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The Islamist Terrorist Threat to Europe after Osama bin Laden's Death

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INTRODUCTION

Almost exactly ten years on from their greatest strike against the west, Osama bin Laden's death in a house in Abbotabad provided a visible marker of the shifting trends in the Islamist terrorist threat to Europe. From a threat with a single return address, it has now evolved into a threat from numerous geographical locations with the original core a weakened version of itself. Thankfully this has not come with a commensurate increase in terrorist effectiveness, but at the same time the growing complexity of the threat poses a new set of challenges for European security planners. This paper will explore the current state of the threat to Europe, how it is connected to the broader threat that is faced in the United States and how it has evolved in this direction. In concluding, it will offer some thoughts on the current direction the threat is going and sketch out some problems that Europe might face in countering it.

While this paper is focused on Islamist terrorism, it is of course not the only threat to be faced in Europe. The recent case of Anders Behring Breivik in Norway, who carried out a massacre of 77 people in pursuit of his goal of stopping what he saw as the Islamicization of Europe, was an example of how other ideologies exist out there of an equal lethality to violent Islamism. In fact, Islamists score quite low on the table of those able to carry out attacks in Europe. According to figures published by Europol, there were some 249 terrorist incidents in 2010, with the majority in fact defined as 'separatist.' The number of those defined as Islamist was lower than every group aside from right-wing terrorists, with only three officially recorded in 2010.¹ Nevertheless, violent Islamist terrorism with its preference for large-scale multiple strikes using suicide bombers often coordinated by outside actors continues to be the main threat that is focused on by European security services.

¹ "TE-SAT 2011 – EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report," Europol, 19 April 2011: www.europol.europa.eu/publications/EU_Terrorism_Situation_and_Trend_Report_TE-SAT/TE-SAT2011.pdf It is necessary to add the caveat that Europol's figures are not complete and it is unclear what is officially constituted as a terrorist incident by the various police forces who submit information. Nevertheless, in terms of effective attacks the general trends indicated hold.

OSAMA BIN LADEN'S DEATH

It is something of a well-worn trope, but it seems unlikely that the death of Osama bin Laden is going to have an immediate direct impact on the threat from violent Islamist terrorism globally. This is not simply because it is unclear to what degree Osama was linked directly in an operational sense to any plots, but more broadly since the ball he had started rolling through the creation of his group al Qaeda has gathered momentum and is radicalizing individuals and networks without requiring his direct input and influence any more. The ideas that he violently introduced to the world through a series of plots targeting America in the late 1990s and culminating in the 11 September 2001 attacks have now evolved to take root amongst a network of radical groups around the world where they have taken on a life of their own. Some of these networks and plots may continue to have operational links to the al Qaeda core, but they are now for the most part independent entities planning and conducting campaigns under their own steam.²

But even when talking about the threat from al Qaeda core, the group with which Osama remained connected post-9/11, it is unclear to what degree he still played an operational role any more. Intelligence information which emerged from his home in Abbottabad suggests he had some prior knowledge of a number of plots, but there has been no conclusive evidence released into the public domain which demonstrates a direct command link.³ Furthermore, the almost complete absence of any reports that recent western plotters had met with him shows that even if he was playing a role, he was doing it from behind the scenes.

Beyond the operational impact there is the ideological impact. It had long been assumed that Osama was playing a much larger ideologically supportive role in al Qaeda than an operational one. As a former FBI interrogator reported based on his interviews of key operatives held in Guantanamo, for them 'Osama bin Laden was never just the founder and leader of the group, but also an idea.'⁴ The fact that intelligence leads had largely gone dry on him for many years, while the operational commanders of al Qaeda were being continually identified and killed, seemed to reinforce this vision of him. But nevertheless, his continuing existence, confirmed through occasional cassette releases, was important in keeping the various factions that he had brought together under the umbrella of al Qaeda together. Gulf Arab money continues to be a major source of al Qaeda's funding and having Osama at the helm meant that this flow would continue.⁵ Without him there it is possible that this tap might stop flowing quite as freely, something that will have a knock-on effect on the group's capacity to run training camps for western recruits and keep leaders like Osama secure.

Nevertheless, at this early stage since his death it is unlikely that we will be able to see this impact directly. Any operational planning that was already underway that was connected to him will have been radically changed for fear of exposure, while networks and plots will have changed their behaviour to protect themselves.⁶ Similarly, while money sources may start to dry up, it will take a while for this to be felt directly. And from an ideological perspective, Osama may have been a figurehead more than a person, but at this stage he will continue to be venerated as a recent martyr and thus continue to play largely the same ideological role that he did prior to his death. Over a long enough period this will fade, but for the immediate future, this will merely remind followers of his greatness. The threat from the organization he started, however, continues to express itself in a number of ways.

