and propaganda in the Internet and acted independently.

The threat to European and North African societies and political institutions by the terrorist activities of groups such as the Moroccan Islamic Fighters Group and the Salafist Group for the Call and Combat (GSPC) is augmented by the alignment to al Qaeda of other established Islamic terrorist movements. On September 11, 2006, the GSPC changed its name to al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, and on November 3, 2007, the Libyan Islamic Fighters Group declared its allegiance to al Qaeda. In the past Ayman al-Zawahiri, bin Laden's right hand man has called North African Muslims to declare "jihad" against American, French, and Spanish and European interests. He has also called for the overthrow of Libyan, Algerian, Moroccan and Tunisian governments, leaders he considers "slaves of the west."

Radical Islamic fundamentalism is the most serious current threat confronting European societies in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Law enforcement, intelligence authorities, private security and the general public have to be prepared to confront and neutralize it.

Latin America

The United States' attention to terrorism in Latin America greatly intensified after 9/11, with a marked increase in bilateral and regional cooperation. Latin American nations were powerfully vocal in condemning the attacks on New York and Washington, and used the Organization of American States (OAS) to boost collaborative anti-terrorism efforts with the U.S. OAS members signed an Inter-American Convention against Terrorism in 2002, which was ratified by the U.S. government in November 2005.

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Over the past several years, the U.S. has carefully monitored threats to Latin America from various terrorist or insurgent groups. Although Latin America has not been a primary focal point in the war on terrorism, countries in the region have been challenged with domestic terrorism for decades. Furthermore, international terrorist groups have at times used the region to further their causes. In its April 2006 report on global terrorism, the State Department highlighted threats in countries ranging from Colombia and Peru to the Tri-Border Area (TBA) of Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay, but emphasized that there was no conclusive evidence of current operational cells of Islamic terrorists in the hemisphere.

Colombia remains of paramount concern to the U.S., largely due to three groups that the Secretary of State has designated as Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs): Two leftist guerrilla groups, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN), and a rightist paramilitary group, the United Self-Defense Forces of Columbia. Despite some headway by the Columbian Government to neutralize the activities of these organizations, the April 2006 terrorism report suggests that these three groups continue to murder, kidnap, assassinate, rob and terrorize Columbians and tourists.

Peru's foremost terrorism challenge is the unfortunate reemergence of the militant Maoist Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path), an FTO that ransacked the country in the 80's and 90's at the cost of more than 69,000 lives. The TBA also has a history of terrorism. The 1992 Buenos Aires bombings of the Israeli embassy and the 1994 Argentine-Israeli Community Center (AMIA) have been subsequently linked to the Iranian government, Hizballah and possibly Hamas. The TBA is a longtime center for arms and drug trafficking, contraband smuggling, document and currency fraud, money laundering and the manufacture and movement of pirated goods. The U.S. is also concerned that Hizballah and Hamas may be raising funds among the sizeable Muslim communities in the region. Since 1982, Cuba has been included in the State Department's list of countries sponsoring terrorism along with Iran, North Korea, Sudan and Syria. Cuba reportedly has provided a safe haven for members of

several terrorist organizations. According to the State Department's most recent report, Venezuela has also ceased cooperating with international anti-terrorist efforts, tolerated terrorism in its jurisdiction and sought closed relations with two known state sponsors of terrorism, Cuba and Iran.

On a positive note, Mexico has used its logistical position as a convenient point of entry to help safeguard the United States border, while Panama provides assistance in protecting the Panama Canal, its primary economic asset.

This brief overview of terrorism around the world summarizes the international threat of al Qaeda-inspired terrorism. Despite assessments by experts that the core al Qaeda group is struggling, this movement is undoubtedly a dangerous and growing phenomenon. The United States, as well as Europe, remains vulnerable to tactical-level jihadist strikes. It is believed the jihadists have the capability to launch a strategically significant attack and even to employ chemical, biological and radiological weapons. Additionally, previous terrorist attacks demonstrate that explosives are far cheaper, easier to use and more effective at killing people than more exotic weapons. Recently, an American member of Al Qaeda urged Islamic fighters to meet President George Bush with bombs when the president visits the Middle East in January 2008. This exhortation again signifies the danger of al Qaeda elements and their continued efforts to strike American targets. Al Qaeda's dedication to the increasing use of suicide bombers presents a difficult challenge to all protection forces and every reasonable effort must be utilized to neutralize this terrible tactic. Although a great deal has been done to improve the security climate in the United States, now is not the time to let down our guard. Al Qaeda is a living, active threat and the United States remains a primary target. The time for urgency is now.®



The Lipman Report Editors