



# IDSS COMMENTARIES (65/2004)

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## Global Terrorism Outlook for 2005

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### **A Resilient Threat:**

In 2005, Western infrastructure and population centers at home and abroad will remain the primary target of Al Qaeda, its associated and affiliated groups. High profile, symbolic or strategic economic and commercial centers, particularly hotels, banks and energy infrastructure will be susceptible to attack. The bulk of the attacks will be in the global south – Middle East, Asia, and Africa – and occasionally on western soil. In March and August 2004, the British authorities were able to detect and neutralize cells in the UK planning attacks against British and American targets. The UK Al Qaeda leader Dhiren Barot alias Issa al Britanni was developing a fully transferable template for attacking any target county.

During the past three years, nearly 100 medium-to-large scale terrorist attacks against US, European and Australian targets were prevented. Heightened public vigilance; unprecedented security, intelligence, law enforcement and military cooperation; and the proactive targeting of cells planning and preparing attacks were effective in reducing the threat. Although terrorist capabilities have suffered, terrorist intentions to strike “Crusader and Jewish” targets have not diminished. Terrorist planners are carefully probing the loopholes and gaps in the post-9/11 security architecture to strike once again on North American and European soil.

As law enforcement, security and intelligence agencies have invested significantly in detecting attacks, it has become more difficult for terrorists to organize and mount large scale coordinated simultaneous attacks of the scale of 9/11. The world in 2005 is more likely to witness attacks of the scale of Madrid, Bali, Casablanca, Riyadh, Istanbul, Karachi, Beslan, and Jeddah. Until now the attacks in Iraq and Saudi Arabia have been mostly against Western targets. In 2005, Islamist groups are likely to attack domestic regime targets as well.

Despite intermittent operational success against terrorist cells planning, preparing and executing attacks, the worldwide threat of terrorism has not diminished. Although governments have invested several hundred-billions-dollars in building counter terrorism capacities during the past three years, the resilience of the contemporary wave of terrorist networks is ensuring the continuity of the threat. While targeting of operational cells can reduce the immediate threat (1-2 years), governments will have to think beyond the traditional counter terrorism practitioners’ tool kit to end the violence. The post-9/11 Islamist milieu facilitates terrorist replenishment of human losses and material wastage, a process essential to continue the fight. As many groups that practice political violence, including terrorism, are willing to negotiate, bringing warring parties together and sustaining protracted

dialogue is essential. Training a new breed of conflict management practitioners to draw in and sustain a dialogue between the politically marginalized groups and the government elite is more likely to reduce the threat in the long term.

### **Al Qaeda: From a Group to a Movement:**

The most profound development in the past three years is the transformation of Al Qaeda from a group to a movement. With the US-led coalition intervention in Afghanistan in October 2001, Al Qaeda members continues to work with three-dozen Islamist groups it had financed, trained, provided weapons and ideologized in the crucible of Afghanistan in the 1990s. Through the Internet, using couriers, visiting combat tacticians and expert trainers, Al Qaeda is sharing its vast knowledge, experience and proven expertise to operationally and ideologically reinforce the multinational mujahidin campaign against the US, its allies and friends.

As the self-proclaimed vanguard of the Islamic movements, the influence of Al Qaeda has been profound in shaping the thinking and practices of the global jihad movement. In many ways, Al Qaeda had accomplished its mandate of galvanizing the Islamists worldwide. Al Qaeda's reinvention into a movement will ensure that like-minded groups will copy its coordinated, simultaneous, mass fatality style suicide attacks. Similarly, Al Qaeda's technologies, tactics, and techniques have spread since 9/11, and the threat of terrorism has become more dispersed and diffused "infecting" existing and emerging groups. For instance, the UK authorities in August 2004 recovered in London a car bomb circuit identical to the design used in Saudi Arabia and Iraq. Emulating classic Al Qaeda tactics, Chechen groups conducted spectacular attacks against a theatre in Moscow, blew up two flights in mid-air, and attacked a school in Beslan. Another example of how a local jihad group was willing to follow Al Qaeda prescriptions was a separatist Muslim group beheading a Buddhist teacher in southern Thailand. Similarly, Al Jemaah Al Islamiyah (JI), which hitherto refrained from conducting mass fatality suicide attacks against Western targets, struck multiple Western targets. JI Singapore leader Ma Selamat Kastari planned to hijack an Aeroflot plane from Bangkok and crash it into a strategic target in Singapore, a typical Al Qaeda tactic. Many other groups seek to copycat Al Qaeda, including Abu Musab Al Zarkawi's Tawhid Wal Jihad, renamed in 2004 as Al Qaeda in the land of the Tigris and the Euphrates. Another group that pledged allegiance to Al Qaeda was Algeria's Salafi Group for Call and Combat. In addition to building a network from Algeria to Mali, Niger, Chad and Mauritania, GSPC (Salafi Group for Call and Combat) also established an operational presence in the West. Despite sustained efforts to break the Al Qaeda link to Pakistani groups, a dozen groups have pledged allegiance to Bin Laden. While Al Qaeda, the operational organization has weakened, Al Qaeda, the ideological movement has grown appreciably. As several local jihad groups adopt Al Qaeda's global jihad ideology, a morphed Al Qaeda will present a greater threat in 2005.