² Jason Burke's excellent book *Al Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam* (London: Penguin, 2004) shows how this franchising approach was one that al Qaeda has been using for a while. In the wake of September 11, it seems as though this approach has accelerated dramatically, with regional networks increasingly taking a more prominent and independent role.

³ "Osama bin Laden was plotting attacks on Britain," *Telegraph*, 12 May 2011

⁴ Ali Soufan, "The End of the Jihadist Dream," *New York Times*, 2 May 2011

⁵ "Wikileaks cables portray Saudi Arabia as a cash machine for terrorists," *Guardian*, 5 December 2010

⁶ Again, it does need to be highlighted that the series of high level successes that American and Pakistani forces have recently scored likely indicate a high level of quality information being mined from data gathered in Abbottabad. This can in many ways be described as a direct consequence of Osama's death.

AL QAEDA CORE

The beating heart of the violent Islamist threat to the west continues to come from al Qaeda core and affiliated groups in Waziristan.⁷ Al Qaeda may have been seriously reduced in the wake of the death of its leader and the continued hammering it receives from American drone strikes, but it has nevertheless demonstrated a continuing capacity to attempt to direct plots targeting the west. This has expressed itself in two key ways: in the first instance, plots where young Europeans arrive in Waziristan seeking training and are redirected back home to conduct terrorist operations, and secondly, cells of locals dispatched to carry out plots in the west. The degree to which al Qaeda core is providing day-to-day operational command of either type of cell is not always clear but a number of plots over the past few years demonstrate the group's capacity to continue to carry out this sort of attack planning.

A good starting point that shows the complex nature of this threat can be seen in a series of plots disrupted in the UK, US and Norway from April 2009 onwards.⁸ The plots all show connections to the same email accounts in Pakistan from which operational command appears to have come from, and is believed by intelligence officials to have been used by an intermediary known as "Ahmad" who was operating on behalf of Saleh al-Somali, then-al Qaeda's international operational chief (al-Somali was killed by a drone strike in late 2009⁹). There was further evidence that westernized al Qaeda members Adnan Shukrijumah (a Saudi who was raised in the United States) and Rashid Rauf (a Birmingham native whose parents heralded from Pakistan) were involved in directing the plots, further showing the ongoing importance of western recruits in both organizing and plotting.¹⁰

The first of the plots to be disrupted was in April 2009 when a picture was taken of British counter-terror chief Bob Quick as he went to brief the Prime Minister at Downing Street of an operation codenamed Pathway. Armed police precipitated a series of arrests across Northern England as they moved on what they claimed was a large al Qaeda directed plot being carried out by a group of Pakistani men who were in the UK on fraudulent student visas. As it turned out, the evidence available was circumstantial and the Crown Prosecution Service had to resort to turning the men over to border's police who moved to try to deport them on a variety of immigration violations. However, police and the security services continued to claim that plotting was underway with a series of shopping malls and large public spaces in Liverpool and Manchester as the targets. When arrested, key individuals were discovered with heavily annotated maps alongside photographs of them in front of distinctly un-tourist like locations.

But the clearest evidence of some nefarious doings from this group came from the arrest in September 2009 of Afghan-American citizen Najibullah Zazi as he prepared to carry out an attack on New York's subway system. According to his own confessions, Zazi and two friends had the previous year attended training camps in Waziristan at around the same time that key plotters from the Pathway group in the UK. There they seem to have met the same operational al Qaeda network that then directed the two groups to carry out attacks in the UK and US at around the same time. Contact was maintained through the same email account by which the men reported back about their leaders while also seeking advice on explosives. The initial trigger for American services to investigate Zazi appears to have come from a tip-off from British intelligence agencies who had continued to watch email accounts that the alleged plot leader in the UK was in contact with. As a result of this connection, the US was able to seek the extradition of the British plot head, Abid Naseer, to convict him on charges on involvement in the plot to attack New York. At time of writing he remained in British custody fighting extradition.

⁷ According to analyst Paul Cruickshank, some 53% of "serious" jihadist terrorist plots between 2004-2011 have links to groups in Pakistan. Paul Cruickshank, "The Militant Pipeline," *National Security Studies Program Policy Paper*, (Washington, DC: New America Foundation, July 2011)

⁸ For a detailed analysis of these three plots, please see: Raffaello Pantucci, "Manchester, New York and Oslo: Three centrally directed al Qaeda plots," *CTC Sentinel*, 1 August 2010

⁹ "Al Qaeda operations planner Saleh al-Somali believed dead in drone strike," *ABC News*, 11 December 2009

¹⁰ "Profile: Rashid Rauf," *BBC News*, 22 November 2008; "From dishwasher to al Qaeda leadership: Who is Adnan Shukrijumah," *CNN*, 6 August 2010

