



Global violent jihad

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Author: Ben Smith

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The UK's Strategic Defence and Security Review and new National Security Strategy place the highest priority on defending the UK from international terrorist attacks. This note looks at the British and other assessments of the threat from global violent *jihad*, Muslim attitudes towards it and the countries that are known to be havens for *jihadis* and those that are suspected to be at risk. Lastly it considers the likelihood of terrorists obtaining weapons of mass destruction and action to prevent that happening.

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Contents

1	Introduction	3
2	The threat level	3
	2.1 The UK assessment	4
	2.2 European Union	6
	2.3 View from the USA	6
3	Evolution of al-Qaeda	7
	3.1 Background	7
	3.2 Al-Qaeda since 2001	8
	3.3 Bin Laden	9
	3.4 Recent attacks possibly related to al-Qaeda	9
4	The world Muslim community and support for global <i>jihād</i>	10
	4.1 Muslim public opinion	11
	4.2 Osama bin Laden	12
	4.3 Terrorist tactics	14
	4.4 Hamas and Hizbollah	15
	4.5 Summary of the evidence	15
5	Present and potential havens for violent <i>jihadis</i>?	15
	5.1 Pakistan	16
	5.2 Afghanistan	18
	5.3 Central Asia	20
	5.4 Northern Caucasus	22
	5.5 Yemen and Saudi Arabia	23
	5.6 Iraq	26
	5.7 Iran	27
	5.8 Palestinian Territories	28
	5.9 Lebanon	28
	5.10 North and West Africa	29
	5.11 Somalia and East Africa	30
	5.12 South East Asia and China	32
	5.13 Europe	34
	5.14 USA	35
6	WMD threat?	36
7	Conclusion	38

1 Introduction

Most Western governments place the highest priority on the threat of global violent *jihadi* movements and aim to gear their policies to countering that threat. Evidence shows, however, that, at least in the EU, far more terrorist incidents are planned by local nationalist and separatist movements such as those in Northern Ireland than by global *jihadis* (see below).

Nevertheless, after nearly 10 years of the “war on terror”, al-Qaeda and its affiliate groups continue to be a policy focus. Many al-Qaeda senior leaders have been killed, particularly in the tribal areas of Pakistan. This has changed the way that al-Qaeda operates, but it is debatable whether the organisation is any less effective than it used to be.

Some assessments of the threat from violent *jihad* suggest that it is in long-term decline because Muslim attitudes towards its tactics are hardening. It is certainly the case that some opinion polls show a decline in the acceptance of tactics such as suicide bombing, although opinion polling is not an exact science and the data is not entirely consistent.

Jihad means struggle or effort. *Jihad* is divided into “greater *jihad*” and “lesser *jihad*”, the greater being a person’s struggle to defeat inner sinfulness. The lesser is external, and may for example refer to the effort of fasting during Ramadan or missionary activities. In a political or military context, (lesser) *jihad* means struggling against evil, which includes holy war. In Islam as in Christianity, there are conditions attached to what may qualify as holy war.

Gordon D Newby, *A concise encyclopedia of Islam* (2002)

The United Kingdom’s new National Security Strategy places the threat from global violent *jihad* among the biggest threats to the UK, and proposes to use the country’s defence, intelligence and scientific capabilities as well as the political, diplomatic and overseas aid efforts to help prevent the instability and radicalisation in other countries that it says can result in a heightened threat to the UK from terrorism.¹ The strategy also points to the diversification of countries from where a terrorist threat might emerge as a matter of concern, but does not list the countries that might present such a threat. There is also no definition of a “fragile state”. Most concern focusses on Afghanistan, Pakistan and Yemen. There are, however, other countries whose governments are weak and where a global *jihadi* ideology could take

hold, for example in Central Asia. On the other hand, the power of local grievances as a motivation for militants remains strong; in many countries the global *jihadis* have not been able to impose their global ideology on local militant groups.

As well as implying the spread of global jihadism to new countries, the feared diversification of the threat might also include global *jihadis* using new tactics and new tools. Could terrorist groups get hold of weapons of mass destruction in the future? The risk is being taken seriously, and a global initiative to safeguard nuclear materials and other potential weapons of mass destruction is ongoing.

2 The threat level

The number of terrorist operations in the UK, both those carried out and those only planned, has not risen in recent years, nor has the number of arrests for terrorist offences.² One

¹ [A strong Britain in an age of uncertainty: the National Security Strategy](#), Cm 7953, 18 October 2010

² Europol, [EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report](#), 2010

analysis suggests that terrorist activity has in the past followed a wave pattern, with each wave lasting about a generation.³ According to this analysis, earlier waves were inspired by nationalism and Marxism, and the present wave of religiously-inspired activity may already be in decline. This conclusion is partly attributed to the decline in support among Muslims for terrorist tactics (see below).

2.1 The UK assessment

The new Coalition Government has placed counter-terrorism high on its agenda. The Coalition's programme for government promised to "take action to tackle terrorism, and its causes, at home and abroad", while also setting out its intention to review UK anti-terrorist legislation and review the countries to which foreign nationals who threaten national security can therefore be deported without the risk of their being tortured.⁴

The ***Strategic Defence and Security Review*** (SDSR) was published in October 2010;⁵ it puts the highest priority on the threat from international terrorism:

We will continue to give the highest priority to tackling the terrorist threat, protecting our operational capabilities, and reforming how we tackle radicalisation, while also reviewing all our counter-terrorism powers to ensure we retain only those that are necessary to protect the public, thereby safeguarding British civil liberties. We will act resolutely against both the threat from Al Qaeda and its affiliates and followers, and against the threat from residual terrorism linked to Northern Ireland.⁶

In the review, the Government sets out its policy to:

Tackle at root the causes of instability. To deliver this we require:

- an effective international development programme making the optimal contribution to national security within its overall objective of poverty reduction, with the Department for International Development focussing significantly more effort on priority national security and fragile states
- civilian and military stabilisation capabilities that can be deployed early together to help countries avoid crisis or deal with conflict
- targeted programmes in the UK, and in countries posing the greatest threat to the UK, to stop people becoming terrorists.⁷

The UK's ***National Security Strategy*** (NSS), published alongside the *Strategic Defence and Security Review*, categorises threats to the UK's security in tiers according to priority. International terrorism is in Tier One, the highest priority. The document explains:

We know that terrorist groups like Al Qaeda are determined to exploit our openness to attack us, and plot to kill as many of our citizens as possible, or to inflict a crushing blow to our economy. It is the most pressing threat that we face today.⁸

³ Leonard Weinberg and William Eubank, "An end to the fourth wave of terrorism?", *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 33: pp594-602, 2010

⁴ Coalition, *Our programme for Government*, May 2010,

⁵ *Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence and Security Review*, Cm 7948, October 2010

⁶ *Ibid.*, p4

⁷ *Ibid.*, p11

⁸ *A strong Britain in an age of uncertainty: the National Security Strategy*, Cm 7953, 18 October 2010

The NSS points to the continuing presence of al-Qaeda commanders in the border areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan, although, it says, military action in the area has weakened the organisation there. It also draws attention to the al-Qaeda-affiliated organisations such as al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), based in Yemen, and other “branches” in Iraq and Somalia.

The NSS suggests that the threat from such groups will become more diversified over the coming years, as failed, failing or fragile states provide new theatres for operations and bases from which the groups can organise and threaten the UK. However, no list of “priority national security and fragile states” is provided.

The impact of regional disputes and conflicts in Palestine, Afghanistan, Bosnia, Chechnya, Lebanon, Kashmir, and Iraq are also highlighted in the previous Labour Government’s White Paper on international terrorism, published in March 2009.⁹

The **Security Service (MI5)** considers that the threat to the UK from international terrorism is “very severe”, and makes clear that al-Qaeda and related groups are the main concern:

Al Qaida and the terrorist networks linked to it are loose-knit groups. They operate without a conventional structure and maintain connections across the world, bound by shared extremist views or experiences. Some are centrally guided by Al Qaida, but others are autonomous and take their lead from radical propaganda shared via the Internet and other channels.

The terrorists draw their inspiration from a global message articulated by figures such as Usama bin Laden. The message is uncompromising and asserts that the West represents a threat to Islam; that loyalty to religion and loyalty to democratic institutions and values are incompatible; and that violence is the only proper response. Mainstream Muslim scholars reject this position.

The worldwide campaign against terrorism has resulted in hundreds of terrorists, including many senior Al Qaida figures, being captured or killed. Major terrorist attacks have been thwarted in a number of countries including the UK. International military action in Afghanistan in late 2001 deprived Al Qaida of its principal base, where it systematically recruited and trained terrorists, and planned and prepared for operations worldwide.

However, Al Qaida and other international terrorist networks remain a very serious threat. Usama bin Laden himself and other senior Al Qaida leaders remain at large, as do many trained terrorists. They are still capable of staging major terrorist attacks, as the Madrid and London bombings in 2004 and 2005 showed. Recent trials and investigations have shown that numerous terrorist networks are continuing to plan and attempt to carry out indiscriminate attacks.

The threat from international terrorism is therefore likely to persist for a considerable time in the future.¹⁰

The threat level in respect of international terrorism within the UK has been set since January 2010 at ‘severe’, the second highest level, indicating an attack is likely but not yet judged to be imminent.¹¹ This threat level is assessed for the UK by the Joint Terrorism Analysis

⁹ *Pursue Prevent Protect Prepare, The United Kingdom’s Strategy for Countering International Terrorism*, Cm 7547, Home Office, March 2009, p38

¹⁰ Security Service website, [International Terrorism](#) [accessed 18 November 2010]

¹¹ More information on the UK terrorist threat level is available on the Home Office website [Current threat level page](#)

Centre (JTAC), part of MI5. More information about the organisation is available on the MI5 website.¹²

2.2 European Union

The number of *jihadi* attacks in Europe is low, and falling. Europol, the EU policing agency, collects statistics on terrorist activity in Member States, although figures for the United Kingdom are not included after 2007. According to the *Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2010*, the total number of terrorist attacks (including failed and foiled attacks) reported by EU Member States in 2009 continued the downward trend registered in 2007 and 2008. The report also found that there was only one Islamist terrorist attack in 2009, which was directed at a military target in Italy:¹³

Islamist terrorism is still perceived as the biggest threat to most Member States, despite the fact that only one Islamist terrorist attack - a bomb attack in Italy - took place in the EU in 2009. Islamist terrorists have threatened EU Member States with perpetrating attacks aiming at indiscriminate mass casualties. The number of arrests relating to Islamist terrorism (110) decreased by 41 % compared to 2008, which continues the trend of a steady decrease since 2006.¹⁴

The number of attacks includes other forms of terrorism than global *jihadi* terrorism, and the report found that separatist terrorist attacks accounted for the majority of attacks and fatalities. Indeed, given the media and political prominence of Islamic terrorism, it is remarkable how few *jihadi* plots are reported each year in EU countries. In 2006 there was one; in 2007, 2; 2008 saw none and in 2009 there was one. This compares with 237 separatist plots in 2009.¹⁵

The number of arrests relating to Islamist terrorism has also steadily decreased since 2006. Europol reported 110 arrests in 2009, a 41% decline compared to 2008.¹⁶

Nevertheless, the report highlighted the high priority assigned by European governments to the threat of *jihadi* terrorism. The threat of indiscriminate mass-casualty attacks clearly means that global *jihadi* plots are taken very seriously, even if they are few in number. Europol also acknowledged that plots such as that to down the Detroit-bound airliner on Christmas Day 2009 demonstrated that the EU can be used to launch attacks on the USA.

2.3 View from the USA

The US intelligence community is relatively confident that progress is being made against violent *ihadis*. In his annual report on the threat to the USA,¹⁷ the Director of National Intelligence, Denis Blair, highlighted the declining support among Muslims for terrorist groups like al-Qaeda (see the section on public opinion, below), attributing this to their violent tactics that have resulted in the deaths of many Muslims.

Blair credited counter-terrorism operations with “successes that have removed key terrorist leaders and operatives who threatened the US Homeland directly”;¹⁸ many of which have

¹² Security Service web site, [Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre](#)

¹³ Europol, [EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report](#), 2010, p11

¹⁴ Europol, [EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report](#), 2010, executive summary

¹⁵ Europol, [EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report](#), 2010, annex 4

¹⁶ Europol, [EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report](#), 2010, p20

¹⁷ Office of the Director of National Intelligence, [Annual Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence](#), 2 February 2010

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p7

been achieved by drone strikes in north western Pakistan. He said that complex terrorist operations involving several cells were now more difficult to organise, but acknowledged that the smaller, short-term plans were difficult to stop.

Denis Blair described the likely nature of a future attack on the US:

Targets that have been the focus of more than one al-Qa'ida plot include aviation, financial institutions in New York City, and government targets in Washington, D.C. Other targets al-Qa'ida has considered include the Metro system in Washington D.C., bridges, gas infrastructure, reservoirs, residential complexes, and public venues for large gatherings.¹⁹

Turning to the threat to allies of the US, he said:

We judge that al-Qa'ida is still plotting attacks against the European targets and that it has encouraged its affiliates to target European citizens in countries in which the affiliates operate.

