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THE YEAR OF LIVING DANGEROUSLY: THREAT ASSESSMENT 2006

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Introduction

The year 2006 may prove to be a critical year in the trajectory of global terrorism. This is taking into account the developments in Iraq and Afghanistan. Iraq has become the key centre for training for new and active members of diverse jihadist movements all over the globe. The situation in Iraq – instability and chaos - is also fuelling the resentment among the Muslim community and providing justification for jihad for both existing and emerging extremist groups worldwide. The insurgents' campaign against the occupying forces in Iraq is increasingly becoming a beacon for movements in other parts of the world. A clear example is Afghanistan, where a resurgent Taliban and Al Qaeda forces have begun to undermine governance in many parts of the country. In Iraq also the jihadists are successful in fighting their adversaries in urban environment. These tactics are now being exported to other areas especially Afghanistan. Thus in Afghanistan, the Taliban and Al Qaeda mimic car bomb, suicide attacks as well as hostage-taking and beheadings, which is making security in the country extremely fragile. Reports also indicate that many of the jihadists trained in urban warfare are returning or have already returned to their respective home countries to conduct attacks as part of the global jihad campaign against the West in general and the US in particular.

Thus in the year 2006:

- Most nations will find terrorism as their tier-one security threat;
- Iraq will be the epicentre for global terrorism;
- In Afghanistan, the terrorist threat will grow;
- The Iraq-based network of Abu Musab Al- Zarqawi will become a global movement parallel to Al Qaeda;

¹ *Las opiniones expresadas en estos artículos son propias de sus autores. Estos artículos no reflejan necesariamente la opinión de UNISCI.* The views expressed in these articles are those of the authors. These articles do not necessarily reflect the views of UNISCI.



- Nevertheless, rifts over strategy will develop within the global jihad movement which may undermine leadership within the jihadist movement.

1. The Context

Four profound developments characterise the contemporary threat landscape. First, the singular threat posed by Al Qaeda is being surpassed by a larger threat established through the global jihad movement. A conglomerate of four-dozen groups, spread across the globe but linked ideologically, will wage jihad campaigns both in the global as well as in the local context. Second, Iraq has replaced Afghanistan as the epicentre of jihad. Like Afghanistan produced the last generation of fighters, the insurgency in Iraq is producing and catalysing a new generation of urban and suicidal terrorists and guerrillas. Third, the threat groups are increasingly exploiting the resentment within the diaspora communities to recruit and raise funds for their jihad. Fourthly, the difficulties in controlling external borders such as in Europe have allowed these groups to coordinate among themselves and organize their campaigns coherently. Greater exchange of ideas, technology, and personnel between the groups has increased the scale and magnitude of threat. Ideology continues to provide an underpinning structure through which ostensible differences of geography and language are overcome.

2. Assessment

As the terrorist threat globalises, most governments will recognise terrorism as the tier-one national security threat. Despite enhanced government investment to combat terrorism, the year 2006 will witness the spread of terrorism with increasing frequency and lethality. This is evidenced in the upsurge in the attacks or attempted attacks last year targeting interests of states both with nominal or substantial links to the US-led campaign in Iraq, such as the July 2005 London bombings. With an escalation in attacks in Iraq and the renewal of violence in Afghanistan, the threat of politically-motivated violence will grow both in the Middle East and Asia. The primary threat to North America, Europe and Australasia will be from the continuing radicalisation of the émigré pockets. Such self starting, independent entities are the most complex to trace and most dangerous in terms of their vision, devoid of strict management or delineated lines of control and command.

