

For the Foreign Affairs Select Committee

**MEMORANDUM ON INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM
AND THE INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE**

By

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Is Al Qaeda Still an Organisation?

1. Al Qaeda is a transnational movement of 'ism' rather than a traditional highly centralised and tightly controlled terrorist organisation. Its worldwide network of networks is bound together with a shared ideology, strategic goals, modus operandi and fanatical hatred of the US and other Western countries, Israel, and the government of the regimes of Muslim countries which Al Qaeda's leaders accuse of being 'apostates' on the grounds that they 'betray' the 'true Islam' as defined by bin Laden
2. This network of networks consisting of affiliated groups, operational cells and support networks in over 60 countries gives the Al Qaeda movement a greater global reach than any previous international terrorist network. It also provides Al Qaeda with the flexibility and resilience to adapt and sustain its global jihad in spite of the many severe blows the movement has suffered. Al Qaeda's core leadership, communication and training capabilities suffered major disruption and damage when the Taleban regime in Afghanistan, which had provided Al Qaeda with safe haven, was overthrown in autumn 2001. Since 9/11, 15 leading Al Qaeda militants have been captured or killed, and over 3,000 suspected Al Qaeda followers have been arrested or detained. Moreover, millions of pounds of Al Qaeda assets have been frozen in the banking system. Yet despite all these setbacks the movement has continued to recruit and raise more funds worldwide and to commit atrocities such as the bomb attacks in Madrid and London, massive suicide bombings in Iraq and the beheading of hostages.
3. It is a dangerous illusion to assume that because Al Qaeda's core leadership does not carry out the detailed planning, organisation and implementation of all the attacks carried out in its name the movement no longer exists or has a purely marginal role. Bin Laden and Ayman

Zawahiri provide the crucial ideological leadership and strategic direction of the movement. It is they who inspire new recruits to join the global jihad and to be ready to sacrifice their lives as suicide bombers for the cause. Al Qaeda videotapes and websites demonstrate the great importance they attach to propaganda. Recently they have expanded into broadcasting their own news programme called Voice of the Caliphate which attempts to use world events to put over their movements' perverted doctrines. Al Qaeda's leaders are well aware that they cannot rely on the mosques as the sole channel for spreading their ideas. Clear evidence that they continue to win the hearts and minds of those who are attracted to joining Al Qaeda affiliated and cells around the world is the way the websites of these affiliated groups swiftly claim the Al Qaeda connection in their claims of responsibility for attacks, and the Al Qaeda core leadership are so quick to claim 'ownership' for successful attacks. However, there are some clear risks involved in this decentralised network of networks structure. What happens if there is a schism over strategy and tactics between leadership and one of the affiliated? And what happens if a splinter group challenges the leadership by defying its decrees? From what we know of Al Qaeda's core leadership we can assume that they simply do not have the manpower and weapons to suppress or overrule the breakaway group. Another possible implication of the loose structure of the Al Qaeda Network is that they may no longer be able to plan and execute complex coordinated spectacular attacks on the lines of 9/11, through some experts dispute this.

Aims, Capabilities and Plans

4. The main aims of the Al Qaeda movement are:
 - to eject the US and its allies from the Middle East and all Muslim lands;
 - to overthrow existing Muslim governments/regimes, on the grounds that they are 'Apostate' regimes which betray the cause of the true Islam, as defined by bin Laden and Zawahiri; and
 - ultimately to establish a pan-Islamist Caliphate to bring all Muslims under the rule of an Islamist super-state.

5. Al Qaeda believes that the use of the weapon of mass casualty terrorism and the belief that Allah is 'on their side' will ensure that they win ultimate victory. The aim of killing as many of their 'enemy' including civilians, wherever and whenever the opportunity arises was spelt out in bin Laden's notorious Fatwa of February 1998. It is Al Qaeda's explicit commitment to mass-killing, so horrifically demonstrated in its 9/11 attacks, that make it by far the most dangerous terrorist network in the modern world.

6. What do we know of Al Qaeda's capabilities? The key resource for any terrorist organisation is its membership and their level of commitment, training, expertise and experience. In attack after attack Al Qaeda's network of networks has proved its ability to deploy large numbers of operatives and to recruit more than sufficient new members to replace those lost by capture and death in suicide bombing or in armed confrontations with security forces. We should remember that it only takes relatively small numbers to carry out attacks which can kill thousands and inflict severe economic damage and disruption. The 9/11

attacks were carried out by 19 suicide hijackers and a support network of a handful of people. There is no evidence that the movement is unable to obtain the funds and explosives it needs to carry out major coordinated mass-killing suicide bombing attacks. There is overwhelming evidence from a whole series of police investigations into Al Qaeda movement activities that the local networks are not only carrying out the planning and execution of operations: they are in most cases raising the cash to fund such operations and obtaining the explosives and other materials and vehicles or other equipment through thefts, corruption and organised crime in their own areas. However, although small scale terrorist bombing is a very low cost activity for the local networks the cost of mounting a coordinated mass-casualty attack may well be beyond the resources of a local network, and hence shortage of funds may act as a significant barrier to mounting more spectacular attacks. It has been estimated that the 9/11 attacks cost Al Qaeda around \$500,000. At that time this was well within the financial capabilities of Al Qaeda's core leadership. It is unlikely that they would find it so easy to fund such a massively lethal and destructive series of attacks today. The freezing of Al Qaeda assets in the banking system has not been extensive enough though to deprive the Al Qaeda of all its resources but It has compelled the terrorist leadership to rely more than ever on local networks for the resources to carry out local attacks.