A third branch to this network was uncovered in July 2010 when police in Oslo arrested a cell of three people who were allegedly planning some sort of attack in Norway. The cell leader was identified as a Uighur-Norwegian who had changed his name to Mikael Davud, and who was in Waziristan at the same time as key plotters from the New York and Manchester group. He was supposedly in telephone contact with a leader of the Turkestan Islamic Party (TIP), and was also in email contact with 'Ahmad' the intermediary for Saleh al-Somali. 'Ahmad' used a different email address from the same computer to communicate with Davud.¹¹ The men were discovered to have been under surveillance for some time, and while they had started to gather bomb-making materials, it was unclear exactly what their final target was to be. Under confession two admitted to different targets: Davud, the Uighur, the Chinese Embassy in Oslo, and Shawan Sadek Saeed Bujak, an Iraqi Kurd with Norwegian residency, the headquarters of *Jyllands Posten*, the Danish newspaper behind the cartoons scandal.¹²

Whatever the case, this network of plots showed the operational command and control that al Qaeda core continues to exert over cells in the west – in fact some of the individuals in the British end of the plot were named in documents found in Osama bin Laden's possession.¹³ This network contained both individuals who had been chosen and then dispatched from North West Frontier Province and individuals who had first been drawn to Waziristan and then re-directed to conduct attacks back home. The possible connection to TIP further demonstrates al Qaeda's connection to other radical groups operating in Waziristan and its capacity to reach through these networks to attempt to carry out attacks.

This capability was further emphasized in late December 2010 and then April 2011 when two further plots were disrupted showing links to al Qaeda core. Given the relatively recent nature of both cases and the fact they still have to come before courts, not all details of the plots are in the public domain. In the December 2010 plot, a group of Swedish nationals were arrested with weapons while planning an attack on the offices of newspaper *Jyllands Posten* in Copenhagen. Two of the members of the plot were reported to have visited Pakistan, one of them alongside a former Guantanamo detainee. The man, Munir Awad, had also been picked up in the past in Somalia and lived with a pair of Somalis in Sweden who were convicted of being involved with al Shabaab.¹⁴ The cell was disrupted at about the same time that information came to light that there was a plot apparently directed by al Qaeda leader Ilyas al-Kashmiri to carry out a series of Mumbai style attacks in Europe with cells conducting sudden shooting attacks along the lines of the successful attack on Mumbai in November 2008 by Pakistani terror network Lashkar-e-Toiba.¹⁵ Strands from this plot were found in France, Germany, and the UK – though ultimately, no actual plot was to emerge.

A further echo of this network was uncovered later in April 2011 when a cell was disrupted in Düsseldorf of three young Germans who were part of the nation's growing community of radicals linked to al Qaeda and affiliate networks in Pakistan. The key member of the group was Abdeladim el-Kebir, a Moroccan-German who had trained in Waziristan and was in contact with al Qaeda leader Atiyah Abd al-Rahman. He had returned to Germany with direction to carry out an attack and was in the process with another fellow Moroccan and a young German-Iranian of trying to build detonators when police moved in to arrest the group.¹⁶ Subsequent information to have been released seemed to indicate that the men were part of a cell that had been identified by a pair of German jihadists who had either been captured or had surrendered in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and that had been specifically recruited as part of a plot known to Osama.¹⁷ One alleged letter from

¹¹ For more detailed analysis on this plot, please see: Petter Nesser and Brynjar Lia, "Lessons Learned from the July 2010 Norwegian Terrorist Plot," *CTC Sentinel*, 1 August 2010

¹² "Norway police seek to charge 3 over bomb plot," *Reuters*, 8 July, 2011

¹³ "Osama bin Laden planned Easter bomb campaign, files seized in US raid show," *Telegraph*, 20 May, 2011

¹⁴ "Danish attack plot suspect in previous arrests," *Agence France Presse*, 31 December 2010

¹⁵ "British brothers 'planned Mumbai-style terror attack in Europe'," *Guardian*, 30 September 2010

¹⁶ "Homegrown terror takes on new dimensions," *Spiegel*, 9 May 2011

¹⁷ "Bin Laden linked to European terror plot," *Associated Press*, 25 May 2011

the al Qaeda leader found amongst his possessions in Abbottabad indicated that he knew one of their names.¹⁸

The key lessons to draw from this second set of networks was that the cells had connections to al Qaeda core in Waziristan and had some level of contact with al Qaeda core. In a number of cases, there is some evidence that Osama bin Laden knew of the plotters – documents found amongst his possessions in Abbottabad show he knew of elements of the Düsseldorf cell and the Northern English cell. However the trend seems to have been for individuals to be sent back with some loose organizational command and control method with them left to conduct an operation. The level to which al Qaeda was able to direct and coordinate these plotters was greatly reduced from previous efforts like the successful 7 July 2005 attacks or the 2006 Transatlantic Airlines plot where key individuals were in almost constant contact via telephone with their handlers in Pakistan. Even though the network was already disrupted from April 2009 onwards, some level of communication was possible. Nonetheless with this final set of plotters it increasingly seems like communication was difficult with groups left largely to their own devices. Something demonstrative of al Qaeda's lessened capacity to conduct long distance operational planning.