### **Demography of Violence:**

The US-led coalition intervention in Afghanistan has dispersed several thousand jihadists from its core in Afghanistan to lawless and comfort zones worldwide such as Iraq, Yemen, Afghan-Pakistan border, Kashmir, Southern Philippines, Somalia, and Chechnya. Although the dismantling of the terrorist training infrastructure in Afghanistan has damaged Al Qaeda's capacity to provide high quality training, the dispersal of its members and associates have increased the threshold of violence several folds. In place of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq

has emerged as the new Asian and Middle Eastern centers of gravity of international terrorism. When hunted, terrorists moved to geographic areas where law and order is lacking or non-existent.

The demography of violence will not significantly change from 2004 to 2005. Today, over 95% of the terrorist groups originate in the global south, primarily in the Middle East and in Asia. Nonetheless, they have built state-of-the-art infrastructure for recruiting and raising funds in North America, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and in Japan, the liberal democracies of the world. Due to the freedoms enshrined in constitutions of these affluent countries, terrorists are still able to operate quite freely and raise more funds in liberal democracies than in authoritarian regimes. Due to the threat of retaliation by the US, the traditional sponsorship of terrorism by some Arab states has declined even further. Except Iran and Syria, no other states are likely to support groups that engage in terrorism. In addition to supporting the Lebanese Hezbollah, Iran will continue its assistance to armed Sunni groups both in Palestine and Iraq. Meanwhile, Libya and Sudan will further distance itself from terrorism. Libya will continue to offer its offices to bring Muslim warring factions to the negotiating table. Rather than isolate Iran, it is imperative for the West, especially the US to engage Tehran. Removal of Saddam, a buffer between the Shia and the Sunni Muslims, has created the conditions for them to work together. The Western failure to engage Iran against Al Qaeda will strengthen the hands of the Iranian hardliners keen to destabilize Iraq and assist anti-US Shia and Sunni Islamists.

Due to a sustained and coordinated international response, Al Qaeda as a group has declined in its operational capability. Nonetheless, the threat facing the world today is much graver than at 9/11. Al Qaeda's attack on America's most iconic landmarks has galvanized a broad spectrum of Islamist groups with divergent views. For the Islamists whether a group is Al Qaeda or not, it no longer makes a difference. Especially after the US invasion of Iraq, reflecting the widespread Muslim rage, several dozen groups have emerged. Many share Al Qaeda's mission and vision of a global jihad, and that the United States is the number one enemy. As in 2004, Al Qaeda's associated and affiliated groups in the Middle East, former Soviet Union, Asia, and Africa will grow in strength, size and influence throughout 2005. They will tap into the suffering, resentment and anger of the Muslims, and draw support and recruits. Spawned by the developments in the Muslim world, both spin off cells and lone wolf attacks, harder to detect, will mount attacks on Western soil, and will pose an appreciable threat. Instead of one central leadership coordinating terrorist operations, multiple centers have emerged especially in Muslim countries.

Despite disagreements, jihad movements worldwide respect Dr Zawahiri and Bin Laden as "God-nominated saviours." As the principal strategist of the jihad movement, Dr Ayman Al Zawahiri continues to guide operations against the West. As the movement's architect, Osama bin Laden provides the inspiration and instigation. Although execution cells in target countries have freedom of operation, they still consult the leaders on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border for major attacks. In 2004, Dr. Zawahiri postponed a planned operation using unconventional agents to strike a Western city, stating that the impact will be greater to strike multiple cities. A dozen groups have recently expressed an interest to acquire, develop and use chemical, biological and radiological weapons. The chemical and biological manual recovered in the Philippines indicates intent to cause mass disruption. Learning from 9/11, Al Qaeda is keen to focus attacks that will affect the global economy. For instance, the Bin Laden audiotape released on December 14, 2004 explicitly called for attacks against energy infrastructure, to double the price of a barrel of oil to USD 100.