7. By far the more important capability for carrying out local attacks is the availability of expertise, especially in bomb making, operational planning and tactics. The Al Qaeda network's supply of well-trained and experienced terrorist operatives has been enormously increased as a result of the field experience provided in the Iraq conflict. Foreign terrorists who have been involved with the Al Qaeda Jihad in Mesopotamia led by the Jordanian Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, are now able to return to their

countries of origin, including the EU member states, battle hardened and with skills acquired and honed in Iraq. It is also noteworthy that in recent weeks we have seen tactics methods copied from the terrorist campaign in Iraq being used in Afghanistan by Taleban and Al Qaeda- linked groups and their Afghan warlord allies to attack. For example the terrorists have rammed a vehicle carrying British personnel with a vehicle packed with explosives. In another close parallel with Iraq the terrorists have also started to mount attacks on recruits to the newly-established Afghan Army.

8. It is possible to obtain a clear idea of the Al Qaeda leadership's long-term strategy from their writings. Zawahiri's Knights Under the Prophet's Banner, for example, stresses the importance they attach to the dual strategy of seeking to establish control over a base area within the heart of the Muslim world while at the same time carrying the struggle to the homelands of the US and its allies. The US military has just announced that they have recently intercepted a letter from Zawahiri to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, Head of Al Qaeda in Iraq. Zawahiri is confident that Al Qaeda will gain a victory in Iraq, and sees this as the first step, the setting up of a Caliphate initially in Iraq, but followed by waging Jihad in Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, finally leading on to the destruction of Israel. The US Department of Defence is convinced that his document is genuine, and, if so, it provides an interesting glimpse of Al Qaeda's strategic plans. The letter also reveals evidence of divisions within the global Al Qaeda network. Zawahiri warns that Zarqawi's particularly cruel measures such as the mass killing of Shia Muslims and the beheading of hostages may alienate public opinion in the Muslim world. If this letter is genuine, as the American government believes, it confirms that the core leadership is unable to control all activities carried out in the name of Al Qaeda. It also confirms the point made earlier re schisms: such a major split on questions

of tactics suggests the possible development of deeper and more lasting splits in the movement.

9. As for plans for specific operations, alas we do not have adequate human intelligence on the precise intentions of the operational planners, cell leaders and support networks. However, we can learn from the investigations carried out by police and judicial bodies into previous attacks successful and failed, in order to learn more about their modus operandi. We know enough from the case history to understand the care and sophistication Al Qaeda network groups use to plan attacks. A vivid example was the information found on an Al Qaeda laptop computer captured in Pakistan which showed that the operations planners were closely examining not only the details of the security provided for key financial targets they planned to attack in the US, but also the precise structure of the buildings in order to decide on the type and strength of explosives to use. It is typical of the Al Qaeda network to engage in detailed reconnaissance and intelligence gathering in preparation for any major operation.

How the Iraq Factor has been Exploited by the Al Qaeda Movement

10. One of the most significant developments in the evolution of Al Qaeda since 2003 has been the way the movement has exploited the allied invasion and occupation of Iraq. Whatever view one may take on the decision to invade Iraq it is simply ignoring reality to deny that the invasion and occupation have been a big boost for Al Qaeda and a setback for the coalition against terrorism. The invasion was a propaganda gift to Al Qaeda because they could portray it as an unprovoked imperialistic attack on a Muslim land. Al Qaeda poses as the defender of Muslim lands and people everywhere. They used this as a recruiting sergeant and as an

opportunity for fund raising for their global jihad. Moreover the conflict provided a rich concentration of US and other western military and civilian targets in a country which the militants could enter all too easily across virtually uncontrolled borders. As this fragile experiment in establishing a democratic government moved forward in Iraq, Al Qaeda has a growing incentive to attack because the last thing they wish to see in Iraq, or anywhere else in the Muslim world, is the successful establishment of a democratic political system. Having failed to prevent the free elections in January 2005 they are now desperate to disrupt the efforts to secure and agreed democratic constitution for Iraq and to provoke an all out civil war between the Sunnis and the Shiite majority. This is what the brutal Al Qaeda bomb attacks on Shiite civilians and clerics are designed to achieve.