Mr Blair argued that killing al-Qaeda leaders in north-west Pakistan remains a central means of stopping al-Qaeda, along with US, Pakistani and European intelligence efforts to identify and disrupt plots. He emphasised the continuing importance of Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, generally referred to as al-Qaeda's second in command:

We assess that at least until Usama Bin Ladin and Ayman al-Zawahiri are dead or captured, al-Qa'ida will retain its resolute intent to strike the Homeland.

This emphasis might surprise those who think that Osama bin Laden may well already be dead and those who point to the increasing tendency for al-Qaeda to be a "brand" or motivating idea rather than an organisation. Nevertheless, Mr Blair did highlight the growing importance of al-Qaeda's "regional affiliates and jihadist networks", particularly in Yemen, Pakistan and the Horn of Africa.

3 Evolution of al-Qaeda

3.1 Background

Initial reports of al-Qaeda, as it formed from *mujahideen* veterans of the fight against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, described it as a relatively centralised organisation. At the top of the structure was Osama bin Laden, who travelled to Afghanistan shortly after the Soviet invasion in 1979. He reportedly used family money to finance the *mujahideen* resistance fighters but, with Dr Abdullah Azzam, a Palestinian physician, he also set up a fundraising and recruitment network with a presence in Europe and the United States as well as in the Muslim world. This Service Office, or *Maktab al-Khidmat*, brought in much funding from rich individuals, mainly from the Gulf States and particularly from Saudi Arabia. After the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989, it was this network that probably formed the basis for the al-Qaeda organisation.²⁰

In 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait, and the Saudis joined the US-led coalition and allowed US forces to be stationed on Saudi soil. As bin Laden joined radical Saudi clerics in denouncing

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p9

²⁰ [The 9/11 Commission Report](#), 2004

this, the government responded by withdrawing his passport and expelling the clerics who supported him.²¹

Mr Bin Laden escaped Saudi Arabia and moved to Sudan in 1991 at the invitation of the new Islamic government in Khartoum. From Sudan he developed the logistic and financial capacity of al-Qaeda, forming alliances with Islamic groups across the world and supplying arms.

Throughout the 1990s bin Laden increasingly spoke against the United States, but pressure on Sudan from other countries to stop harbouring terrorists began to tell on the Khartoum government, and he was expelled in 1996, returning to Afghanistan, possibly with the acquiescence of the Pakistani intelligence services.²²

Afghanistan was in the middle of a civil war between the Taliban and other militant groups, and it was not until the Taliban emerged as the strongest force that bin Laden confirmed his alliance with them. Afghanistan turned out to be a convenient base for al-Qaeda, and bin Laden helped the Taliban financially by using his contacts in the Gulf. US intelligence sources suggest that between 10,000 and 20,000 fighters were trained in al-Qaeda camps in Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001.²³

The growing effectiveness of the organisation was demonstrated by the attacks on the US embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam in 1998, for which al-Qaeda and bin Laden later (though not immediately) claimed responsibility. In August 1998, the US conducted a cruise missile attack on al-Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan, reportedly coming close to killing bin Laden. In 2000, al-Qaeda activists attacked the USS Cole, which was moored at Aden in Yemen.

After the 9/11 attacks in the USA in 2001 and the subsequent invasion of Afghanistan, al-Qaeda operatives in Afghanistan were dispersed, with the leadership finding refuge in the mountainous areas of Pakistan near the Afghan border.

3.2 Al-Qaeda since 2001

The expulsion of bin Laden and the al-Qaeda leadership from Afghanistan had a dramatic effect on the organisation. The core organisation had been relatively centralised, although it had always forged links with affiliates and inspired smaller groups that were not directly controlled by it; attacks such as those of 9/11 were directly organised by al-Qaeda's top leadership.

After 2001, the central leadership, headed by bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, gradually lost its ability to organise directly. Restrictions on the movement of personnel and the supply of money and weapons confined the original leadership to a small area and made them increasingly figures of inspiration rather than of command. The number of members of the core leadership has also been reduced by assassinations.

If the al-Qaeda core leadership has been marginalised from organising physical attacks, the importance of their ideological function should not be underestimated. The very name chosen for the organisation, "The Base", suggests that the original strategy included supporting a global movement as much as controlling one.

²¹ John Rollins, *Al Qaeda and Affiliates: Historical Perspective, Global Presence, and Implications for U.S. Policy*, Congressional Research Service, February 2010

²² See Arnie Schifferdecker, "[The Taliban-Bin Laden- ISI Connection](#)", *Foreign Service Journal*, December 2001

Many analysts argue that the potential for global *jihadis* to organise attacks has not been diminished by the decentralisation of al-Qaeda. The analogy of a company abandoning running its own branches and instead giving franchises to independents is often used, and it is arguable that a decentralised and amorphous organisation may be more difficult to combat than one with an easily-identified leadership and headquarters.

Al-Qaeda “franchises” are generally thought to be self-funding and may depart from core al-Qaeda policy in such areas as target selection. Communication between core al-Qaeda and the franchises is limited and slow, because signals intelligence-gathering efforts are focussed so strongly on al-Qaeda activities and al-Qaeda’s core leadership is concerned to keep its location secret because of the risk of assassination attempts.

3.3 Bin Laden

Osama Bin Laden’s health and his location have been the subject of much speculation for years. According to one analyst, many US intelligence officials believe that he is dead.²⁴ When al-Qaeda praised the Christmas Day attempted bombing of the Northwest Airlines flight, it was in a message claimed to be the voice of Osama bin Laden, broadcast on al-Jazeera, but some believe that it was faked.

3.4 Recent attacks possibly related to al-Qaeda

- The 2004 Madrid bombings. It is thought that this attack was not organised by al-Qaeda core leadership, and that there was no participation by al-Qaeda except in an inspirational role.
- The 7 July 2005 attacks on the London public transport system. The leader of the bombers visited Pakistan and it is thought that the bomb-making techniques may have been learned from al-Qaeda associates in that country.
- The thwarted plot to attack trans-Atlantic airliners using liquid explosives in August 2006.
- An email purporting to be from al-Qaeda claimed responsibility for the suicide attack on the Islamabad Marriott Hotel in September 2008 that killed 54, although this attack was also claimed by a Pakistani group.
- Christmas Day 2009 Northwest Airlines attempt. This attack was immediately claimed by the AQAP franchise and intelligence sources suggest that the al-Qaeda core may have had nothing to do with planning the attack. An audio message was released by the core leadership in January 2010 in which a man purporting to be bin Laden praised the suspected perpetrator of the attempt.
- May 2010 failed attempt to bomb Times Square, New York, by Faisal Shahzad. Mr Shahzad told interrogators that he had been inspired by the US-born radical based in Yemen, Anwar al-Awlaki. It is said that he was trained in bomb-making by elements of the Pakistani Taliban, but it is not clear that al-Qaeda core leadership had anything to do with the planning. Nevertheless, the core leadership lost no time in claiming responsibility. This led one commentator to remark that to claim responsibility for a

²³ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 2004, p67

²⁴ Scott Stewart, “Taking Credit for Failure”, *Stratfor*, 27 January 2010

failed plot demonstrated the central organisation's weakness and desperation for publicity.²⁵

- The failed parcel bombs discovered at East Midlands and Dubai airports in October 2010. The plot is believed to have originated in Yemen, where a Saudi man called Ibrahim Asiri is thought to be a leading light in al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and may have made the bomb.
- Attack on Stephen Timms MP. 21-year-old student Roshonara Choudhry said that she had been inspired by the sermons of Anwar al-Awlaki. Choudhry said she wanted to stab Timms as a punishment for voting in favour of the invasion of Iraq.²⁶

Whether or not Osama bin Laden is alive, the core group has been marginalised and no longer poses so much of a physical threat as it used to. Events such as the Christmas Day 2009 attempt show that the al-Qaeda concept is alive and well and posing a threat in Western countries and pro-Western Middle Eastern countries alike.

For many commentators, the forced decentralisation of the organisation has led al-Qaeda to change its strategy. Further large-scale attacks in the USA and Europe are now less likely. The focus is now on more traditional terrorist tactics: car-bomb attacks or the killing with small arms of "soft" targets such as tourists.²⁷ Recently, Western security services have worried about the possibility of a Mumbai-style attack, where suicide fighters with machine guns kill as many non-Muslims as possible. Smaller-scale attacks could allow AQ to minimise Muslim casualties while still causing maximum disruption to everyday life in Western cities.

4 The world Muslim community and support for global *jihad*

Muslim attitudes to global violent *jihad* may be changing, with more Muslims expressing dissatisfaction with Osama bin Laden, for example, in opinion polls of recent years (see below). Suggestions that this signals the demise of the movement may be premature, especially since the data on which they are based are relatively thin.

Nevertheless, competition is taking place on a global scale for the allegiance of young Muslims, and opinion is likely to be more volatile than in the past. The fact that there is a global conversation on Islam is in itself new. Some observers have noted an increasingly significant world Muslim community (*umma*) supplanting national or local allegiances.²⁸ This is probably a result partly of globalisation and communication media such as the internet, and partly of the collapse of Arab nationalism as an ideology. The shift in focus from national concerns to global ones has been important in the development of global *jihad* and it is significant that al-Qaeda prefers to play down the importance of its Sunni roots, in public at least.

²⁵ Scott Stewart, "Taking Credit for Failure", Stratfor, 27 January 2010

²⁶ "Stephen Timms attacker guilty of attempted murder", *Guardian*, 2 November 2010

²⁷ Steven Simon and Jonathan Stevens, "Al-Qaeda Takes It to the Streets", *Washington Post*, 8 October 2010

²⁸ Pew Research poll 2005, quoted in Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon, *The next attack*, Hodder and Stoughton, 2005

Within Muslim communities the competition for the allegiance of people who might be susceptible to the messages of violent *jihad* continues. In March 2010, for example, a conference of Islamic scholars in Mardin, Turkey, issued a declaration reinterpreting a 14th century *fatwa* (religious declaration) that is used by the contemporary *Salafi-jihadi* movement as a religious justification for violent *jihad* against governments that were not truly Islamic. The conference declared that the 14th Century *fatwa* was issued in specific circumstances which no longer apply, and that modern Muslims benefit from living in a world in which governments are bound by peace treaties, so violence against governments in Muslim-majority countries was not justified.²⁹

In a recent article for *Inspire*, the English-language *jihadi* magazine, the US-born Muslim now thought to be an important al-Qaeda member resident in Yemen, Anwar al-Awlaki, denounced the Mardin declaration. He said that the members of the conference were out of touch if they believed that Muslims were benefitting from peace and pointed to the situations in Afghanistan and the Palestinian Territories as examples of suffering.³⁰

A recent academic study looked at the struggle for influence over conservative tendencies within the Islamic world between al-Qaeda and like-minded groups, and the Muslim Brotherhood.³¹ The Muslim Brotherhood (MB), founded in Egypt and with branches in many Muslim-majority countries, including Hamas in the Palestinian Territories, is a conservative movement that believes in the establishment of Sharia law. Like al-Qaeda it has global reach. Those wishing to discourage violence are unsure whether the Muslim Brotherhood acts more as a “firewall” (stopping Islamists from moving to the more extremist views expounded by al-Qaeda) or a “conveyor belt” (where Islamists move on from the non-violent MB to violent groups). The author concludes that the MB should be allowed to struggle against the ideas of the *Salafi-jihadis*, but that no-one should be under the illusion that the MB is in any way a liberal group.

4.1 Muslim public opinion

The major source of information on Muslim public opinion throughout the world is the Pew Global Attitudes project. Pew is a non-profit organisation based in the USA that provides opinion polling data from around the world. To provide a clear picture of the trends in world Muslim public opinion, the same questions must be asked repeatedly of a large sample of respondents in many countries. Pew comes closest to providing that sort of information, but it should still be treated with caution.

Salafis

Salafi is Arabic for someone who follows the ancestors. The word has three meanings for Islam: the first three generations of Muslims, whose behaviour is a model for modern Muslims because they lived so soon after the lifetime of the Prophet.

Applied to modern political/religious movements it can mean both the re-interpretation of these traditions or a return to them; third it can be translated in English as “fundamentalist”. *Salafist* is used interchangeably by some with *Wahhabist*, although many scholars reject this usage.

“Salafi” does not mean “terrorist”. It is important to distinguish between mainstream Salafism and the kind of revolutionary Salafism promoted by al-Qaeda.

²⁹ For more information on Islam, see Library Standard Note 4727, *Islam: A Guide*, 11 June 2008

³⁰ “Anwar al-Awlaki Attacks Mardin Conference’s Declaration on Jihad”, *Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor* Volume: 8 Issue: 42, November 18, 2010

³¹ M Lynch, “Islam divided between *Salafi-jihad* and the *Ikhwan*”, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 33: pp467-487, 2010

Most reports suggest a decline in the support in the Muslim world for radical leaders and terrorist tactics. Within that overall picture, however, there are some striking differences: according to the Pew survey, 53% of Palestinians in Gaza have at least some confidence in the leadership of Osama bin Laden, while only 2% of Lebanese Shia do. Palestinians living in Gaza are less likely to support Hamas and Hizbollah than their compatriots in the West Bank.