Although Al Qaeda, the most hunted terrorist group in history, will decline in power, strength and size, the threat posed by the global jihad movement will escalate. The intermittent successes by governments against terrorist cells planning and preparing attacks will be overshadowed by the tempo of the insurgency in Iraq. This tempo is largely outpacing that of the counter terrorism movement that is subject to governmental control, procedure and to strict parameters. The terrorist world is currently rely less on clear directional control and more and more on extemporized and impromptu initiatives. This all orbits around a core notion, derived from but not subject to explicit control of the Al Qaeda philosophy and ideology. The momentum of attacks in Iraq will influence jihadi and Islamist groups worldwide to both support as well as attack targets of the US, its allies and friends. Like Osama bin Laden built a global terrorist network using Afghanistan, Abu Musab al Zarqawi is using Iraq to build a global network parallel to Al Qaeda. Wherever the leaders and key operatives have been arrested, Zarqawi is seeking to control Al Qaeda cells, from North



America to Northeast Asia. His contemporary status, a result of his replacement as figurehead in Iraq is of substantial consequence². At the outset this was considered a reflection of dissent or displeasure towards the tactical trajectory Zarqawi was pursuing. However this shift emancipates Zarqawi from a structured role with geographical limits and permits him to regenerate global agendas. Instability in Iraq is largely ensured, but any embryonic or latent dissent over the region at large will need greater strategic direction. This is an ambition likely to now draw direction from Zarqawi. The insurgency in Iraq is breathing new life to a global jihad movement.

3. Icons of Jihad

Although Al Qaeda, the operational organisation, has declined in strength, its ideology of global jihad has infected and is driving forward the global jihad agenda. The ideological blueprint that has been provided no longer requires nurture or promotion. The impetus already gained is currently so entrenched that it permits the organic, informal creation of minor groups or ad hoc organizational entities for a specific operation to self-form. This was best evidenced by the London bombings which witnessed compelling ideological commitment to the Al Qaeda agenda coupled with and supported by the unprecedented rise in internet based access to materials and knowledge for operations and attacks. Other groups are emulating Al Qaeda signature tactics – particularly suicide. The operational knowledge to conduct coordinated simultaneous attacks particularly against high profile Western targets killing, maiming and injuring civilians is spreading.

As the radicalised Muslims increasingly view Islam under threat from the West, they regard Zarqawi as the symbol of resistance against the US. Mohamed Siddique Khan, the leader of the UK cell that conducted the July 7 2005 attacks, paid tribute to Osama bin Laden, his deputy Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri, and to Zarqawi as separate entities, underscoring his significance. Osama bin Laden's influence on the terrorist networks is gradually being replaced by Zarqawi's imprint. Zarqawi is exercising significant influence on Libyan, Algerian, Moroccan, Tunisian, Egyptian, and the networks in the Gulf. Zarqawi's snatch and beheading operations and suicide attacks dominate the terrorist websites and global media, casting a shadow on Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda. Zarqawi, a master at manipulating the media, seeks to project himself as the icon of the global jihad. As Zawahiri seeks to appeal to the moderate Muslims for support, Zarqawi's actions are hurting the global jihad movement. A rift is likely to emerge between Zawahiri and Zarqawi in 2006.

4. Threat in the Middle East

With increasing US investment in the creation of new intelligence platforms and collaboration with Pakistan's Inter-Services-Intelligence, the threat to the core leadership of Al Qaeda will increase. In 2006, the Al Qaeda leadership is likely to suffer unprecedented losses and attrition through the massive efforts of security services. While Iraq will remain his principal hunting ground, Zarqawi will seek to attack overseas in a reflection of his broader agenda. He is likely to repeat his Jordan-style chemical attack of April 2004 and suicide

² Sands, David R.: "Zarqawi replaced as Al Qaeda chief in Iraq", *Washington Times*, 4 April 2006, in <http://washingtontimes.com/world/20060403-100712-2680r.htm>.



attacks on three international hotels on November 9, 2005, either in the Middle East or the West through franchised terrorists but with him as strategic director. Over time, Zarqawi's jihadi support cells will mature and mutate into operational attack cells. The networks from Iraq have penetrated at least ten European countries, the Maghreb, Levant, the Gulf, and is seeking to establish a presence in Asia.