### **Iraq: The New Land of Jihad:**

Due to the sharp deterioration of security in Iraq in 2004, the country has emerged as the epicenter of terrorism in the Middle East. With the hardening of coalition targets in 2005, the terrorists are likely to shift their targeting to include the new Iraqi regime. As a part of the Al Qaeda agenda, the Iraqi Islamists are likely to attack the oil facilities of Iraq. Despite an increase in Coalition troop levels, the US and its coalition partners and Iraq will lack the intelligence dominance to break the insurgent and terrorist momentum. Provided there is no troop pullout, the resident threat within Iraq in 2005 will not worsen compared to 2004.

The sustained violence in Iraq is affecting the Muslim psyche. The increasing operational tempo of the insurgency and terrorism has spawned several new groups and is giving a new lease of life for existing groups worldwide. Exploiting the long, open and porous borders, Islamist groups in the Levant and in the Gulf, notably in Saudi Arabia are increasingly participating in the Iraqi jihad. Two dozen Iraqi groups are joined by foreign fighters primarily from the Levant. Like Afghanistan during the Soviet occupation, Iraq will draw cradle and convert Muslims from North America, Europe, Middle East, Africa, and Asia. Compared to Palestine, the television images from Iraq will have a greater impact politicizing and radicalizing Muslims both in the territorial communities of the Middle East and Asia and the migrant and diaspora communities in the West. In comparison to dedicated cells of Al Qaeda and its associated groups operating in the West, young Middle Eastern and Asian Muslims living in Europe and North America are driven by the events in Iraq to attack western targets. As they have no operational contact with definable groups, such ideologically driven affiliated cells are harder to detect. The terrorist support networks in Europe are generating recruits and support to replenish the human losses and material wastage in Iraq. In addition to multiple groups sustaining attacks against coalition and regime targets within Iraq, cells in North America and Europe will be inspired to attack host country targets in 2005.

With mounting pressure on Al Qaeda's surviving leadership in Afghanistan and Pakistan, Iraq has emerged as the global epicenter of domestic and international terrorism. The most active group in Iraq, Abu Musab Al Zarkawi's Tawhid Wal Jihad is steadfastly transforming into an Al Qaeda-type multinational group. Originally composed of Palestinians and Jordanians, Zarkawi is aggressively using the Internet to recruit European Muslims. On his behalf, the rich Muslims of Western Europe are traveling to Eastern Europe and the Balkans to recruit poor Muslims to fight in the Iraqi jihad. Contrary to the initial trend, foreign fighters are not going to Iraq only to die, but serve on rotation, where they fight against the coalition troops only for a period of time. Before serving another tour of jihad, they return home to share their experience to recruit and raise funds. Using Iraq as a strategic base, Zarkawi is providing leadership to portions of the Al Qaeda's global network left leaderless and serving as its de-facto operational leader. Zarkawi is expanding his network across the Middle East into the Far East and across Europe into North America. Although operations by Zarkawi in Germany, France and UK were prevented, he maintains a network of a few hundred members and supporters in Europe. Despite 150 arrests in 10 European countries, he continues to receive both finance and recruits from Europe and Canada. A chemical operation by Zarkawi aimed at killing several thousands of US and Jordanian nationals was frustrated in Amman in the last week of March and the first week of April in 2004. In 2005, Zarkawi will strike both within and outside Iraq possibly using unconventional agents. Since 9/11, among the dozen terrorist groups that have expressed an interest to acquire, develop and use

chemical, biological and radiological weapons, Tawhid Wal Jihad presents the greatest threat.

### **Flawed Counter-Terrorism Strategy:**

The US invasion in Iraq has not reduced but increased the threat of terrorism several folds. It has diverted US specialist resources to neutralize the Al Qaeda leadership, the greatest single failure of the US counter terrorism strategy. Furthermore, the opportunity to restore stability and resources to rebuild Afghanistan into a model Muslim country in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been lost. In 2003-4, Al Qaeda, Taliban and Hezb-i-Islami re-emerged as a credible force in Afghanistan. Unless these threat groups are neutralized, they will periodically strike government targets and seek to assassinate the Afghan President Hamid Karzai. In addition to the Afghan and Iraqi leaderships, the world's most threatened leader is Pakistan's Pervez Musharaff, who has challenged the jihadi groups.

Three years after, both the strategy and the effectiveness of the global campaign to combat terrorism is being questioned. The Western strategy of building a coalition to combat the tools of terror has proven flawed in conception. The Rumsfeld model of fighting the terrorist operational capabilities and not the ideological message has its limitations. Although the tactical successes of targeting operational cells have reduced the immediate threat, the failure to target terrorist ideology and motivations is ensuring the continuity of the threat. In spite of the detentions in 102 countries, Al Qaeda-led Islamist groups continue to survive and fight back. As the terrorist operational infrastructures are becoming more compartmentalized and clandestine, their execution cells have become harder to detect.