Most Muslims do appear to be worried about extremism. Asked whether they were concerned about Muslim extremism in their own country in 2010, a majority of respondents in Egypt, India, Indonesia, Lebanon, Nigeria, Pakistan and Russia said that they were. Only in Jordan and Turkey did less than half worry about this.³² The question was asked in various countries from 2005 onwards, and there is no indication that inhabitants of Muslim majority countries are getting any less worried about perceived Islamic extremism in their countries.

In another interesting question in the Pew survey, Muslims were asked whether they saw a conflict between modernisers and fundamentalists in their country. Many did see such a struggle. In every country surveyed, the majority of those who saw such a struggle sided with the modernisers, except in Egypt.

4.2 Osama bin Laden

Support for Osama bin Laden may be a useful proxy for support for international violent *jihad*. Support among Muslims for Osama bin Laden has, according to Pew, generally declined over recent years. Palestinians and Nigerian Muslims are the only groups where (slightly) over 50% of respondents had some, or a lot of, confidence in his leadership in 2009. Despite the fact that he may be living in Pakistan, only 18% of Pakistanis registered support for him and as many as 35% had no opinion.³³

³² Pew Global Attitudes Project, Key indicators database, [Concerns About Extremism in Our Country](#) [accessed 11 November 2010]

³³ Pew Global Attitudes Project, [Little Enthusiasm for Many Muslim Leaders](#), Report, February 2010

Confidence in Osama bin Laden in 2009

	A lot/some	Not much/none	Don't Know
	%	%	%
Egypt	23	68	9
Jordan	28	61	12
Lebanon	2	98	1
<i>Shia</i>	2	98	*
<i>Sunni</i>	5	94	*
<i>Christian</i>	0	99	2
Palestinian Territories	51	47	2
<i>West Bank</i>	51	48	2
<i>Gaza Strip</i>	53	44	3
Turkey	3	77	22
Israel	3	95	2
<i>Jew</i>	1	99	*
<i>Arab</i>	14	72	15
Indonesia	24	53	23
Pakistan	18	47	35
Nigeria	32	60	8
<i>Muslim</i>	54	39	7
<i>Christian</i>	10	80	9

Source: Pew Global Attitudes Project, [Little Enthusiasm for Many Muslim Leaders](#), Report, February 2010

Pew also reported a strong decline in support for Osama bin Laden between 2003 and 2009. In Pakistan in 2003, for example, 59% of Pakistani Muslims supported bin Laden. By 2009, this proportion had dropped to 25%. In Lebanon, the fall was from 20% to 4%.

Polls by World Public Opinion.org, an opinion research centre managed by the University of Maryland, give a different picture. Feelings towards bin Laden remained fairly constant between 2007 and 2009 in Pakistan and Egypt, with some 44% of Egyptians surveyed having positive views about him. Only in Indonesia was there a significant decline in support for the leader.³⁴ The biggest proportion of respondents having positive feelings about him was again in the Palestinian Territories.

World Public Opinion found that sizeable majorities in Egypt, Indonesia, Pakistan and Morocco supported al-Qaeda's aims of getting the US to withdraw its forces from Islamic countries, keeping western values out of Islamic countries and, except in Indonesia, installing strict Shari'a law in every Muslim country.³⁵

World Public Opinion also reported sizeable majorities in most Muslim countries opposing attacks on civilians, following a survey in 2009. The majority against such attacks, however, had not strengthened since 2007, when the same question had been asked. Interestingly,

³⁴ World Public Opinion.org, [Public Opinion in the Islamic World on Terrorism, al Qaeda, and US Policies](#), 25 February 2009, p24

³⁵ World Public Opinion.org, [Public Opinion in the Islamic World on Terrorism, al Qaeda, and US Policies](#), 25 February 2009, p22

there did appear to be a trend in Egypt and Indonesia for more people to think that attacks on civilians are hardly ever effective in changing a situation.³⁶

4.3 Terrorist tactics

Pew found that the support for suicide bombing as sometimes or often justified had decreased markedly since they first asked the question in 2002.

Support for suicide bombings

Often/sometimes justified	2002 %	2004 %	2005 %	2006 %	2007 %	2008 %	2009 %
Lebanon	74	-	39	-	34	32	38
Jordan	43	-	57	29	23	25	12
Pakistan	33	41	25	14	9	5	5
Indonesia	26	-	15	10	10	11	13
Turkey	13	15	14	17	16	3	4
Nigeria	47	-	-	46	42	32	43
Palestinian Territories	-	-	-	-	70	-	68
Egypt	-	-	-	28	8	13	15
Israel	-	-	-	-	-	-	7

Asked of Muslims only

Source: [25-Nation Pew Global Attitudes Survey](#), July 2009

Note that only in the Palestinian Territories is there a majority that support the view that suicide bombings are sometimes or often justified. This may reflect the particular circumstances of Palestinians who, without a state, may be more liable to find non-state violence acceptable. This may mean that Palestinians are more likely to volunteer for suicide missions. It may also make it more likely that Hamas could re-adopt suicide bombing. Having used suicide bombers to great impact in the second Intifada (uprising) from 2000 to 2005, in 2006 Hamas announced that it would no longer employ this tactic. While Israel’s efforts to prevent materials that might be used for bombing reaching Gaza may, in part, be responsible for this, it may also be related to the fact that less than half of Palestinian respondents in 2009 had a favourable view of Hamas itself.³⁷

World Public Opinion.org found in 2009 that large majorities in every country surveyed rejected attacks on US civilians, whether at home or working in Islamic countries.³⁸ There was not a large variation between 2009 and 2007, when the same question had been asked in Egypt, Indonesia and Pakistan. Around one in ten Pakistanis and Egyptians approved of such attacks. Again, the biggest number of respondents approving of attacks on US civilians was in the Palestinian Territories, where 24% approved of attacks on US civilians in the US and 30% approved on attacks on US civilians working in Islamic countries.

³⁶ [Public Opinion in the Islamic World on Terrorism, al Qaeda, and US Policies](#), World Public Opinion, 25 February 2009, p6

³⁷ For discussion of this topic, see Daniel Jeffrey, “Gaza, Hamas and the Suicide Bomber: Why Then and Not Now?”, RUSI commentary, January 2009

³⁸ World Public Opinion.org, [Public Opinion in the Islamic World on Terrorism, al Qaeda, and US Policies](#), 25 February 2009, p24

4.4 Hamas and Hizbollah

While neither Hamas nor Hizbollah are presently engaged in global jihadi activity, opinion towards them shows some interesting changes. According to Pew Global Attitudes, the popularity of Hamas increased in Egypt, Indonesia and Lebanon between 2007 and 2009, while in the Palestinian Territories, it decreased significantly over the same period. Support for Hizbollah remained fairly steady in the period in most surveyed countries, except in the Palestinian Territories, where it declined markedly.

Opinion of radical groups in 2009

	Unfavourable	Favourable
Hamas		
Jordan	36	56
Egypt	44	52
Palestinian Territories	52	44
Lebanon	68	30
Turkey	69	5

Hizbollah

	Unfavourable	Favourable
Palestinian territories	36	61
Jordan	45	51
Egypt	57	43
Lebanon	64	35
Turkey	73	3

Source: Pew Global Attitudes Project, [Little Enthusiasm for Many Muslim Leaders](#), Report, February 2010

4.5 Summary of the evidence

While the evidence is not comprehensive and it sometimes gives mixed signals, it appears that large majorities of Muslims oppose violent *jihad* and have little confidence in Osama bin Laden. The proportion is probably decreasing. Support for terrorist tactics appears to be declining. Support for radical groups such as Hizbollah and Hamas is much more widespread.

5 Present and potential havens for violent *jihadis*?

The UK's Strategic Defence and Security Review set out a strategy to tackle the root causes of extremism abroad by targeting international development aid at priority fragile states, maintaining a military and civilian stabilisation capacity to help states at risk and by deploying

counter-radicalisation programmes in the UK and in priority countries.³⁹ The review and the National Security Strategy both stress the diverse range of threats faced by the UK as an important challenge to national security strategy: clearly, the group of countries from where a terrorist threat to the UK may emerge is not static. However, the SDSR describes the Afghan/Pakistani border areas as the most dangerous:

The most significant terrorist threat to the UK and its interests overseas comes from the Al Qaeda senior leadership based in the border areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan, and their affiliates and supporters. The current threat to the UK from international terrorism is judged to be Severe, meaning that an attack in this country is highly likely. The threat is becoming more diverse as groups affiliated to and inspired by Al Qaeda develop more autonomy in directing operations. As such we are likely to see a more unpredictable picture in the future, potentially with more frequent, albeit less sophisticated attacks.⁴⁰

The Department for International Development has commissioned some work on what constitutes a “fragile” state,⁴¹ and the Department’s structural reform plan aims to improve the effectiveness of UK aid in Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Horn of Africa. Nevertheless, no list of states that are presently considered “fragile” is provided.⁴² This is Government policy, as explained recently in response to a question in the House of Lords. The Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Lord Howell of Guildford, said:

The recently published national security strategy sets out the Government's commitment to tackle the causes of conflict and instability overseas. The Government regularly assess countries at risk of instability and departments use a range of assessment criteria when looking at this important issue. As announced in the strategic defence and security review, the Cabinet Office and departments will continue to draw together all-source analysis to advise the National Security Council of emerging issues with implications for UK interests, including through a biannual report on countries at risk of instability. It is not Government policy to make public the details of the countries at risk of instability report.⁴³

This section summarises the available information on the global *jihadi* threat from militants based in some of the high-risk countries.

5.1 Pakistan

Pakistan is presently much more significant as a base for global *jihadis* than Afghanistan. In July 2010, a top US counterterrorism official said that US intelligence estimated there were somewhat "more than 300" **al-Qaeda** members in Pakistan's tribal areas,⁴⁴ including al-Qaeda senior leadership (AQSL) and Osama bin Laden, if he is still alive.

Al-Qaeda works with both the Pakistani and the Afghan **Taliban**. During the time of the Taliban government in Afghanistan, al-Qaeda was far more integrated with the Taliban, and

³⁹ [Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence and Security Review](#), Cm 7948, October 2010, p11

⁴⁰ [Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence and Security Review](#), Cm 7948, October 2010, p41

⁴¹ See for example Frances Stewart and Graham Brown, [Fragile States](#), Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity, January 2009

⁴² DFID web site, Structural reform plan, [Strengthen governance and security in fragile and conflict-affected countries](#) [accessed 14 December 2010]

⁴³ HL Deb 9 Nov 2010, c67WA

⁴⁴ “New Estimate Of Strength Of Al Qaeda Is Offered”, *New York Times*, 1 July 2010

provided some financial support to it. Since 2001, however, al-Qaeda's weaker position has reduced its ability to provide manpower or money to the Taliban.

The US and Pakistan's counterterrorism efforts in the area, particularly US special forces and unmanned aerial vehicle (drone) attacks, have reduced the effectiveness of al-Qaeda in this area. According to IHS Jane's, the security consultancy, some 130 drone attacks were carried out in the tribal areas of Pakistan from the beginning of 2008 to mid-2010, killing foreign and Pakistani militants including the leader of the Pakistani Taliban, Beitullah Mehsud, as well as civilians.⁴⁵ The increasing unpopularity of suicide bombings with the Pakistani public has been attributed to the increase in terrorist attacks in the settled areas of Pakistan.

Lashkar-e-Tayyiba

US intelligence is particularly worried about **Lashkar-e-Tayyiba** (LET), a group based in Pakistan whose objective is to establish Islamic rule in South Asia and to liberate Muslims from Indian control in Kashmir.⁴⁶ The group is alleged to have contacts with the Pakistani security service, the ISI and is well-funded by the Kashmiri diasporas in the UK, the US and Canada. They have not traditionally been focussed on Western targets, but their involvement in the Mumbai attacks has raised the possibility that this may change and that they may increasingly be interested in targeting European and other Western interests.

Lashkar-e-Tayyiba's presence within Kashmir, however, is much smaller than in previous years. In the mid- to late-1990s, at the height of the recent Kashmiri conflict, it was estimated that there were more than 2,000 fighters in the area.⁴⁷ Although there are reports of cooperation between al-Qaeda and LET and also of a breakaway faction called Global LET, the objectives of LET are not generally those of global *jihad*. While LET has been blamed for many attacks in India, these are part of the group's regional strategic focus, and the leadership is said to be wary of losing support from both the Pakistani public and the Pakistani authorities, which means maintaining that regional focus. Were the Pakistani authorities to conduct a thorough crackdown on LET, the group might be encouraged to move closer to al-Qaeda.