11. It is absurd to suggest that recognising the way Al Qaeda has exploited the war in Iraq to its own considerable advantage in some way 'excuses' Al Qaeda's terrorism. In my view there can never be an excuse for the use of terrorism, whoever the perpetrators. Terrorism involves the deliberate mass murder and injury of civilians and is a crime against international law and humanity. However, understanding more about the motivation of terrorists and how they are attracted into extremist groups and groomed to be suicide bombers, is a vital subject for research. 'Know thine enemy' has always been a key maxim of successful strategists. How are we to unravel the Al Qaeda if we do not understand what makes them tick? Nor should we overlook unforeseen consequences of foreign policy decision-making, especially when the key decision are taken by a more powerful ally which may also have failed to anticipate and plan for the implications of their policy for the struggle against international terrorism.

International Efforts to Combat Al Qaeda Terrorism

12. In spite of the setbacks in the struggle against Al Qaeda described above there have been some very positive developments in the international response which need to be taken into account if we are to get a more balanced assessment:

- In spite of deep divisions among members of the Coalition Against Terrorism over the invasion of Iraq international intelligence cooperation in counter-terrorism especially at the bilateral level, has continued to improve. For example, Spain, France and Germany have continued to cooperate closely with the United States in sharing intelligence on the Al Qaeda network despite their opposition to Washington's policy in Iraq.
- EU member states (especially Spain, Germany, France and the UK) have shown considerable success in using their criminal justice systems to try persons suspected of involvement in Al Qaeda linked terrorism. The US government's apparent determination to circumvent their own highly-respected Federal Criminal Court system and to resort to detention without trial for terrorist suspects is baffling and deeply damaging to America's reputation as a champion of democracy and the rule of law.
- One of the most encouraging developments in international response has been the un-dramatic but vital work of capacity building in the developing countries, for example the assistance programme of the FCO in disseminating expertise in anti-terrorism law, policing and intelligence work and the

work of the international agencies such as ICAO, IATA and ACI in enhancing aviation security and of IMO in maritime security.

- The valuable progress in counter-terrorism made by the EU following the Madrid and London bombings for example through the Europe Arrest Warrant mechanism, and the enhanced intelligence sharing and judicial cooperation procedures through EUROPOL, SITCEN, and EUROJUST. This cooperation provides a useful model for other regional IGO's and it is particularly encouraging that the UK has take a very useful role during the British Presidency to further enhance the EU cooperation in this key field.

Major Weaknesses in the International Response to Terrorism

13. If asked to pinpoint major weaknesses in the international response to terrorism I would stress four massive problems:

- In view of Al Qaeda's serious efforts to acquire CBRN weapons much more intensive efforts are required to tighten and police the international arms control and counter-proliferation regimes to enable them to encompass prevention of proliferation to non-state groups. Far more than changes in international treaties is required. We urgently need powerful international agencies to police such regimes. The IAEA is an encouraging, though far from perfect model. We need to build similar mechanisms to deal with chemical and biological weapons.

- Many governments still show a lack of political will and courage to take an unambiguous stand against terrorism whoever the perpetrators and whatever their self-professed cause. There are no good terrorists. Terrorism is a brutal attack on the most basic human right of all, the right to life. It should be outlawed and suppressed wherever it occurs. Until this happens we will continue to see more atrocities like the 9/11 attacks, the Beslan school massacre, the Bali bombings, the Madrid and London bombings and hundreds of other acts of mass murder.
- There has been a tragic failure to wage the battle of ideas against the extremists who preach hatred and incite people to commit terrorism. All democratic governments, including our own have a special responsibility to actively promote democratic values, the role of law and human rights. Moreover this cannot simply be accomplished by radio and TV programmes and political speeches. Action counts far more than words in the difficult world of upholding democratic values and human rights. If the behaviour of democratic states flatly contradicts our stated values we lose our credibility in the battle of ideas worldwide.
- Closely interwoven with the battle of ideas against the promoters and preachers of terrorism is the struggle to uphold basic human rights. While it is true that some extreme human rights campaigners elevate human rights into a totally impractical and irresponsible rejection of all collective moral and political obligations that make the enjoyment of human rights possible, most citizens of democracies and many who are working to democratise

their countries would be shocked if we were told that some of our most cherished civil liberties (e.g. habeas corpus, the right to a fair trial, freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of movement, freedom of assembly, freedom of expression), were to be suspended in the name of state security. If we throw away our basic liberties in the name of dealing with the terrorism threat we will have done the terrorists' work for them.

Conclusion

14. As Joseph S. Nye, Yukio Satoh and I recommended in our Trilateral Commission report Addressing the New International Terrorism (May 2003):

“Dialogues about the protection of civil liberties in the face of security threats should be a regular feature of the meetings of the home security officials and should be reinforced by meetings of judicial officials and parliamentarians. Assistance programmes must include attention of human right issues. Not only are such values central to the definition of the civilisation that we seek to protect, but overreactions to insecurity that infringe civil liberties undercut the sort of attractive power that is essential to maintain the support of moderate opinion and to deprive terrorists from recruiting new converts”.

15. I can assure the Committee that it is my firm belief that we can succeed in unravelling the Al Qaeda network without undermining our civil liberties in the process.