¹⁸ Florian Flade, "From Osama with love – bin Laden's letter to Germany," *Jih@d*, 26 August 2011, <http://ojihad.wordpress.com/2011/08/26/from-osama-with-love-bin-laden-s-letter-to-germany/>

FELLOW TRAVELLERS IN PAKISTAN

But the threat from Waziristan is not one that is solely linked to al Qaeda core. The Düsseldorf cell, for example, demonstrated links to the broader community of German radicals that have been drawn to Pakistan since 9/11, whom have been making their way to the province since the mid-2000s. Through a community of Azeri extremists they encountered in Turkey, they connected to the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and its offshoot group the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) – both of which operated in the sea of extremists in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region. This led to a number of plots including most dramatically the plot disrupted in 2007 when a group of German radicals directed by the IJU attempted to carry out a bombing against American targets in Germany. Since then, the German community in Waziristan was allowed to establish a separate group called the German Taliban Mujahedeen (GTM) that was an off-shoot of the IMU and IJU and provided a network to welcome the growing number of German radicals drawn to Waziristan. However, while this group has expressed a desire to strike at Germany, aside from the 2007 plot, codenamed Alberich by the German security services, neither the IJU or GTM networks have hatched many direct threats to the west. For the most part instead they have provided fighters and money to the anti-NATO forces in Afghanistan and anti-state forces in Pakistan.¹⁹ The Düsseldorf plot, however, showed the potential exists for the networks to link up to form direct threats to Europe.

Similarly, the threat from primarily Kashmir and India oriented network Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT) is one that has tentacles in Europe, but as it stands has not flexed its muscles much in the direction of striking Europe. There have been longstanding stories of Pakistani-Kashmiri communities in Europe (and in particular the UK) providing funding for LeT in Pakistan, with stories of individuals going over to fight alongside them.²⁰ There have been links from LeT to plots in the west, specifically the case of Willy Brigitte, the French convert who trained at a LeT camp and then was dispatched to Australia to carry out some sort of plot there. Richard Reid – the ‘shoe bomber’ - allegedly used an LeT network in Paris prior to boarding the plane to Miami on which he attempted to detonate the bomb in his shoes.²¹ These (and likely other) instances aside, LeT’s primary target outside Pakistan remains India and the group has been responsible or linked to repeated large terrorist incidents in that country.

There have also been a series of cases in the UK that show that a connection remains between jihadi warriors in AfPak and Great Britain. Most recently, the conviction of Munir Farooqi, a former Taliban fighter, and a couple of members of his network showed the on-going existence of networks in the UK providing avenues for young Britons to go and fight alongside the Taliban.²² And while much less is known about them currently, some evidence to be leaked into the public domain seems to indicate that there were connections to Pakistan in a plot disrupted in the UK in Christmas 2010.²³

The clearer menace to the west, however, comes from the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), a Pakistani jihadi group that has demonstrated a repeated capability to try to launch operations beyond their borders. While their primary target remains the United States, they have shown an interest in reaching out to strike Europe as well. As leader Waliur Rehman put it in June 2011 in an interview following Osama bin Laden’s death, ‘soon you will see attacks against America and NATO countries, and our first priorities in Europe will be France and Britain.’²⁴

¹⁹ Guido Steinberg, unpublished manuscript, “The German Jihad: On the Internationalization of Islamist Terrorism”

²⁰ Probably most famous is British Hindu convert Dhiren Barot who wrote about his experiences alongside Lashkar in Kashmir in his book written using the pseudonym Esa al’Hindi, *The Army of Madinah in Kashmir* (Birmingham: Al Maktabah Press, 1999)

²¹ Stephen Tankel, *Storming the World Stage: The Story of Lashkar-e-Toiba*, (London: C. Hurst & Co., June 2011), p. 164-166

²² “Munir Farooqi given four life sentences for terror charges,” *BBC News*, September 9, 2011

²³ Paul Cruickshank, “The Militant Pipeline,” *National Security Studies Program Policy Paper*, (Washington, DC: New America Foundation, July 2011)

²⁴ “Babur Hussain: A danger signal for Pakistan Taliban’s threat to West,” *Al Arabiya*, 28 June 2011

The threat to the west from the group dates back to January 2008 when it was connected to a plot to attack the European nations that had forces in Afghanistan. A network of twelve men, ten Pakistani and two Indian, were picked up by European authorities while plotting a series of attacks on Barcelona's underground system. According to prosecutors and an informant within the cell, some of the men had undergone training with TTP in Waziristan. The informant reported that then-TTP leader Baitullah Mehsud had specifically identified him as a potential suicide bomber – the plot was disrupted a bit earlier than planned when the agent thought that he had been told by his co-conspirators to say his goodbyes and panicking he contacted his handlers. The link to TTP was confirmed in August 2008 when Maulvi Omar, a spokesman for the group, released a video in which he stated, 'the one in Barcelona was conducted by twelve of our men. They were under pledge to Baitullah Mehsud and TTP has already claimed responsibility, because of Spain's military presence in Afghanistan.'