Daniel Benjamin, US State Department Coordinator for Counterterrorism, recently underlined the high priority given to LET by the US government in a press briefing:

Very few things worry me as much as the strength and the ambition of LET, which is a truly malign presence in South Asia. As the two-year anniversary of Mumbai approaches, we continue to work very closely with our interagency partners and international allies to reduce the threat from this very dangerous group, and I am pleased to say that there is growing cooperation in the region to thwart LET, especially between such critical partners as India and Bangladesh.⁴⁸

Threat to Europe

Analysts suggest that there are many Western nationals sympathetic to al-Qaeda in Pakistan. This enables al-Qaeda senior leadership to carry out missions against Western targets, where the ability to speak English and move about normally without attracting attention among westerners is crucial to the success of many missions. Al-Qaeda in the

⁴⁵ *Relationships and rivalries: Assessing al-Qaeda's affiliate network*, IHS Janes., October 2010

⁴⁶ Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *Annual Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence*, 2 February 2010, p11

⁴⁷ *Relationships and rivalries: Assessing al-Qaeda's affiliate network*, IHS Janes., October 2010, p42

⁴⁸ Daniel Benjamin, Counterterrorism Update, Press briefing, US State Department, 17 November 2010

Arabian Peninsula (AQAP, based in Yemen) reportedly has much more difficulty in finding recruits who can speak English and meet similar requirements.

According to the head of the UK Security Service (MI5), the percentage of serious plots and leads uncovered by the Security Service in the UK that are linked to al-Qaeda in the tribal areas of Pakistan has dropped from around 75% two or three years ago to about 50% now.⁴⁹

Nevertheless, the fact that half of all major planned attacks are connected to tribal areas in Pakistan shows that the threat from individuals and groups in that area, while less direct than it used to be, is still highly significant.

In recent months, attention has again focussed on potential operations that appear to have been planned by al-Qaeda's core leadership in the tribal areas of Pakistan. In July 2010, a German national was arrested in Kabul and told his captors of a planned attack similar to the one perpetrated in Mumbai in 2008 but this time planned for Germany. In October, it was reported that several German nationals had been killed in a drone attack in North Waziristan; Pakistani officials said that their presence in Pakistan was related to preparations for attacks on Europe.⁵⁰ In September 2010, a Pakistani intelligence source was quoted in the *Daily Telegraph* saying that at least 20 UK nationals were being trained in firearms and explosives use in Pakistan's tribal areas, with a view to attacking the UK.⁵¹ The reports were not independently verified.

The desire of al-Qaeda's core leadership in Pakistan to organise a large-scale attack has been described by some as a sign of their declining fortunes. Financial and communications difficulties, brought about by drone strikes in Pakistan and international action to stop the flow of funds, have combined with a probable decline in the group's popularity to weaken the core leadership. Some of the leadership's problems were illustrated by the story of the Times Square bomber, Faisal Shahzad, a naturalised US citizen of Pakistani origin. It is reported that Mr Shahzad travelled to Pakistan to receive explosives training for the planned attack on New York but a combination of financial and logistical problems meant that his training only lasted for five days.⁵²

Weakness of the core leadership in Pakistan has meant that it is increasingly dependent on affiliated groups. While these groups may share al-Qaeda's general aims, their desire to associate themselves with al-Qaeda is often partly opportunistic, offering affiliated groups access to international funding streams and greater publicity, and assisting with local recruiting. On the other hand, local groups often retain local priorities and prefer to fight their own governments, for example, than participate in al-Qaeda's global *jihād*.

5.2 Afghanistan

Al-Qaeda

In June 2010, Leon Panetta, the head of the CIA, put the number of **al-Qaeda** fighters in Afghanistan at between 50 and 100, "maybe less".⁵³ Since then, intelligence figures have reported that the number of international jihadists in the country is increasing, particularly in the north and east of the country in the Nuristan and Kunar provinces, near Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (formerly North West Frontier) Province and tribal agencies. Much of

⁴⁹ [Speech by Jonathan Evans to the Worshipful Company of Security Professionals](#), 17 September 2010

⁵⁰ "Terrorist threats in Europe: hype or reality?", *IJSS Strategic Comments*, October 2010

⁵¹ "Twenty Britons 'plotting attack on city streets'", *Daily Telegraph*, 30 December 2010

⁵² "Terrorist threats in Europe: hype or reality?", *IJSS Strategic Comments*, October 2010

⁵³ "Panetta: 'Maybe 50 to 100' al Qaeda left in Afghanistan", *Washington Post*, 27 June 2010

this influx of activists has been attributed to stronger actions taken against al-Qaeda and other militants by the Pakistani authorities in the north western areas of Khyber Pakhtukhwa and the agencies.

Taliban

The **Afghan Taliban** is not principally a global *jihadi* organisation. Its present policy focus is thought to be to regain control of the territory of Afghanistan from the “infidel” forces presently occupying it: the coalition troops and the present Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, which it sees as their puppet. It does not carry out attacks on western targets outside Afghanistan.

The Afghan Army estimates the number of anti-government foreigners in Afghanistan at about 4,000, mostly Pakistanis,⁵⁴ although most of these are thought to be associated with the Pakistani Taliban rather than direct al-Qaeda affiliates.

Haqqani Network

The **Haqqani Network** is a semi-autonomous part of the Taliban which uses al-Qaeda tactics such as suicide bombings, largely in the eastern provinces of Afghanistan around Khowst. Its leadership is thought to be in North Waziristan, in the tribal areas of Pakistan. It is probably the most extreme faction of the Taliban and the least amenable to peace negotiations with the Western-backed government. Commentators also think that it is al-Qaeda’s closest ally in the Afghan conflict. Bin Laden and Jalaluddin Haqqani, the former leader of the network, are said to know each other personally.

Around 2007, the leadership of the Haqqani network passed to Sirajuddin Haqqani, son of Jalaluddin. According to a US intelligence source:

Sirajuddin is very much into the global extremism of al-Qaeda. For insurgents and terrorists, al-Qaeda is the sexiest organisation there is. He has got these ties and tends to be more violent than his father was.⁵⁵

Despite this, al-Qaeda’s contribution in terms of manpower to the Haqqani network is thought to be minimal and there are very few Arab fighters in Eastern Afghanistan. The relationship may offer more to al-Qaeda than to the Haqqanis; one expert was quoted as saying:

I am sure that the Haqqani network is fundamental to the future of al-Qaeda. I think they are living under Haqqani protection in North Waziristan or, if elsewhere, trade on his support.⁵⁶

Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan

There are also reported to be increasing numbers of other nationals in Afghanistan, including a number of Turks and a sizeable presence of Tajiks, especially in the north, near the border with Tajikistan. There are also said to be numbers of Turkmen, Azerbaijanis and Kazakhs, Uzbeks and Chechens. The **Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan** (IMU) has raised its profile in Afghanistan in recent months, causing concern in Western security circles.

Afghanistan remains a significant centre for global *jihadis*, and Western governments’ stated concern that the country could slip back towards being a base from which attacks against

⁵⁴ “Al-Qaeda boosted by influx of foreign volunteers”, *Times*, 24 September 2010

⁵⁵ *Relationships and rivalries- assessing al-Qaeda’s affiliate network*, IHS Jane’s Security and Military Intelligence Consulting, October 2010, p13

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p17

Western targets could be launched is probably well-founded.⁵⁷ There have been suggestions from some observers recently that a solution to the Afghan difficulties would be a *de facto* partition, leaving the southern Pashtun heartlands of Kandahar and Helmand in the effective control of the Taliban while protecting the government in Kabul and the north of the country. Reports of increased jihadist presence in the north and north east of the country suggest that such a solution would not be straightforward, should it be pursued.

If the Taliban do retain influence in the Pashtun heartlands as Coalition troops withdraw, Western forces will need to develop an effective strategy for preventing the use of the area as a safe haven for global *jihadis*.

5.3 Central Asia

Fundamentalist groups in Central Asia were widely suppressed during the 1990s, but are showing signs of resurgence. The Central Asian group that causes most concern to Western security officials is the **Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan** (IMU). The group is said to be linked to al-Qaeda although the exact nature of the link is as yet unclear.⁵⁸ The group has a presence in several Central Asian countries as well as in Afghanistan.

Various international bodies are claiming a role in fighting extremism in the region, including the Organisation for Security Cooperation in Europe (**OSCE**) and the Russian/Chinese-led Shanghai Cooperation organisation (**SCO**). In August 2010, **NATO** said that it plans to set up a counter-terrorism centre in a Central Asian country, although it did not say which one.⁵⁹ The **UN** announced in September that the UN Regional Centre for Preventative Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA), the UN Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF) and the Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Tajik, Turkmen and Kazak governments would enhance their cooperation to strengthen counter-terrorism efforts in Central Asia.⁶⁰ The UN Special Representative for Central Asia said that:

...there is a growing concern about the possibility of intensifying activities of various extremist, terrorist, and criminal groups and networks operating in Central Asia, fuelled by instability in the wider region and porous borders through which extremism and criminal networks penetrate the region.⁶¹

To date, most of the activities of militants in the area have been confined to attacks on government authorities of the region, but the IMU is an exception to this. There is potential, too, for other international violent *jihadi* groups to establish themselves in the region, or for the indigenous groups to change their policy to become more violent or to change strategy and start to aim at targets in the West.

Tajikistan

Tajikistan is a source of concern, as increasing numbers of Tajiks are appearing in northern Afghanistan to join the fight against the Western-backed government. There have been several bombings in Tajikistan in recent months and, in August 2010, more than two dozen prisoners with ties to Islamic militancy escaped from a prison in the capital, Dushanbe.

⁵⁷ For an example of this concern, see Ministry of Defence web site, [Operations in Afghanistan: Why we are there](#)

⁵⁸ "Al-Qaeda boosted by influx of foreign volunteers", *Times*, 24 September 2010

⁵⁹ "NATO to set up counter-terrorism center in Central Asia", *Interfax Kazakhstan General newswire*, 1 September 2010

⁶⁰ "UN unveils new scheme to boost Central Asia's fight against terrorism", *Uzbekistan Daily*, 8 September 2010

⁶¹ Miroslav Jenca, quoted in "UN unveils new scheme to boost Central Asia's fight against terrorism", *ibid*

On 19 September 2010, Tajikistan suffered its most serious attack since 2001, when a military convoy was attacked in the Rasht Valley, resulting in the deaths of 28 soldiers, or according to some reports as many as 40. The Tajik government said the attack was led by former commanders of the **United Tajik Opposition**, a coalition of Muslim and nationalist groups that fought a bloody civil war against Tajikistan's current authorities in the 1990s.⁶² The attack was later also claimed by the **IMU**. Some critics say that the Tajik government uses the threat of violent Islamism to suppress dissent and gain support from western governments.

In October 2010, it was reported that a major militants' training camp had been discovered by Tajik forces in the Rasht Valley, close to where the convoy was attacked.⁶³ Tajik forces engaged a large group of IMU fighters who were attempting to flee across the border into Afghanistan and reportedly killed 20 of them. Recent attempts to exert central government control over the mountainous area may have provoked the upsurge in violence, but the insurgents in the area have also been linked to the IMU and many fighters in the area are certainly sympathetic to al-Qaeda.

An American anti-terrorism specialist said:

The violence in Tajikistan shows that al-Qaeda is going through a kind of metastasis. If governments don't wake up, al-Qaeda is soon going to have new bases across the region from which to fight its war in Afghanistan and against the West.⁶⁴

Kyrgyzstan

Recent government upheaval and inter-ethnic violence in Kyrgyzstan has done nothing to allay fears about the potential for violent Islamists to increase their influence in the area. However, little of the violence has been directed at western targets and it appears that, for the present, militant groups in Kyrgyzstan do not have global aspirations. It was reported that Tajik security forces had killed four "suspected militants" in Kyrgyzstan on 28 October 2010, although the group to which the dead belonged was not given.⁶⁵

It is reported that **Hizb-ut-Tahrir**, the radical Islamic group with a presence in much of Central Asia, has been active in Kyrgyzstan, although it is banned there, as in all the other Central Asian states, the Russian Federation and Bangladesh. Hizb-ut-Tahrir has a stated policy of non-violence but the radicalism of its ideology and its cell-based organisational structure lead analysts to worry that it could easily become a threat if it abandoned its non-violent stance.

Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan is the original home of the **Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan** (IMU), perhaps the most feared of the Central Asian Islamic militant groups. It is said to be highly professional and its fighters more committed than the average Afghan fighter. The group is said to be training a number of German nationals to carry out Mumbai-style attacks on Western Europe.⁶⁶

⁶² "Tajikistan Says Islamic Militants Were Behind a Deadly Ambush of Its Soldiers", *New York Times*, 21 September 2010

⁶³ "Tajikistan training camp discovery proves al-Qaeda has new base in region, US warns", *Daily Telegraph*, 20 October 2010

⁶⁴ "Tajikistan training camp discovery proves al-Qaeda has new base in region, US warns", *Daily Telegraph*, 20 October 2010

⁶⁵ Janes Terrorism and Insurgency Centre, 29 October 2010

⁶⁶ Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Centre, *Afghanistan country profile*, July 2010

The group's reach also extends well beyond Uzbekistan. During the time of the Taliban government in Afghanistan, the IMU had a strong presence in the northern Afghan province of Kunduz, which borders Tajikistan. After the fall of the Taliban regime, many IMU fighters are thought to have moved to north western Pakistan. With the increased counterterrorist pressure in Pakistan, it is reported that many fighters are seeking to re-establish their bases in Northern Afghanistan, close to the Central Asian areas where they recruit most of their fighters.

