

PAPER ONE

INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM: THE THREAT

Any discussion of the Government's strategy to reduce the threat from international terrorism to the UK and its citizens must begin with the nature of the threat itself. This Paper analyses that threat. It reviews the recent history, since September 2001, of the threat from Al Qaeda, the networks inspired by it and the other networks and groups with similar aims; it considers, on the evidence of attacks so far, what is different about the current international terrorist threat compared with the terrorist threat the UK has faced before; and it outlines the challenges the threat presents to countries worldwide, including the UK.

International terrorism: its actions and intentions

International terrorism did not start with the attacks in New York on 11 September 2001. However, since September 11th, international terrorists have mounted further attacks throughout the world. They have killed people of all nationalities, faiths and backgrounds. Some of these attacks were mounted by terrorists directly under the control of the Al Qaeda leadership. Others have been mounted by networks only loosely affiliated to Al Qaeda, but inspired by its message and ideology.

Examples of International terrorist attacks since 9/11

- April 2002, Tunisia – 21 killed in attack on Western tourists at synagogue
- May 2002, Pakistan – 19 killed in attack on French engineers in Karachi
- June 2002, Pakistan – 11 killed in attack on the US Consulate in Karachi;
- October 2002, Yemen – 1 killed in water borne attack on MV Limburg
- October 2002, Indonesia – 202 killed in attack on Bali nightclub
- November 2002, Kenya – 12 killed in attack on hotel and Israeli aircraft in Mombasa
- May 2003, Saudi Arabia – 35 killed in attack on residential compound in Riyadh.
- May 2003, Morocco – 45 killed on attacks in Casablanca
- August 2003, Indonesia – 12 killed in attack on Marriott Hotel in Jakarta
- November 2003, Saudi Arabia - 17 killed in attack on residential compound in Riyadh
- November 2003, Turkey – 27 killed in multiple attacks on British and Jewish targets in Istanbul.
- March 2004, Spain – 192 killed in attacks on Madrid rail network
- May 2004, Saudi Arabia - 24 killed in multiple attacks in Al Khobar

- September 2004, Indonesia – 9 killed in attack on Australian Embassy in Jakarta
- October 2004, Egypt - 34 killed in attack on hotel
- December 2005, Saudi Arabia – 5 killed in attack on US Consulate in Jeddah

The attacks in Istanbul in November 2003 directly targeted British interests. The leaders of Al Qaeda have made clear in repeated statements that the UK and its citizens are targets for attack.

Terrorist networks in the UK have acted on these instructions. The police and intelligence agencies have disrupted a number of attacks in the UK before they could be mounted. Many of those involved in these terrorist conspiracies have been overseas nationals, but we have been increasingly aware of the involvement of British nationals.

From 11 September to 31 December 2004, 701 people were arrested under the Terrorism Act 2000. Of these 119 were charged under the Act, with 45 of them also being charged with other offences. 135 were charged under other legislation – including charges for terrorist offences covered in other criminal law such as the use of explosives. And 17 have been convicted of offences under the Act. For example, a man arrested in November 2000 was subsequently convicted and sentenced to 20 years imprisonment for plotting to commit an explosion. And two men arrested under the Terrorism Act in 2000 were each also subsequently sentenced to 20 years imprisonment for plotting to commit an explosion.

Investigations of terrorist suspects in the UK have revealed a range of other activities including:

- facilitation of men, money and materials for networks engaged in conflict overseas;
- fundraising for terrorist networks overseas and in the UK;
- acquisition and dissemination of false documents for use by terrorists in the UK and overseas;
- facilitation of training in the UK and overseas in both ideology and terrorist techniques.

Statements by Al Qaeda leaders

Bin Laden May 2004

“There will be a prize of 1,000 grams of gold for whoever kills a military figure or civilian from the veto masters [i.e. permanent members of the Security Council], such as the American or British...”

Al-Zawahiri statement October 2004

*“We must not wait until the American, **British**, French, Jewish, South Korean, Hungarian and Polish forces enter Egypt, the Arab Peninsular, Yemen and Algeria and then begin the resistance. We should begin the resistance now. The interests of the Americans, British, Australians, French, Polish, Norwegians, South Koreans and Japanese are everywhere. They all participated in the occupation of Afghanistan, Iraq and Chechnya or supplied Israel with the means of subsistence.”*

The Government believes that the recent history of indiscriminate attacks worldwide, the declared targeting by Al Qaeda leaders of the UK, its citizens and interests, and the plots which have been uncovered to mount attacks in the UK itself amount to clear evidence of a real threat to British people and British interests.

Why is the current threat different?

Terrorists aim to achieve objectives through intimidation and fear. They assert that ends justify means, no matter what the cost in human life and suffering.

We have faced terrorists before pursuing a variety of causes. Some terrorists were overcome by effective law enforcement; some were eventually brought within political processes; others faded with the passing of generations.

But Al Qaeda and its offshoots and imitators are different. They are distinguished from their predecessors by a unique combination of factors which puts the current threat on a scale we have not previously experienced.

- **Global reach:** These terrorists – loosely affiliated groups operating without a conventional structure – draw their inspiration from a global message articulated by internationally recognisable figures such as Usama Bin Laden. That message is uncompromising. It asserts that the West represents a threat to Islam, that loyalty to religion and loyalty to democratic institutions and values are incompatible; that violence is the only proper response. This ideology is adaptable to many causes, local and international. The terrorists take advantage of modern media to spread their propaganda and have attracted followers across the world. Together, Al Qaeda and like-minded

groups comprise the first effectively global terrorist threat, by which few parts of the world are untouched. They present a threat to democracy globally and the global economy.

- **Capability and ambition:** We have faced expert and well-trained terrorist groups before. But Al Qaeda and related groups have exceptional techniques and capability. They are consistently ambitious and innovative. They can take advantage of modern international travel and communications unavailable to their predecessors. They are sophisticated in their use of these techniques. They are prepared to use any means to mount attacks, no matter what the consequences for their victims or themselves. Attacks so far have used conventional means – although often in unconventional ways. But we know that these terrorist networks are interested in using chemical, biological and radiological weapons.
- **Lack of restraint:** the terrorists are prepared to kill in very large numbers and indiscriminately. They are prepared, in some cases, to sacrifice their own lives to mount attacks. And the casualties of those attacks can be of any background or religion. Many of their victims have been Muslim.

The challenge for open societies

Terrorism with this reach, this ambition and this sophistication presents unique challenges for law enforcement agencies in open societies.

- Terrorist networks can sustain themselves and attack anywhere, exploiting freedom of travel, identity theft and free flows of money. So the response has to be international as well as national.
- Because a central aim is often to cause mass and potentially catastrophic casualties, international terrorists have a wide range of targets. So a key and most effective part of our defence is our intelligence capability which enables us to anticipate attacks before they can be mounted.
- Because many terrorists are careless of their own lives, we cannot assume conventional protective measures will always work, although we must seek to deter and protect wherever it is realistic to do so. In addition, it is particularly important to pre-empt attacks rather than rely on our ability to intercept them while in progress.
- Because we want to preserve the open society which the terrorists wish to destroy, law enforcement is constrained by the legitimate demands of individual freedom. So enforcement must be complemented by policies which discourage extremism and terrorist recruitment.

The other papers in this series consider how the UK Government has sought to respond to these challenges and how it has shaped its strategy in the light of them.