The plan was to start with an attack in Barcelona, which was to be followed by claims of responsibility from Baitullah Mehsud alongside threats of further attacks unless the West withdrew from Afghanistan. To back these threats up, elements from the cell were to travel around Europe conducting similar attacks in various capitals. At the time of the arrests in Barcelona, one of the men had already moved on to Germany to connect with a group in Frankfurt and was only picked up by Dutch police two months later. In the end eleven men were found guilty of being involved in terrorism with some accused of being prepared to be suicide bombers. In their summary of the case, Spanish courts stated that the men were in contact with Baitullah Mehsud's network.²⁵

Since then, the group has been linked to plots targeting western aid workers in Pakistan, a strike in Afghanistan at the end of 2009 against the CIA that was the product of a complex counter-intelligence operation involving a Jordanian intelligence asset. It has also been linked to a plot in Canada to carry out a strike of some sort in Ottawa,²⁶ a fundraising network in Florida, USA,²⁷ and a group of three men in the District of Columbia who believed they were helping smuggle TTP members into America.²⁸ Most dramatically, however, the group was connected to Faisal Shahzad, the young Pakistani-American who trained alongside the group in Pakistan and then came back to America to try to detonate a car bomb in Times Square, New York. A despondent young man, Shahzad had wandered over to train alongside the group in summer 2009 where they had persuaded him to go back and launch an attack in the US. Before leaving he recorded a video with the group that they released soon after his capture, thus confirming his involvement with the group.

While on the one hand this plot, like the previous ones linked to al Qaeda, showed the capacity of the group to train individuals and prepare plans to attack the west while theoretically under heavy coverage by predator drone strikes and US intelligence assets, it also showed the relative weakening of the groups capacity. Unlike their previous nearly successful plot, where a large network was deployed to carry out an ambitious multi-target attack, in this case a lone individual who happened to arrive in Waziristan was trained and turned around. Nevertheless, TTP's capacity to do this and the agility with which it was able to conduct this near-miss operation demonstrates the high risk with which the group should be viewed, something reflected in its listing as a proscribed terror group by the UK, the US, Canada and the United Nations.

²⁵ For a complete re-telling of the plot, please see: Fernando Reinares, "A case study of the January 2008 suicide bomb plot in Barcelona," *CTC Sentinel*, January 2009

²⁶ "Posted," *National Post*, 5 July 2011

²⁷ USA vs Hafiz Muhammad Sher Ali Khan et al, Southern District of Florida, case number: 11-20331, filed 12 May 2011

²⁸ "Three plead guilty to the conspiracy to provide material support to the Pakistani Taliban," *Department of Justice Office of Public Affairs Press Release*, 12 September, 2011, <http://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/2011/September/11-crm-1173.html>

SHUDDERS FROM IRAQ

While groups organizing in Pakistan continue to be a main source of the terrorist threat to Europe, there is also a fragmentary threat from al Qaeda affiliated Iraqi groups. This most clearly came into focus when on 11 December 2010, Taimour Abdulwahab al-Abdaly attempted to carry out a double bombing in Stockholm. Subsequent to the attack, Interpol confirmed that Iraqi intelligence had reported that they had received confessions from captured insurgents that indicated that the Iraqi branch of al Qaeda – the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) – was plotting an attack in Europe or the US.²⁹ Furthermore, in a video released subsequently to the attack in which Abdulwahab took credit for the attack that killed him and injured two others, he apologized for lying to his family saying that ‘my travels to the Middle East were – wasn’t for business. It was for jihad.’ He also referred to ‘the Islamic State’ which many interpreted as a reference to ISI. British counter-terrorism agents also confirmed to the press that he had recently travelled to Iraq and Jordan,³⁰ though it remained unclear that there was independent confirmation beyond this that he had fought jihad alongside the Iraqi group. A few years earlier, a leader of the group had specifically threatened Sweden and cartoonist Lars Viks.