Kazakhstan

Although 14 foreign organisations working in Kazakhstan have been classified as terrorist by the Kazakh government, and banned, Kazakhstan is not the most troubling of the Central Asian states. Relative stability has allowed the government to keep a tighter grip on potential militancy than in some neighbouring states. The Kazakh government hosted an **OSCE** regional anti-terrorism conference in the Capital Astana in October 2010, and in September 2010, the Shanghai Cooperation organisation conducted live-ammunition anti-terrorism exercises in Kazakhstan.

5.4 Northern Caucasus

The rebellions in the North Caucasus have traditionally been seen as nationalist, largely independent and locally-orientated, without the transnational inter-linkages and strategies of groups more closely affiliated with al-Qaeda.

In an important move, the leader of the Chechen rebels, Doku Umarov, declared in 2007 that he wanted to set up an Islamic "Emirate of the Northern Caucasus", signalling that the Chechen movement was moving closer to international *jihadi* groups. In 2010, however, the movement appeared to be splitting, with many important leaders renouncing the international *jihadi* connection and the leadership of Doku Umarov. Akhmad Zakaev, the former "foreign minister" of the movement was quoted recently as saying that the Chechen fighters had "distanced themselves from this mythical state under the name of '[Caucasus] Emirate,'" whose advocates had pushed for "continuous jihad" while "forgetting about their main goal – the struggle for the independence of Ichkeria [the rebels' name for Chechnya]"⁶⁷ Analysts interpreted the move as possibly driven by an attempt to recruit more moderate and non-Muslim supporters to the cause, which has been weakened by Russian military operations.

While the Chechen rebels may be divided and weakened, unrest has now spread to neighbouring republics, particularly Ingushetia, Dagestan and North Osetia. According to Jane's, the violence is increasingly driven by organised *jihadi* groups which seek to establish an Islamic state.⁶⁸ In response, the Russian Dagestani government has started to form a militia on the lines of the Chechen militia, to try to control the unrest.⁶⁹

In a development in November 2010 that underlined the danger presented to Western countries by the disaffected from the Northern Caucasus, Belgian, Dutch and German police detained eleven suspects linked to a Chechen group who were planning to "commit an attack in Belgium," according to a statement by the Belgian prosecutor's office.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ "Can Anti-Umarov Rebel Faction Win Support Among Non-Muslims?", *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Volume: 7 Issue: 186, 15 October 2010

⁶⁸ Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Centre, *Russia country profile*, July 2008

⁶⁹ "Dagestani Leadership Unable to Control Situation in Republic", *Jamestown Foundation Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 7 Issue: 211*, 19 November, 2010

⁷⁰ "Chechen terror suspects busted in Belgian raid", *EUObserver*, 24 November 2010

5.5 Yemen and Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is generally thought to have been relatively effective in its campaign against global *jihadis* on its territory. In November 2010, the Saudi authorities announced that there had been 149 al-Qaeda-related arrests in the preceding eight months, dismantling 19 separate terrorist cells. The Ministry of the Interior also announced the confiscation of \$600,000 that had been collected for al-Qaeda during the annual pilgrimage to Mecca in November 2010.⁷¹

The announcement, and the fact that there has been no major domestic attack over the last 15 months, showed that the Saudi security forces are increasingly willing and able to combat *jihadis* operating from Saudi Arabia. This contrasts with the situation in the early 2000s, when there was a number of significant attacks.

Better use of intelligence is widely credited with improving the security services' impact on terrorist activities. Intelligence sharing between Saudi Arabia and Western governments is also thought to have been responsible for thwarting the plan, conceived in Yemen, to blow up bombs concealed in printer cartridges bound for Chicago, and for recent alerts over a small-arms attack in Europe.

The growing effectiveness of the Saudi campaign is thought to have had a knock-on effect on Yemen. In 2006, a large number of al-Qaeda associates escaped from jail in Yemen and, in 2009, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula was formed by a merger between groups based in Saudi Arabia and Yemen. Many Saudi-based fighters had fled counter-terrorist action and hostile public opinion in Saudi Arabia and headed for Yemen. Yemen is now increasingly seen as the most important base for global violent *jihad*, alongside the tribal areas of Pakistan.⁷²

The country is feared not only as a source of terrorism: Yemen also forms part of important arms, drugs and people-trafficking networks, particularly with Somalia. There are also some 300,000 Somali refugees in Yemen (a tremendous burden for such a poor country) and Yemeni officials report that members of the Somali al-Shabaab militant group have been arrested in Somali refugee camps. The Yemeni Government has expressed fears that Somali refugee camps in Yemen will be used as recruiting grounds for extremists.⁷³ At the same time, Yemen experts warn that the Yemeni government may use the threat of al-Qaeda to gain Western governments' support.

A US preacher of Yemeni descent, Anwar al-Awlaqi, is thought to be the spiritual leader of AQAP is said to be hiding in the Shabwa Governorate of Yemen amongst the Awalik tribe, of which he is a member. The Awalik tribe is one of the largest and most important tribes in southern Yemen. The tribal system is crucial to understanding relationships in Yemen: al-Qaeda is reported to supply money to Yemeni tribes that provide shelter for al-Qaeda associates,⁷⁴ while the Yemeni security services also pay tribes to hand militants over.

In his recent speech, the head of MI5, Jonathan Evans, drew attention to the call by a leader of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) for followers to carry out any sort of attack against Western interests, without necessarily aspiring to mass-casualty events such as

⁷¹ IISS, "Saudi Arabia: testing times ahead", *Strategic Comments*, 15 December 2010

⁷² For more information on Yemen, see Library Standard Note [Yemen](#), 23 July 2010

⁷³ "Terrorists posing as refugees in Yemen", *Daily Telegraph*, 22 November 2010

⁷⁴ "Why Do Yemeni Tribes Refuse to Hand Over Terrorist Suspects?"

9/11.⁷⁵ This tactic clearly makes sense for al-Qaeda, especially in an environment where centralised control and facilitation are less possible. In the same speech, Mr Evans said that the number of plots originating in Somalia and Yemen are increasing, while the number originating in the tribal areas of Pakistan have declined from some 75% to 50% in the last few years.

The Yemeni connection with the failed “underpants bomber” attempt to down the Detroit-bound airliner on Christmas Day 2009 led Central Command, the US military command centre for the Middle East, to upgrade the fight against terrorism in Yemen.⁷⁶ The US increased both its civil and military assistance programmes to Yemen during 2010, with Central Command proposing to supply Yemen with \$1.2 billion in military equipment and training over the next six years. US military aid has already been increased dramatically, from \$155 million in fiscal 2010 from less than \$5 million in fiscal 2006.⁷⁷ The heavy emphasis on military aid is controversial.

In October 2010, Saudi intelligence warned France that AQAP might be planning an attack on French soil, or elsewhere in Europe. While the reports were not specific, they were described as “credible”. The intelligence may have originated with a former Guantánamo detainee, Jabir Jubran al-Fayfi, who recently turned himself in to the Saudi authorities.⁷⁸ Also in that month, the convoy of the British Ambassador in Yemen was attacked. The ambassador survived.

Yemen has attracted many extremists of Saudi nationality, but has not attracted as many westerners as have the tribal areas of Pakistan. People who can speak English or other western languages and pass without attracting attention in the west are highly valuable for operations in western countries. There are, however, exceptions. Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, the “underpants bomber” had been educated in London and, in June 2010, Yemeni security forces arrested “dozens” of foreigners, including one British, one American and three French citizens, on suspicion of having links to al-Qaeda.⁷⁹

Illustrating the ambiguity of al-Qaeda “affiliation”, on 23 November 2010, a suicide bomber said to be a Sunni militant loyal to al-Qaeda detonated a car bomb beside a procession of Shia Muslims commemorating an important day in the Shia calendar. 17 worshippers died.⁸⁰ Clearly, the attack was sectarian in nature and had little to do with global *jihad*.

UK action in Yemen

The major part of the UK’s military assistance consists of training for Yemeni armed forces and police, although details are not easily available due to the sensitivity of the work. On 3 January the UK announced an increase in funding for counter-terrorism operations in Yemen; according to the then Prime Minister, British aid to Yemen involves ‘intelligence support, training of counter-terror units, capacity building and development programmes’.⁸¹ This is said to include UK backing for Yemen’s Counter-Terrorism Unit.⁸²

⁷⁵ [Speech by Jonathan Evans to the Worshipful Company of Security Professionals](#), 17 September 2010

⁷⁶ “MI5 warns of Yemeni, Somali threat”, *Gulf States Newsletter*, 17 September 2010

⁷⁷ “Idea of escalating military aid to Yemen divides U.S. officials”, *International Herald Tribune*, 16 October 2010

⁷⁸ “French Report New Threat of Terrorist Attack in Europe”, *New York Times*, 18 October 2010

⁷⁹ “Briton is arrested in raids to round up foreigners ‘with al-Qaeda links’”, *Times*, 7 July 2010

⁸⁰ “Yemen Car Bomb Kills 17, Rattling Fragile Truce”, *Asharq al-Awsat*, 24 November 2010

⁸¹ Prime Minister’s Office, [‘Vigilance key to tackling terrorist threat – PM’](#), Press notice, 1 January 2009

⁸² “Saleh talks rapprochement, but it could be too late to contain insurgency in southern Yemen”, *Gulf States newsletter*, 4 June 2010

The UK spent about £20m in 2008-09 in aid to Yemen, an increase on the £12 million allocated in 2007-08, and will spend about £25 million in fiscal year 2009-10; £35 million to £40 million in fiscal year 2010-11 and, 'dependent on progress on reform of state structures in Yemen, up to £50 million in 2011-12'.⁸³ The UK is involved in attempts to improve education, health, justice and infrastructure in Yemen and combat radicalisation. This work is carried out by the Department for International Development (DFID) "with much collaboration with the Ministry of Defence".⁸⁴ On 9 October, the DFID announced an extra £2 million contribution to a UN fund to assist with the refugee problem in the north of the country.⁸⁵

The UK Government has stated its intention to spend 30% of its development budget on fragile states, and Yemen is one of the prime candidates to be included in this category. Alan Duncan MP, Minister of State for International Development, recently summed up the UK Government's approach to the country:

Yemen is high on the Coalition Government's agenda. It is one of the countries of most interest to our new National Security Council, and it is one where we believe the solution must be driven by an integrated approach, with development and diplomacy at its heart.

What we are interested in doing is tackling the challenges of poverty, disease and education in Yemen; we are interested in helping achieve better governance; we are interested in regional and global stability; and we are interested in arresting the rise of terrorism.

In short we are interested in addressing poverty and instability so that Yemen can hold together and prosper.⁸⁶

On 17 November 2010, Mr Duncan suggested that further increases to the aid budget for Yemen are likely:

Yemen is of the highest priority to the coalition Government. Subject to the Department for International Development's bilateral aid review and the security situation in Yemen, DFID is inclined to increase its commitment to that country. We believe strongly in the power of development to give solid foundations to a country that faces threats to its stability and economy.

The UK is playing a leading role in the Friends of Yemen process, in which our partnership with Gulf states is an essential element. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State recently visited Saudi Arabia and Kuwait to exchange views on Yemen and to build our common approach. That will help to ensure that the commitments made in New York in September are delivered in time for the next Friends of Yemen meeting in Riyadh in February.⁸⁷

US action

The US authorities, too, are concerned about Yemen. Daniel Benjamin, the State Department's Counterterrorism Coordinator, recently gave an indication of Yemen's rapid rise to the top of the agenda:

⁸³ HC Deb 5 January 2010, c21

⁸⁴ HL Deb 21 October 2009, c708

⁸⁵ HC Deb 22 October 2009, c1661-2W

⁸⁶ [Speech by the Right Honourable Alan Duncan MP](#), Minister of State for International Development at the Chatham House Yemen Forum Conference, 1 November 2010

⁸⁷ HC Deb 167 November 2010, c867

As many of you know, we're working hard with a range of Yemeni security forces to increase their ability to confront al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula, which has shown itself to be the first al-Qaida affiliate with the capacity and the intention to strike as far away as the United States. It's important to underscore, however, that we have a two-pronged policy when it comes to dealing with Yemen, and we're also working to help strengthen civilian institutions and address Yemen's fundamental economic and governance problems. Our development assistance, it's worth noting, has roughly quadrupled since 2008, and we hope it will rise to more than \$106 million next year.⁸⁸

"Working with Yemeni security forces" is regarded as something of a euphemism. It has been known for some time that the US military acts directly against targets within Yemen. This was demonstrated by the US Tomahawk missile strike against alleged militants in Yemen which killed at least 41 people on 17 December 2009.⁸⁹

5.6 Iraq

Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) was formed in October 2004 when the Jordanian Abu Musab al-Zarqawi swore allegiance to Osama bin Laden. Previously known as Tawhid wa al-Jihad, Zarqawi's group is now generally known as Al-Qaeda in Iraq.