5. Threat in Asia

The post 9-11 environment witnessed both the strengthening of existing groups and the emergence of new jihadist and Islamist groups in South Asia and Southeast Asia. Despite tremendous successes by General Musharraf to combat the Al Qaeda threat, the local jihad groups in Pakistan are providing support to Al Qaeda. Having shared common training infrastructure with Al Qaeda, the Pakistani groups - notably Laskar-e-Toiba (LeT), Jayash-e-Mohamed (JeM), and Harakat-ul-Jihadi-Islami (HuJI) - are supporting Al Qaeda to survive. To compensate for the dismantling of the camps in Afghanistan, Al Qaeda's closest ally in Southeast Asia, Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), has established a number of facilities and opportunities for training both in the Philippines and in Indonesia. As the Southeast Asian vanguard of jihad groups, JI has been training the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and other Southeast Asian groups. The ideological, financial, and technological collaboration between these groups have increased their resilience. The release of Abu Bakar Ba'asyir in June 2006 is likely to provide significant momentum to JI. With or without clear directional linkage to the militant wing of JI, Ba'asyir remains a spiritual ideologue, whose presence in the extremist milieu, free from prison is disquieting. He is unlikely to have dispensed with his extremist views or deviated from his past as a promoter of violent jihad against what he considers an apostate administration. An attack does not need material blessing from him but may be enacted in his name or as a gesture to signal his departure from prison. It is this that is likely to significantly raise the threat levels subsequent to his release.

The threat of terrorism to Asia decreased immediately after the US invasion of Iraq as the centre of gravity shifted back. Nonetheless, the influence of Middle Eastern operational and support networks on Asian groups is becoming profound. First, the decentralized networks are offering funding to South and Southeast Asian groups to mount attacks. Second, in the absence of Asian ideologues, Middle Eastern ideologues such as Abu Mohamed al Maqdisi [mentor of Zarqawi] are influencing the discourse of the Asian jihadists. Third, terrorist technologies from the Middle East have appeared in Asia. For instance, the identical car bomb circuit found in the UK, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia has been found in Pakistan, Thailand and the Philippines. This further underscores the directional lead that regional groups taking from wider Al Qaeda campaigns. Fourth, the beheading operations practised in Iraq have been conducted by groups in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and in Thailand. With time these trends are likely to grow in Asia aggravating the jihadi threat. Interviews with Asian jihadists revealed that they were determined to support "their brothers in Iraq." As LeT did in 2005, Southeast Asian groups are likely to dispatch or attempt to dispatch fighters to join the Jihad in Iraq in 2006.

Government failure to control the jihadist threat in Bangladesh is likely to embolden Jamiatul Mujahidin Bangladesh (JMB). The group is likely to mount attacks overseas starting with India. Unless the international community intervenes, the insurgency in Nepal is likely to deteriorate further, already evidenced by significant rioting, culminating in a Maoist



government in 2006 or 2007. With the failure of Norway to develop a structured peace process, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) is likely to assassinate key political leaders and military chiefs and mount spectacular attacks in the south of Sri Lanka in 2006. Despite sporadic terrorist attacks in their capitals and in northern India, the Indian and Pakistani leaders will work towards peace in the internationally-disputed Kashmir. In Afghanistan, the bulk of the US forces will withdraw, handing over security to NATO forces. Asia's most threatened leaders Musharraf and Karzai are likely to face renewed assassination attempts.

Conclusion

To reduce the global terrorist threat, three measures are necessary. First, support Muslim elites to develop a robust response to the ideology of global jihad. An ideological counterweight to the extremist message of terrorist groups must be indigenous to the region in question. Any western led ideological response will have limited esteem and hold only nominal value. Movement towards promoting messages of tolerance and moderate Islamic messages can be promoted by the west. However the creation and conveyance of the messages should not be communicated through western channels. Second, maintain intelligence-led operational effectiveness on the ground to neutralise operational cells. Third, build capacity and resolve to terminate regional conflicts that produce human suffering, internal displacement, refugee flows and production of future terrorists. Without developing an ideological counterweight to the ideology of global jihad and resolving regional conflicts where Muslims are suffering, the terrorist groups and their support bases will grow and continue to gain momentum. They will replenish their human losses and material wastage from the vast pool of human cadre available to them. As such governments must invest not only in the immediate operational measures but in strategic counter terrorism that takes a long term examination of the threat and best response.