One of the immediate clues, however, that commentators picked up on was the similarity in the car bomb that al-Abdaly left and the car bombs left in London by Bilal Abdulla and Kafeel Ahmed in their failed terrorist attempt from June 2007. That attack, which the men followed up with an attempted suicide bombing against Glasgow’s international airport, brought Iraqi-style terror to Britain’s streets. Kafeel Ahmed died of his injuries, but Bilal Abdulla was arrested and later stood trial for the bombings. On the stand he declared an admiration for Islamic insurgents in Iraq and letters found on a computer in his possession included a letter addressed to the ‘Soldiers of the Islamic State of Iraq,’ in which he declared, ‘God knows that the days I spent with you were the best and most rewarding days of my life.’ According to intelligence and police reports, Abdulla was supposed to have spent some time in 2006 alongside the insurgency in Iraq, presumably ISI, and is believed to have volunteered for a suicide mission.³¹ This was rejected on the basis of his British passport and clean record and he was sent back to the UK.

While not definitively confirmed in either case, it is believed that both al-Abdaly and Abdulla spent some time alongside ISI in Iraq. Whether the organization was responsible for dispatching the individuals to Europe has not been confirmed, but their deployment of bombs similar to those seen on Iraq’s streets (using pressurized gas containers as a key element, rather than the hydrogen peroxide based bombs that al Qaeda cells from Pakistan tend to deploy) and the fact that both men had Iraqi roots seemed quite clearly to indicate that the war in Iraq had come to Europe’s streets.

In some ways this is not surprising. The conflict in Iraq has long had connections reaching into Europe. In late 2005 it emerged that a key online media figure for al Qaeda in Iraq (the ISI nomenclature was only adopted in 2006) was based in London’s Shepherd’s Bush and, even before the invasion of Iraq, cells connected to al Qaeda in Iraq’s prominent leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi were found across Europe. These groups were for the most part providing funding and support for the battle in Iraq, sending money and fighters along routes from Europe into Iraq. The massive unpopularity of the war in Iraq turned it into a major draw for excitable and radicalized young men from Europe eager to fight. In one instance, a pair of young Britons, Omar Sharif and Asif Hanif, were drawn to Iraq to join the insurgency but were unable to cross the border into Iraq from Syria and were instead re-directed to carry out attacks on Hamas behalf in Tel Aviv. In another example in Germany, a pair of young men eager to prove their worth to join al Qaeda in Iraq and in retaliation for the Danish cartoons attempted to detonate a suitcase bomb using gas canisters on a train in Cologne.³² That at a certain point these networks started to work in the other direction is not entirely surprising and highlights the dangers of having flows of individuals from the west to jihadi battlefields.

²⁹ “Interpol warned of ‘al Qaeda plots’ in US and Europe,” *BBC News*, 16 December 2010

³⁰ “The ‘bubly’ Luton radical who became a suicide bomber in Sweden,” *Guardian*, 14 December 2010

³¹ Andrew Alderson, Ben Leach, Duncan Gardham, “Bilal Abdulla: Doctor by day, terrorist by night – the secret life of a new breed of terrorist,” *Telegraph*, 20 December 2008

³² “Failed bomb plot seen as al Qaeda initiation test,” *Spiegel*, 9 April 2007

Having said this, while links to Iraq have been found amongst a number of plots and networks in Europe, the war has not been a major direct source of terrorist plots outside Iraq. This is not to say that the war has not had a radicalizing impact that exacerbated extremism in Europe. It is clear that in the wake of the decision to invade Iraq already radical communities in Europe were pushed over the edge and from that group of individuals a number of subsequent terrorist plots have matured. Not many plots targeting locations outside Iraq but plotted from within Iraq have been uncovered. The plots that have been discovered have been conducted by individuals with European passports who went to Iraq to become fighters and were re-directed, rather than cells of Iraqi's dispatched from the region to carry out attacks in the West. Unlike other al Qaeda branches, the organization has not tried to claim responsibility for the plots that have been linked to them, suggesting that the group does not see a value to affixing its stamp to a failed plot (unlike other groups like TTP) and clearly does not see attacking the West as an immediate priority. While its jihad in Iraq remains active, it has gone down in tempo considerably and become a more domestic affair. All of which points to Iraq being a continuing potential source of threat, through the unknown numbers of westerners who fought alongside ISI or one of its affiliates, but not being a key threat for the immediate future.

KIDNAPPING AND JIHAD IN NORTH AFRICA

In a similar fashion, the threat from al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) is one that seems to be currently primarily focused at home, with tentacles found amongst networks in Europe, but very few attacks directly organized and coordinated by AQIM in Europe. Networks linked to the group have been found in Italy, France and Spain primarily, though the group's current primary threat to European citizens seems to be at those who are travelling in its realm of operations in North Africa. As a leading French judge put it in August 2011, 'it's been shown that AQIM is only able to strike in its own zone, by wanting to kill tourists, and we have seen nothing emerge as a significant foreign operation in Europe that was really organized by AQIM.'³³ While this analysis is not universally shared, the reality is that has been a long while since an advanced plot has been disrupted in Europe that demonstrates strong links to the group.