In spite of the public alignment of his organisation with Al-Qaeda, Zarqawi does not follow al-Qaeda leadership's policy of attacking Western targets. AQI is mainly a sectarian force, intent on provoking war between Sunnis and Shi'as in Iraq. While this may be an effective way of damaging US interests, AQI's strategy does not fit well with the global jihadist aims of pan-Islamic unity. The recent wave of bomb attacks against Shia and Christian targets in Iraq demonstrate that Zarqawi intends to pursue his own strategy of inciting a sectarian war between Iraq's Sunni and Shia communities.

The significant question for the US is whether the complete withdrawal of troops, due to take place by the end of 2011, will leave AQI in such a strengthened position that it is capable of setting up cross-border terrorist operations. However, it seems unlikely that the Shi'a-dominated Iraqi government will allow global *jihadis* much room for manoeuvre, and Western leaders are more concerned about the growing influence of Iran on the country.

Sunnis and Shias

Probably between 85% and 90% of Muslims are Sunnis. In Sunni-majority countries, Shias often make up the poorest sections of society and see themselves as oppressed and discriminated against.

Majority Shia countries are Iran, Iraq, Bahrain and, possibly, Yemen.

Global violent *jihad* is largely a Sunni phenomenon.

On 22 February 2006, the al-Askari Mosque in Samarra, Iraq, one of the holiest sites in Shia Islam, was bombed and its dome destroyed, triggering sectarian violence. The attack was claimed by al-Qaeda.

Al-Qaeda in Iraq has conducted many anti-Shia operations, mainly with the aim of disrupting the US-backed Iraqi state. But al-Qaeda is an avowedly Sunni organisation and, despite some calls for Muslim unity, many Salafi purists, such as those that make up the core of al-Qaeda, regard Shiism as heresy

⁸⁸ Daniel Benjamin, Counterterrorism Update, Press briefing, US State Department, 17 November 2010

⁸⁹ "US to focus on Yemen extremists", *Financial Times*,

5.7 Iran

For the US State Department, Iran is the world's "most active state sponsor of terrorism".⁹⁰ It is widely accepted that Iran supplies arms and financial support to Hizbollah, which it helped set up in the 1980s. There also links between the Iranian government and Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, although it is not clear how strong those links are. Both Hizbollah and the Palestinian groups, however, are focussed on Israel and the situation of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, and there are no reports of Hamas or any other Palestinian group attacking Western interests in recent years.

Most analysts accept that the Iranian government supports Shia groups in southern Iraq, and these groups certainly attacked US targets within Iraq. These links, however, are probably driven by a desire to strengthen Iranian influence over its neighbour to the west and to hasten the US departure from Iraq, rather than by any plan for a world Islamic caliphate.

The State Department also says that Iran has supported the Taliban in Afghanistan with training.

The relationship between Iran and al-Qaeda is complicated. Iran is a majority-Shia country, whereas al-Qaeda is an orthodox Sunni organisation which has declared its opposition to Shiism. After 9/11, many al-Qaeda operatives in Afghanistan fled to Iran, where they were detained by the Iranian authorities; in 2005, Iran's intelligence minister said that 200 al-Qaeda members were in Iranian jails.⁹¹ Some 20 members of the bin Laden family are also said to have been under house arrest in Iran for some time.⁹² In May 2010, it was reported that significant numbers of al-Qaeda figures had been released and were leaving Iran, fuelling speculation that Iran had decided to allow senior figures to leave Iran to allow al-Qaeda to replace leaders killed by US drone strikes in Pakistan.

Hardliners in the Iranian government may be pushing for a tactical alliance with al-Qaeda to hit the common enemy- the USA. Some have suggested that al-Qaeda serves Iranian interests by weakening Sunni Muslims and suggest that this is the real reason why Iran has not crushed al-Qaeda in Iraq.⁹³

Others in the regime may favour resisting any action against US interests as long as no military action is taken against the Iranian nuclear programme. In the event of any such action, Iranian "assets" such as Hizbollah in Lebanon and Shiite groups in the Gulf States might be activated, to strike US interests and US allies in the region.

In November 2010 it was reported that a shipment of arms from Iran had been intercepted in Nigeria.⁹⁴ The consignment, which included rocket launchers and grenades, was probably destined for Gambia and commentators suggested that it showed that Iran is intent on fomenting instability in West Africa.

There are Sunni terrorist groups operating within Iran, usually with a separatist motivation. A group called Jundollah operates in Iran's Sistan and Baluchistan Province, bordering Pakistan. The group's primary objective is the elimination of perceived state discrimination

⁹⁰ US State Department website, [State Sponsors of Terrorism](#) [accessed 26 November 2010]

⁹¹ Kenneth Katzman, *Iran: U.S. Concerns and Policy Responses*, *Congressional Research Service*, October 2010, p44

⁹² "Bin Laden's Family Under House Arrest in Iran", *Asharq Al-Awsat*, 23 December 2009

⁹³ "Jihadis Speculate on Secret Cooperation between Iran and al-Qaeda", *Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Focus* Volume: 6 Issue: 6, 25 February 2009

⁹⁴ "Nigeria reports seized Iranian arms shipment to UN", *BBC News Online*, 16 November 2010

against ethnic Baluchis and Sunni Muslims in Iran, and the ideology of the group has been described as *salafi/jihadi*. It has adopted the tactic of mass casualty suicide bombing and was responsible for the first such attack within Iran.⁹⁵ On the other hand, the group is focussed on regionalist and nationalist objectives and its leader has denied any link to al-Qaeda.

5.8 Palestinian Territories

While residents of the Palestinian Territories often have radical views and many are supportive of Osama bin Laden (see above), al-Qaeda and global jihadists do not have a significant presence in the Occupied Territories. In August 2009, the radical Jund Ansar Allah (Soldiers of God) movement, declared an “Islamic emirate” in the Gaza Strip. The group described itself as inspired by al-Qaeda and criticised Hamas for failing to install Sharia law in Gaza. Hamas security forces surrounded the group’s base and, after heavy exchanges of gunfire and numerous large explosions, the group was defeated.⁹⁶ There have been a number of reports of foreign fighters entering Gaza from Iraq and other countries but Hamas denies these reports. Jane’s profile of Israel and the Occupied Territories points out:

Although seeking to establish a Palestinian state governed according to Islamic principles, the aims of the Islamist nationalist groups must be distinguished from the more global and Salafist ambitions of jihadist groups such as al-Qaeda. While Palestinians were active in the jihadist-orientated Fatah al-Islam group that recently led an uprising in the Nahr al-Bared Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon, no such jihadist group is yet established in the Palestinian territories themselves, and there is little enthusiasm for Salafist versions of Islamic thought.⁹⁷

5.9 Lebanon

According to US intelligence estimates, Hizbollah has not attacked US interests for 13 years and has no plans to do so at the moment.⁹⁸ The organisation is clearly focussed on the unstable domestic situation in Lebanon and on the tensions with neighbouring Israel. Hizbollah is the most powerful military force in Lebanon and is Shia.

Western authorities were concerned that Western troops patrolling the Israel/Lebanon border for the United Nations UNIFIL force would be vulnerable to al-Qaeda inspired attacks. Hizbollah is reported to be strongly opposed to Sunni *jihadi* operations against UNIFIL and to be utilising its intelligence resources and its influence with Lebanese military intelligence, to help prevent such attacks.⁹⁹

After the war with Israel in 2006, in which Hizbollah successfully resisted the Israeli army largely because of Iranian weaponry, Iran resupplied the Lebanese group with at least 25,000 new rockets, including some 500 Iranian-made medium-range missiles with the capacity to reach Tel Aviv from south Lebanon.¹⁰⁰ Analysts think that a US or Israeli strike against Iran and its nuclear programme would cause Hizbollah to resume its policy of attacking US targets.

⁹⁵ Jane’s Terrorism and Insurgency Centre, Jundallah, Group profile, 22 November 2010

⁹⁶ “Hamas fights back Al-Qaeda-inspired militants in Gaza”, *Christian Science Monitor*, 15 August 2009

⁹⁷ JTIC country briefing, Israel, Gaza and the West Bank [accessed 23 November 2010]

⁹⁸ Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *Annual Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence*, 2 February 2010, p12

⁹⁹ Jane’s Terrorism and Insurgency Centre, Group profile, Hizbollah [accessed 24 November 2010]

¹⁰⁰ Kenneth Katzman, *Iran: U.S. Concerns and Policy Responses*, Congressional Research Service, October 2010, p40

5.10 North and West Africa

Western security circles are worried about the influence of al-Qaeda core leadership over *jihadi* groups in North Africa. In 2006, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), pledged allegiance to Osama bin Laden, and in 2007 changed its name to al-Qaeda Organisation in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). The group had been losing public support after years of violent struggle with the Algerian authorities, and perhaps sought to be re-born as a pan-Islamic jihadist organisation. One of the organisation's stated policies is to carry out more attacks in Europe.¹⁰¹

While the link with al-Qaeda has given AQIM a publicity boost and access to international funding, the North African security forces, particularly of Algeria, have had some success in controlling it. At the same time, al-Qaeda's senior leadership is reported to be suspicious of the largely Algerian leadership of AQIM, fearing that it may be infiltrated by the Algerian secret services.¹⁰²

IHS Jane's suggests that the other objective of the newly-formed AQIM -- to form the unified North African command that its name suggested -- has also failed due to the unwillingness of groups in Morocco and Tunisia to accept its leadership.¹⁰³

AQIM's aim of launching attacks in Europe has been frustrated in recent years. Faced with this situation, AQIM is reported to be turning its attention south, to the Sahel fringes of the Sahara desert. This area (in Mauritania, southern Algeria, Mali, Niger and Chad) is sparsely populated and weakly governed, causing concern in Western circles that AQIM may be able to set up bases in the region.

In September 2010, five French workers and two other foreigners were kidnapped in Niger

and taken into the Sahara. The abduction took place in the mining region in central Niger, and followed 12 kidnappings of foreigners further north in the Sahara over the previous year.¹⁰⁴ Niger security officials thought that the abduction was either carried out by AQIM itself or by bandits who would sell their hostages on to AQIM.

AQIM directs much of its rhetoric against France, whose policies on restricting the wearing of the veil, among other things, have attracted hostility. The French intelligence service has warned that the threat of a terrorist attack in France is the highest since the mid-1990s, when the country was at risk from Algerian militants.

Mauritania, Mali and Niger are thought to be particularly vulnerable to AQIM activity. Borders in the region are notoriously difficult to control and the states have limited security capacity.

Amadou Marou, the President of Niger's National Consultative Council, recently warned European governments of the danger of these states failing and called for increased support for the security forces of the region:

When speaking of security, Europe thinks of closing up, securing the interior and the borders, but the principal security of Europe is the security and development of Africa.

¹⁰¹ "Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb- sliding south", *Relationships and rivalries- assessing al-Qaeda's affiliate network*, IHS Jane's Security and Military Intelligence Consulting, October 2010, p30

¹⁰² "Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb- sliding south", *Relationships and rivalries- assessing al-Qaeda's affiliate network*, IHS Jane's Security and Military Intelligence Consulting, October 2010, p31

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ "Al-Qaeda fear as mining staff are snatched from their homes", *Times*, 17 September 2010

Somalia got away from us, and northern Mali is in the process of getting away from us. If the Europeans don't reinforce security in this area, they'll have to move.¹⁰⁵

Mauritania has bombed AQIM targets from the air in northern Mali and has confronted *ihadis* directly on the ground.

West Africa

A recent tendency that has alarmed security analysts is the growth of West Africa as a transshipment point supplying the European cocaine market. Guinea Bissau has been singled out as an extreme case of corruption, poverty and state weakness leading to vulnerability to South American drug traders. The value of the trade is said to dwarf the GDP of many of the smaller states in the region,¹⁰⁶ and Guinea Bissau and other states in the region lack the resources to tackle the trade, even if they had the will.

The connection with terrorism comes with West Africa's proximity to countries such as Mali and Algeria, where *ihadis* are prepared to use revenues from the drugs trade to finance their activities. Mali, particularly, has an extremely tenuous hold on its large territory. It is reported that armed Islamic groups use well-worn camel trade routes through the territory which they control to smuggle cocaine as well as their more traditional money earners: cigarette smuggling and kidnapping.¹⁰⁷

The involvement in the cocaine trade goes against Islamic injunctions against narcotics, and some Islamic groups are said to refrain from it. The Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), the forerunner of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, is said to have been involved in drugs for quite some time, however, and so AQIM has considerable experience in this trade.

Added to these concerns is the long-standing fracture between the Islamic north and the Christian south in some West African countries. A recent report from the International Crisis Group drew attention to increasing polarisation between Christian and Muslim communities, and an increasing tendency to view politics in a religious light.¹⁰⁸ The report tells of a radical Islamic group in Northern Nigeria, Boko Haram, which draws inspiration from al-Qaeda and gains some concrete support from that source. At the same time, the International Crisis Group warns against an overly simplistic view of conflicts in Northern Nigeria. Nevertheless, the radical views of Nigerian Muslims (see above) in relation to Osama bin Laden and terrorist tactics are a cause for concern for Western authorities. The recent unrest in Cote d'Ivoire, where the southern-based incumbent has refused to hand over power to his victorious northern-based rival in the recent presidential election, has only contributed to the picture of polarisation and radicalisation in the region.¹⁰⁹

5.11 Somalia and East Africa

Herakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen, or Movement of the Youths in Struggle, is an Islamic group affiliated to al-Qaeda that controls much of the southern and central parts of Somalia. **Al-Shabaab**, as it is generally known, has traditionally focussed on the battle for Somalia itself and, unlike AQAP, AQIM and AQL, it has not formally merged its structure with al-Qaeda.