By using the current strategy, the threat posed by the Al Qaeda movement to the West, its allies and friends can be managed but not ended. By not fighting the icons, socio-economic and political drivers of terrorism, and changing the reality on the ground, the threat will persist. As long as the ideology remains robust, the terrorist group will recruit and draw support to continue the fight. Three years after, Bin Laden's message "It is the duty of every good Muslim to wage jihad" finds resonance among Muslims in the south and the north. Furthermore, the catalyst conflicts from Palestine to Iraq, and Chechnya to Kashmir, is fuelling the Muslim rage, helping to breed and sustain a global campaign of violence.

### **Response:**

With the increased porosity of borders between terrorist organizations, the exchange of technical and human expertise between terrorist groups is increasing the threshold of violence. With enhanced terrorist cooperation, governments will be forced to collaborate by establishing common databases, exchange of personnel, joint training, combined operations and sharing of resources and experience. While authoritarian regimes such as Saudi Arabia will aggressively target violent Islamists, democracies such as Malaysia will search for political solutions to contain or co-exist with the Islamists. With the disruption of the terrorist networks, Islamists will increasingly operate through community institutions such as madaris and mosques. Furthermore, they will use the Internet as their main tool for disseminating knowledge, propaganda and communication. Fuelled by the developments in Iraq, anti-Americanism and Islamism as ideologies will find greater appeal especially in the Muslim world.

As armed conflicts politicize and radicalize the affected, they have become the main producers of terrorists and supporters of violence. To reduce the threat of political violence in

the international system, it is essential for the international community to develop capabilities to facilitate negotiation between warring factions in Palestine, Chechnya, Kashmir, Mindanao [Philippines], Maluku [Indonesia], Poso [Indonesia], Algeria, Afghanistan, and Iraq. These conflicts of international and regional neglect are the strategic bases of contemporary terrorism. Had governments diverted a fraction of the resources designed to build war-fighting capabilities to conflict management, they could have ended several such protracted conflicts. Without a shift in its foreign policy, the United States of America will continue to be misunderstood by the rest of the world. By gradually replacing hard power with soft power, the Bush Administration will be able to change the overall Muslim mindset towards the United States of America and its citizens. In the wake of the devastation caused by the Tsunami, the US should seize the opportunity to correct the Muslim misperception of her by building a US-led international coalition for the reconstruction of millions of Muslim and non-Muslim homes.

### **Conclusion:**

The failure to contain the severity of the violence in Iraq; the lack of political will to end the catalyst conflicts in places such as Palestine, Chechnya and Kashmir; and the failure to neutralize the core leadership of Al Qaeda are providing a steady pool of recruits and support for violent Islamists. An assessment of the successes and failures in 2004 reveals that disrupting and degrading operational capabilities can reduce the threat but not end terrorism. Operational counter terrorism has failed to strategically damage jihad organizations, especially their intentions to strike and motivations to sustain the fight.

The Israeli experience dictates that even with the best intelligence and strike capabilities, terrorism cannot be ended without containing extremism and empowering the moderates. If the international community is serious in its efforts to strategically reduce the threat of terrorism, it must develop a multi-pronged, multi-dimensional, multi-agency, and a multi-national model to combat terrorism and extremism. While the counter-terrorism community should target the terrorist operational and conceptual infrastructures, the affluent nations must seek to change the political and economic realities of the global south. While maintaining the counter-terrorist intelligence collection capabilities and operational effectiveness on the ground, it is necessary for political, educational and religious leaders to consider developing a parallel response to target the extremist ideology – the principal driver of contemporary violence. As jihad organizations misinterpret and misrepresent the Koran, it is necessary for government and society to counter the corrupt version of the religious texts presented by power hungry political ideologues masquerading as men of religion, misusing and abusing a great religion. Such a response cannot be formulated by the US or the Europeans but by the Muslim world with the steadfast support of affluent nations.

The first phase in the US-led coalition against terrorism focused on crippling Al Qaeda. In the second phase, the US and its allies provided significant assistance to its friends to fight Al Qaeda associated groups in their countries. For instance, Philippines fought the Abu Sayyaf Group, Indonesia fought Jemmah Islamiyah, Yemen fought Al Qaeda, Algeria fought the Salafi Group for Call and Combat, Georgia fought Chechen groups, and Pakistan fought a dozen Al Qaeda associated groups. As terrorism is a vicious by-product of extremism, the third phase should be to fight the ideology of violence.

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