Within North Africa, however, the organization has proved itself to be a relatively effective network. It has kidnapped a number of western hostages in the broader Sahel and Sahara region, and is believed to currently hold at least four French hostages³⁴ and possibly a British and an Italian worker captured in Nigeria in May 2011.³⁵ Although it denied any responsibility, AQIM has been blamed for the attack in April 2011 at a café in Marrakesh which killed 16 mostly European tourists and it has been responsible for numerous attacks against Algerian forces. Most recently, it claimed responsibility for an attack on a barracks in Cherrhell, west of Algiers, which killed 18.³⁶

It is also unclear to what degree the organization has either profited from or been involved in the current uprisings in North Africa. On the more alarmist end of the scale, the President of Chad, Idriss Deby, said that the group had snatched surface-to-air missiles from Colonel Gaddafi's abandoned munitions dumps.³⁷ But the more general consensus seems to be that the organization had not managed to play much of a role or benefit from the Arab Spring except in providing a regular set of video and online commentaries about what was going on.³⁸ Overall, the direct threat from the group to Europe seems to be somewhat limited, though it cannot be discounted without any doubt, given its ongoing capacity to conduct attacks in North Africa and the chaos which has ensued in the wake of the Arab Spring.

³³ "Al Qaeda branch won't attack in Europe: France," *Associated Press*, 6 August 2011

³⁴ "Mali: les quatre otages francais enlevés au Niger se portent bien," *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 11 August 2011

³⁵ "Nigeria AQIM hostage video checked," *Reuters*, 4 August 2011

³⁶ "Algerie. AQMI revendique le double attentat suicide contre l'Académie militaire du Cherrhell," *AFP*, 28 August 2011

³⁷ "Al Qaeda snatched missiles in Libya: Chad President," *AFP*, 25 March 2011

³⁸ "Al Qaeda in North Africa seeks Arab Spring jihad," *Associated Press*, 15 August 2011

THE THREAT FROM THE HORN

Further over in East Africa there appears to be a similar, but potentially more dangerous menace, in the Somali al Qaeda connected group, al Shabaab ('the youth'). An offshoot of the Islamic Courts Union which emerged in Somalia in response to rampant warlordism, the group took off in the wake of the Ethiopian invasion of Somalia in late 2006. The unifying effect of the Ethiopian invasion pushed a great number of Somalis towards Islamist insurgent groups and acted as an instant radicalizing factor amongst the global Somali community. Diaspora members from Denmark, Sweden and the United Kingdom (as well as some from North America) started to stream back to the country to fight the invaders. Since then, the group evolved into an organization that has increasingly developed connections to al Qaeda core. Key al Qaeda members have connected with them and, perhaps most disturbingly for the outside world, the group has increasingly attracted young westerners seeking jihad – drawing from beyond Somali communities to an increasingly multi-ethnic community of young aspirant warriors.

This has led to the phenomenon of foreign suicide bombers in Somalia – with at least two Americans and one Dane believed to have carried out such attacks on behalf of al Shabaab. A further unknown number of foreign fighters have been killed, but more prominently an American of Syrian descent, Omar Hammami, has taken on a seemingly senior role within the group – most recently appearing as one of the speakers at an event the group held in Mogadishu in May 2011 to commemorate Osama bin Laden's death. Hammami's role as a spokesman has included the release of videos online of him rapping about the glory of jihad presumably to attract other young westerners to join the group.

Others with strong links to Europe have also emerged. Present at the event in Mogadishu was a Somali cleric who until recently was based in London participating and speaking at public events. Sheikh Abdulkadir Mumin was known to be in London until around mid-2010 after which time he seems to have moved back to Somalia where he has taken on some sort of a role as a theological leader for al Shabaab. The sort of link Mumin represents highlights the ongoing financial and human connections between the west and the Islamist fighters in Somalia. In December 2010 two men in Sweden were convicted of supporting al Shabaab. While the sentence was eventually overturned, one of the men admitted having trained alongside the group in Somalia and wiretaps by Swedish security services showed the men to be in regular contact with the group in Somalia.³⁹ Sweden has also been host in the past to Sheikh Fouad Mohammed Qalaf, a prominent al Shabaab leader who spent many years in Sweden and was able to adopt a citizenship in the country. In Germany, a small community of Somali's and others have congregated around Hussein Kassim M., a Bonn based Somali preacher who has proved a magnet for young German extremists – some of whom have gone on to Waziristan, and some of whom have ended up in Somalia alongside al Shabaab.⁴⁰ In Britain repeated stories have emerged of individuals who have supposedly gone to fight in Somalia, with a few cases being brought before courts of individuals accused of providing support networks in the UK to support al Shabaab or others being placed on control orders for suspicious travel through Somalia. Thus far no one has been convicted for being involved with the group, though a member of the wider network around the 21 July 2005 group who tried to bomb London's public transport system was convicted after trying to borrow money from an undercover police officer to try to go for jihad in Africa (presumably Somalia, as he intended to fly to Nairobi).⁴¹ A further case is currently proceeding through courts of a London man who is alleged to have sent money to "al Qaeda inspired" groups in Somalia.⁴²