¹⁰⁵ "Europe must reinforce African armies or "move"- Niger", *Agence France Presse*, 15 October 2010

¹⁰⁶ "Terrorism and the Illicit Drug Trade in West and North Africa", *RUSI Newsbrief*, 24 November 2010

¹⁰⁷ Dario Cristiani, "Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and the Africa-to-Europe Narco-Trafficking Connection", *Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor* Volume: 8 Issue: 43, 24 November 2010

¹⁰⁸ *Northern Nigeria: Background to Conflict*, International Crisis Group Africa Report N°168, 20 December 2010

¹⁰⁹ For information on the situation in Cote d'Ivoire, see the Standard Note [In brief: Ivory Coast - back on the brink](#), 21 December 2010

However, the internationalisation of the conflict there, involving troops from other African countries, has changed the situation. Ethiopian troops were present in the country from the late 1990s until 2009. Now, Ugandan troops make up most of a 6,000-strong African Union (AU) peacekeeping force in Somalia. Al-Shabaab struck outside Somalia's borders for the first time in July 2010, using suicide bombers to kill 76 Ugandans watching the World Cup final in Uganda's capital, Kampala. The group's leader, Ahmed Abdi Godane, threatened more such actions:

What happened in Kampala was just the beginning. If Uganda and Burundi do not withdraw their troops from Somalia, there will be more bombings like these.¹¹⁰

Although this was al-Shabaab's first attack outside Somalia, it was in revenge for Ugandan participation in the struggle for control of Mogadishu, and to that extent it was still focussed on domestic politics. Some reports, however, suggest that it is only a matter of time before al-Shabaab turns its attention to Western targets, possibly in Western countries. The American Enterprise Institute points out that at least 20 US citizens and over 100 UK citizens have joined al-Shabaab in Somalia and that these foreigners could target Western countries:

The United States appears to be high on al Shabaab's list of international targets. The group began issuing threats against the United States in 2008, and it now professes an ideology resembling al Qaeda's. It has pledged allegiance to bin Laden and views itself as fighting the global jihad led by al Qaeda.¹¹¹

According to Jane's, the links with al-Qaeda have certainly become stronger over the last few years and have led to an increase in the use of al-Qaeda tactics, such as simultaneous mass-casualty suicide bombings. However the link with foreigners is not universally popular, with opponents of al-Shabaab labelling them "puppets of foreigners who are bringing war to the country".¹¹² The Shabaab leadership may be divided on how much to follow the al-Qaeda link. For al-Qaeda, al-Shabaab has provided a low-cost, high-impact obstacle to US policy. The extreme chaos and clan-based rivalries in Somalia make it a less than ideal haven, since non-Somali associates who take refuge in Somalia are at risk of betrayal or extortion. According to Jane's, this means that it is unlikely to be chosen as a new operational base for al-Qaeda.¹¹³

The UK authorities are taking the potential threat from Somalia seriously, not least because of the number of UK residents said to be training with al-Shabaab. The head of MI5, Jonathan Evans, drew attention to this recently:

In Somalia, for example, there are a significant number of UK residents training in Al Shabaab camps to fight in the insurgency there. Al Shabaab, an Islamist militia in Somalia, is closely aligned with Al Qaida and Somalia shows many of the characteristics that made Afghanistan so dangerous as a seedbed for terrorism in the period before the fall of the Taleban. There is no effective government, there is a strong extremist presence and there are training camps attracting would be jihadists from across the world. We need to do whatever we can to stop people from this country becoming involved in terrorism and murder in Somalia, but beyond that I am

¹¹⁰ "In search of Africa's bin Laden", *Times*, 18 July 2010

¹¹¹ Christopher Harnisch, *The terror threat from Somalia: the internationalisation of al-Shabaab*, American Enterprise Institute, February 2010, p1

¹¹² *Relationships and rivalries: Assessing al-Qaeda's affiliate network*, IHS Janes., October 2010, p40

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p41

concerned that it is only a matter of time before we see terrorism on our streets inspired by those who are today fighting alongside Al Shabaab.¹¹⁴

Al-Shabaab's leader may well have the ambition to use Westerners to turn his group into a true global *jihadi* organisation. A security official based in Nairobi is quoted as saying:

He is very much of the international jihads mindset, and wants Islamic rule across the world, from Somalia to Alaska.¹¹⁵

In July 2010, the Government set out the action that it is taking in relation to Somalia:

The UK talks regularly to governments in the region about countering Somali terrorism and reducing the threat it poses both in Somalia and the wider region. Developing internal peace and stability in Somalia will take time given the lack of state structures, but in the long term it is the best way to deny terrorists the space they need to operate. We will continue to work with international partners and the TFG [Transitional Federal Government] to prevent Somalia from being a safe haven for terrorists and to protect UK citizens from the terrorist threat. Over the course of 2010 we will look to increase out counter-terrorism support across the region.¹¹⁶

The other major *jihadi* group in Somalia is **Hizb ul-Islam**. Hizb ul-Islam is a Sunni organisation that aims to overthrow the present transitional government of Somalia.

Jane's rates the effectiveness of the anti-terrorist environment as "very poor".¹¹⁷

Al-Shabaab has attracted media attention, in part because of the Kampala attacks. Nevertheless, al-Qaeda has long had the capability to act in East Africa, as shown by the attacks on the US embassies in Dar es-Salaam in Tanzania and Nairobi in Kenya in 1998. These were attributed to Egyptian organisers, members of Ayman al-Zawahiri's Egyptian Islamic Jihad. Zawahiri merged his organisation with al-Qaeda in the same year as the attacks, and became bin Laden's second-in-command. There are, at present, few reports of al-Qaeda cells in Kenya and Tanzania.

According to US intelligence, the threat to Western targets from East Africa is limited at present:

We judge most Al-Shabaab and East Africa-based al-Qa'ida members will remain focused on regional objectives in the near-term. Nevertheless, East Africa-based al-Qa'ida leaders or al-Shabaab may elect to redirect to the Homeland some of the Westerners, including North Americans, now training and fighting in Somalia.¹¹⁸

5.12 South East Asia and China

There have been few reports of a serious al-Qaeda presence in Southeast Asia in recent years. There are, however, several Islamic rebel groups across the region and areas with weak governance and social and economic problems of the sort that are often associated with the establishment of international terrorist networks.

¹¹⁴ Jonathan Evans's terrorism speech to the Worshipful Company of Security Professionals, 17 September 2010

¹¹⁵ "In search of Africa's bin Laden", *Sunday Telegraph*, 18 July 2010

¹¹⁶ HC Deb 20 July 2010, c193-4W

¹¹⁷ Jane's, JTIC Country Briefing – Somalia, September 2010

¹¹⁸ Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *Annual Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence*, 2 February 2010, p11

Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) is an **Indonesian** group most famous for being linked to the Bali bombing. The attack in 2002 against a nightclub on the largely Hindu island of Bali killed 202 people, many of them tourists from Australia.

JI has experienced and skilled fighters, bomb-makers and planners, some of whom trained in Afghanistan, but experts disagree on the extent to which JI is linked to al-Qaeda. While some fear that the group is close to al-Qaeda and could do serious damage to Western interests in South East Asia, others say that Jemaah Islamiya is focussed on regional objectives rather than global *jihad*. The group has been indirectly associated with attacks on international targets: the Marriott Hotel bombing in Jakarta in August 2003, which left 12 dead, and the Jakarta Australian embassy bombing in September 2004 (10 deaths).

According to Jane's, the group is probably focussed on consolidation and rebuilding rather than on planning or executing military operations at present and has decided that attacks on foreigners are counterproductive.¹¹⁹ In March 2010, two JI militants were killed in Jakarta and security officials said that they had links to a group which called itself al-Qaeda in Indonesia, although no further information was forthcoming.

In November 2010, the International Crisis Group issued a report drawing attention to the potential for increased tension in Indonesia between Christians and Muslims. Aggressive conversion programmes by evangelical Christian groups and the growth of hard-line Muslim vigilante organisations were blamed for the rise in tensions, along with the failure of the government to address the problem effectively. The ICG describes how the common enemy of proselytising Christianity has led groups that were hitherto hostile to each other – *salafi* conservatives who are in favour of and against *jihad* – to share platforms, and says that it is likely that the increased tensions will facilitate recruitment to *jihadi* groups.¹²⁰

The **Philippines** is largely a Catholic country, but its southern provinces are majority-Muslim and home to two Islamist groups, the separatist **Moro Islamic Liberation Front** (MILF) and a more radical group, the Islamist **Abu Sayyaf** Group (ASG). ASG cooperates with **Jemaah Islamiyah** and some JI operatives are hiding in the Philippines.

ASG may still have some connections with al-Qaeda associates but these connections are not what they were, as ASG has veered towards criminality in recent years.¹²¹ Nevertheless, the US authorities are concerned about potential terrorist use of the southern Philippines as a staging post for attacks on the USA. Up until now, however, the group's only international focus has been to kidnap and ransom foreign nationals, normally tourists.

Assessing the threat of Islamic groups in **China** is difficult, given the Chinese government's control of the news. Some eight million Muslims live in China, mostly in the Province of Xinjiang, and the influx of dominant Han Chinese into the province, which the mainly-Muslim Uighur people of the province see as policy of domination, led to riots in June 2009 that claimed about 200 lives. Al-Qaeda has tried to recruit the Uighur Muslims to its cause of global *jihad*; in October 2010, a senior al-Qaeda militant, Abu Yahya al-Libi, called on the Uighur to start a *jihad* against the authorities. Al-Libi also urged other Muslims to support the Uighur's campaign.

¹¹⁹ Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Centre, Group profiles, Jemaah Islamiya [accessed 23 November 2010]

¹²⁰ *Indonesia: "Christianisation" and Intolerance*, Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°114, 24 November 2010, p15

¹²¹ Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Centre, Group profiles, Abu Sayyaf Group [accessed 23 November 2010]

So far al-Qaeda's attempts to involve itself in Xinjiang have not met with much success. While Uighur Muslim resentment against the Beijing authorities is strong, it is focussed on protecting Uighur culture and independence for Xinjiang rather than a universal caliphate.

5.13 Europe

The US Director of National Intelligence drew particular attention in February 2010 to extremist networks in Europe:

... networks of Islamic extremists in Europe represent a continued threat because of their access to fighters and operatives with training in Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, and Somalia; the presence of active facilitation networks in Europe; and European nationals' relative ease of travel to the United States.¹²²

In the Europol terrorism report for 2010, several member states are cited as expressing concern about indications that individuals or groups are active in facilitating terrorist activities outside the EU through financial or practical support.¹²³

Germany, France and the UK have been a particular focus of concern, because of threats such as that of Bekkay Harrach to carry out attacks in Germany after the German national election if the electorate did not demand a withdrawal of its armed forces from Afghanistan.¹²⁴

France also reports an increased threat due to its support for Algeria's 'apostate' government and its campaign against terrorism in Algeria. It is also targeted for passing a law against veils in schools and preparing to pass a law against the wearing of the full-body veil (niqab or burqa) in any public place.¹²⁵

The fear of a large-scale attack being carried out against a European target grew throughout 2010, with many reports referring to "home-grown" terrorists.

In July, suspected members of al-Qaeda were arrested in Norway and Germany. Norwegian police said that the individuals were linked to plots to attack the New York subway and a shopping centre in Manchester.¹²⁶

In October it was reported that a major al-Qaeda-related plot had been discovered that would involve many small groups of fighters carrying out coordinated attacks in France, Germany and the UK. It was alleged by the security services of various countries that the groups armed with light weapons would seize and kill as many victims as possible in a similar way to the 2008 Mumbai attacks. The information was thought to come from a German national who had been arrested in Afghanistan and who was connected to the Hamburg mosque that had been frequented by the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks.¹²⁷ There was unconfirmed speculation that Osama bin Laden was personally involved in planning the attacks.¹²⁸

In November, some 26 individuals suspected of plotting attacks on European targets were arrested in Brussels, Antwerp, Amsterdam, and Aachen, in Germany. Approximately 15

¹²² Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *Annual Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence*, 2 February 2010, p10

¹²³ Europol, *EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report*, 2010, p20

¹²⁴ Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Centre, Group profiles: al-Qaeda, October 2010 [accessed 23 November 2010]

¹²⁵ Europol, *EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report*, 2010, p20

¹²⁶ "Norway claims al-Qa'ida cell had links to New York subway bomb plot", *Independent*, 9 July 2010

¹²⁷ "Q&A: Europe travel terror alerts", *BBC News online*, 5 October 2010

¹²⁸ "UK joins US to upgrade Europe terror alert", *Scotsman*, 4 October 2010

people of these were suspected of recruiting *ihadis* for Iraq and Afghanistan. The arrests followed a three-year investigation into a Belgian Islamic centre.¹²⁹

Several European countries as well as the USA and Japan have modified their advice for those travelling in Europe. The UK Foreign Office described the threat of an attack in France and Germany as “high” and tourist access to the German Reichstag building and the Eiffel Tower in Paris has been restricted.

While networks continue to present a threat to European countries, the attack on Stephen Timms MP in 2010 may represent a new trend: the self-radicalised individual. This possible trend has been picked up in the Europol report:

Islamist terrorist activities are increasingly being perpetrated by self-radicalised and often self-instructed individuals, acting alone instead of in groups. As mentioned in Member States’ contributions, this development is facilitated by the availability of instruction manuals, effective propaganda and recruitment materials on the internet.¹³⁰

With the increasing effectiveness of restrictions on individual communications and financing making large-scale organisation difficult, it is propaganda and individual acts that are increasingly likely to be the favoured operating method for global violent *ihadis*.

In December 2010, a suicide bomber set off two bombs in Stockholm, killing himself in the process. The revelation that the bomber had lived for some time in the UK prompted commentators to question the UK’s Prevent programme, which aims to discourage radicalisation.¹³¹

5.14 USA

US intelligence assessments allege that there is a small number of terrorist cells in the USA.¹³² In general, these are devoted more to spreading *ihadist* ideology and gathering support for struggles overseas than to mounting attacks on US soil. Nevertheless, evidence suggests that some attacks are planned each year, although the US intelligence community thinks that only a few of these will ever result in successful attacks.

The danger presented by the radicalisation of US nationals, as with Europeans, is that they can travel to be trained abroad, then return to carry out attacks on their home country. According to the IISS, the US is experiencing an upsurge in home-grown terrorism.¹³³ In 2009, a Muslim convert shot two Army recruiters in Little Rock, Arkansas and also in that year a Muslim US Army Major shot and killed 13 fellow soldiers at Fort Hood in Texas. It is alleged that he had tried to contact al-Qaeda operatives before the incident and that he attended the same mosque as some who were involved in the 9/11 attacks.¹³⁴ There were two more plots for attacks to be carried out in the USA by US nationals: one in 2009 for an attack on the New York subway by an American of Afghan descent and the Times Square bombing plot of 2010, to be carried out by an American of Pakistani origin.

¹²⁹ “Chechen terror suspects busted in Belgian raid”, *EUObserver*, 24 November 2010

¹³⁰ Europol, *EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report*, 2010, p42

¹³¹ This note does not deal with the UK’s domestic action against terrorism. For information on that, see the Library’s [Terrorism](#) subject page, which contains papers such as [Control orders and the Prevention of Terrorism Act 2005](#), 23 November 2010

¹³² Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *Annual Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence*, 2 February 2010, p11

¹³³ “Terrorist threats in Europe: hype or reality?”, *IISS Strategic Comments*, October 2010

¹³⁴ “Fort Hood shooting: Texas army killer linked to September 11 terrorists”, *Daily Telegraph*, 7 November 2009

6 WMD threat?

Nuclear, biological and chemical weapons in the hands of non-state actors are clearly a major worry for policymakers. In an interview in February 2010, The US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said:

The biggest nightmare that many of us have is that one of these terrorist member organizations within this syndicate of terror will get their hands on a weapon of mass destruction. [Al Qaeda is] unfortunately a very committed, clever, diabolical group of terrorists who are always looking for weaknesses and openings.¹³⁵

To minimise the threat of terrorist use of such weapons, the UK Strategic Defence and Security Review requires the:

retention of our chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear science and technology capabilities that contribute to counter-proliferation and our response to the potential use of such materials by terrorist or state actors.¹³⁶

It is not certain how easy it would be for a terrorist group to create a nuclear bomb; obtaining weapons-grade nuclear material is generally thought to be a difficult task without the assistance of a state, since there is very little of it in the world, generally in the control of states. According to the US intelligence community, there are no signs, so far, that any states are helping terrorist groups to acquire such weapons:

We do not know of any states deliberately providing CBRN [chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear] assistance to terrorist groups. Although terrorist groups and individuals have sought out scientists with applicable expertise, we have no corroborated reporting that indicates such experts have advanced terrorist CBRN capability with the permission of any government. We and many in the international community are especially concerned about the potential for terrorists to gain access to WMD-related materials or technology.¹³⁷

If it would be very difficult for a terrorist group to make a nuclear bomb, to make a radiological “dirty bomb” would be much easier. Low-enriched uranium could be stolen relatively easily and only needs to be distributed using conventional explosives. Many analysts think that the likelihood of international *jihadis* making a “dirty bomb”, is higher than that of a group making a nuclear bomb.¹³⁸

Biological and chemical weapons may be of more practical use for terrorist groups. US diplomatic cables leaked to the Wikileaks site suggested that the Indian authorities in 2006 were far more concerned about biological weapons than nuclear:

Turning to the subject of counter-bio-terrorism cooperation, Singh reported that Indian intelligence is picking up chatter indicating jihadi groups are interested in bio-terrorism, for example seeking out like-minded PhD's in biology and bio-technology. He compared the prospects for nuclear terrorism ("still in the realm of the imaginary") to

¹³⁵ Scott Stewart, “The Jihadist CBRN Threat”, Stratfor, 10 February 2010

¹³⁶ *Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence and Security Review*, Cm 7948, October 2010, p11

¹³⁷ Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *Annual Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence*, 2 February 2010, p12

¹³⁸ Gavin Cameron, *Nuclear terrorism*, Macmillan, 1999, p131

bio-terrorism ("an ideal weapon for terrorism ... anthrax could pose a serious problem ...it is no longer an academic exercise for us.")¹³⁹

Deterrence

Traditional nuclear deterrence theory clearly does not apply easily to non-state actors such as al-Qaeda. Even finding and killing leaders of such groups is difficult for western forces; they simply do not present a clear target that can be threatened with destruction in retaliation for a mass-destruction attack. Recent research has highlighted this difficulty:

Deterring Al Qaeda from using a nuclear weapon, should it acquire one, is a harder challenge than analysts have argued. Suggestions for "deterrence based on punishment" have severe limitations. Al Qaeda is not a state, has no clear command authority, and has no clear nuclear weapons-employment doctrine. Most analysts also ignore the dynamic of "crisis instability" ("use it or lose it"): should the West believe Al Qaeda has an improvised nuclear device, it is unlikely (regardless of whether Al Qaeda leadership claimed the weapon would be held as a deterrent only) that the West would accept a mutually-assured-destruction relationship with the group. The West would hunt the weapon down, forcing Al Qaeda's hand. The best counter-Weapons of Mass Destruction-Nuclear Terrorism defense, therefore, is good counterinsurgency policy to starve it of recruits until the group dies.¹⁴⁰

Global Threat Reduction Programme

While starving a group of recruits until it dies may be the only sure way to end its activities, it is not a comfortable policy option on its own. Meanwhile, the major nuclear powers are attempting to ensure that nuclear materials do not fall into the hands of terrorist organisations, or hostile states. The G8-sponsored Global Partnership against the spread of materials and weapons of mass destruction was set up in 2002 as a ten-year programme. The UK's contribution to it is the Global Threat Reduction Programme. The programme was originally focused on Russia's need to manage the large amount of nuclear materials left over from Cold War weaponry and ageing nuclear power programmes.¹⁴¹

With Russia increasingly able to manage its own nuclear materials, the programme is now focussed on states that were formerly part of the Soviet Union. In November, an important transfer of 11 tons of highly-enriched uranium and three tons of plutonium was carried out in Kazakhstan. In a cooperative project between the US and Kazakh authorities that was 14 years in the planning, the material was moved across Kazakhstan to a new, secure storage facility near the border with Russia and China. US and Kazakh officials were particularly concerned about the previous location of the nuclear material, 150 miles across the Caspian Sea from Russia's troubled Dagestan republic.

The Kazakhstan project was largely funded by the US, which contributed about \$219 million to the project. The UK Government made a contribution of some \$4 million, according to reports, and Kazakhstan also contributed funding. Thomas D'Agostino, head of the US National Nuclear Security Administration said:

¹³⁹ "US embassy cables: Indian jihadi groups 'interested in bio-terrorism', *Guardian*, 16 December 2010

¹⁴⁰ James Van De Velde, "The Impossible Challenge of Deterring "Nuclear Terrorism" by Al Qaeda. *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Volume 33, Number 8 (August 2010), pp. 682-699

¹⁴¹ For more information on the protection of nuclear material and the 47-nation nuclear security summit held in April 2010, see Library Research Paper 10/42, [Progress towards nuclear disarmament?](#), 15 June 2010

The most immediate and extreme threat [to international security] is a terrorist acquiring nuclear material. This takes one of those pieces, a big chunk, off the table.¹⁴²

Although it was originally set up as a ten-year programme, the Global Partnership is likely to be extended beyond 2012.¹⁴³ It will also continue to expand its geographical presence. In 2009, the UK had four projects in Kazakhstan, three in Tajikistan, three in Kyrgyzstan; projects in Ukraine, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus and Iraq, as well as numerous projects in Russia.¹⁴⁴

Chemical weapons

As well as handling nuclear material, the Global Threat Reduction Programme also deals with chemical and biological threats. The Japanese group Aum Shinrikyo used the nerve agent sarin for its attack on the Tokyo underground in 1995. This and other chemical agents such as soman, ricin and tabun are thought to be within the capabilities of a significant terrorist group to prepare.¹⁴⁵ The potential for mass casualties using chemical weapons is significant. The Tokyo attack killed about a dozen people, but injured thousands. If the poison had been distributed more effectively, it could have killed many times more.

Biological weapons

The threat of a biological attack by terrorist groups is also considerable. The disease ebola has been mentioned as a potential weapon, and anthrax has already been used. Other diseases could be genetically engineered. The Japanese group Aum Shinrikyo managed to modify the genes of the E.coli bacterium to include botulinum toxin, turning the common and normally mild bacterium into a killer.¹⁴⁶ The group also collected ebola virus samples for potential use in a weapon. Biological agents could clearly affect many more people than chemical or radiological agents because of their natural ability to multiply. The potential for suicide attacks, where a person would infect themselves and then pass the infection on to others has also raised concerns.

7 Conclusion

The number of terrorist attacks by global violent *jihadis* is very low; nationalist terrorism is far more prevalent in Europe. The Metropolitan Police Commissioner, Sir Paul Stevenson made a speech putting the threat into context:

Like others, I don't want to inadvertently overstate the influence of terrorism and thereby give it undue promotion, because terrorism usually has two key component parts - the act itself which can kill - and the images in the media and our minds which create the fear upon which terrorists thrive.¹⁴⁷

Nevertheless, he said that terrorism in general is here to stay, no matter what form it takes, and that the threat to the UK has not been higher than it is now:

In my judgement, and this is a view shared by my senior colleagues in the Security Service, this is undoubtedly as dangerous a time as we have seen for the UK, and UK interests abroad, since the attempted attacks on the Tiger-Tiger nightclub in London and Glasgow airport in 2007. There can be no complacency.

¹⁴² "US and Kazakhstan complete secret transfer of Soviet nuclear materials", Christian Science Monitor, 22 November 2010

¹⁴³ DECC, *Global Threat Reduction Programme: seventh annual report 2009*, 2010, p6.

¹⁴⁴ DECC, *Global Threat Reduction Programme: seventh annual report 2009*, 2010, p16

¹⁴⁵ Frank Barnaby, *The future of terror*, Granta, 2007, p46

¹⁴⁶ Frank Barnaby, *The future of terror*, Granta, 2007, p40

¹⁴⁷ Sir Paul Stevenson, "Building National Resilience", Speech to the Royal United Services Institute, 24 November 2010

Despite these comments, some observers suggest that terrorist activity is in decline.

International cooperation in controlling the communication and financing networks of extremists, as well as targeted assassinations, have been effective in reducing the threat of major plots organised by al-Qaeda's core leadership in the tribal areas of Pakistan, but the group's ideology is very much alive and capable of motivating individuals or small groups to carry out operations. The threat to Western countries is increasingly coming from self-radicalised and sometimes self-trained individuals; the internet and mobile telephone technology are important tools for spreading radical ideology and techniques such as bomb-making.

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula is probably the most threatening sub-group at present, and Western efforts are concentrated on attempting to combat the threat from that area. Other groups have caused concern, but many of them remain focussed on local grievances and have not succeeded in presenting a serious, sustained threat to Western interests.

One of the main obstacles to al-Qaeda spreading its style of globalism is the fact that many groups are more concerned about local concerns and group rights than establishing a worldwide caliphate.

The movement of Western individuals for training or fighting in countries such as Yemen, Pakistan or Somalia is a serious worry for Western authorities, as it allows extremist groups in those countries to extend their activities to the Westerners' home countries.

Counter-insurgency policies to rebuild economically and socially such countries as Yemen are important but will take a long time to bear fruit. Meanwhile, governments are attempting to prepare for the possibility of an extremist group gaining control of weapons of mass destruction or a "dirty bomb".