It is in Denmark, however, where concerns about the Somalia connection were brought into sharp focus for Europeans when on 31 December 2009 Somali-Dane Muhidin Gelle came crashing through the door at the home of Kurt Westegaard. Known as one of the cartoonists responsible for the infamous Danish cartoons, Westegaard had long been expecting some sort of attack. While he

³⁹ "Two Swedes acquitted of plotting terror crimes," *The Local*, 2 March 2011

⁴⁰ Dirk Baer, "The Somali Shabaab militias and their jihadist networks in the west," *KAS International Reports*, vol.8, 2011, pp.22-38

⁴¹ "Operation Overamp: Hassan Mutegombwa," *Metropolitan Police Press Release*, 26 February 2008

⁴² "Man accused of funding terrorism in Somalia," *BBC News*, 15 July, 2011

was able to escape unharmed, the assailant was shot twice by police and arrested. Identified as 28-year-old Mohammed Muhidin Gelle, it was soon revealed that Kenyan authorities had in fact picked up Gelle earlier in the year as part of a group of Shabaab linked individuals who were allegedly plotting to carry out an attack on visiting US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton. Having been apprehended by Kenyan authorities, he was turned over to the Danish Embassy who promptly repatriated him.⁴³ But while it seemed likely that he was connected to the Somali group and they subsequently praised his action, it is unclear that al Shabaab was in any way connected to his specific attack. The method he employed – using an axe to try to cut his way through the front door to Westegaard – was not typical of Shabaab plots and while the group had expressed anger at the cartoons they had not launched any sorts of attacks beyond their borders.

This attack came soon after another plot connected to the group was disrupted in Australia. In that case, a pair of Lebanese-Australians connected to an al Shabaab support network in Australia, were arrested (and later convicted) for plotting an attack on an army base outside Sydney. At least one of the two Lebanese men had attempted to go and fight alongside Shabaab in Somalia, but had been unable to leave the country due to visa issues. Other members of the group had been to training camps in Somalia and were seeking fatwa's from clerics there authorizing their proposed attack. But while Shabaab again acknowledged the plot, they denied all responsibility or connections to the men, saying the accusations against them were based around the fact that the men were Muslims.⁴⁴

In both of these plots, al Shabaab connections can be found, though it is hard to discern any sort of command and control role. Instead, it seems as though the group's external networks are turning bad for their own reasons, something that clarifies the potential danger of radicalized networks in western nations. A third plot in Goteburg, Sweden that is still in its very early stages of discovery needs probably to be added to this list at least in passing. In this most recent case, a group of men (three of Somali origin and another Iraqi) whom police sources told the local press had links to al Shabaab, were reported to be plotting an incident to target Lars Viks, a Swedish artist who has been mentioned earlier and was responsible for a picture that portrayed Mohammed as a dog.⁴⁵

However, in tandem to these links to networks abroad, al Shabaab has started to demonstrate a capacity to reach outside Somali borders. Its 11 July 2010 attack on football fans watching the World Cup final in bars in neighbouring Kampala, Uganda killed 74 people in a pair of synchronized suicide bomb attacks. The group has also been connected to an attempted attack the year before in Kenya against Hilary Clinton and has been host to a number of senior al Qaeda leaders who have coordinated attacks elsewhere in the continent. However, it is unclear whether the group is eager to stretch its reach too far beyond its borders, likely aware of the repercussions should it be directly connected to an attack in the west. Documents to have been found on Fazul Mohammed seemed to indicate that he thought the group should return to being an insurgent organization,⁴⁶ and sources within the group are reported to have advocated for a withdrawal from Mogadishu to return to this sort of a role.⁴⁷ But what impact this will have on the group's international connections is unclear. As we have seen the repeated instances of Shabaab linked groups turning to violence at home will remain a cause for concern for western security planners.

⁴³ "Terror suspect had jumped bail in Kenya," *Daily Nation*, 6 September 2009

⁴⁴ Raffaello Pantucci, "Operation Neath: Is Somalia's al-Shabaab movement active in Australia," *Terrorism Monitor*, vol.9, no.3, 20 January 2011

⁴⁵ "Sweden terror suspects tied to Islamists: report," *The Local*, 12 September, 2011

⁴⁶ Jeremy Scahill, "Blowback in Somalia," *The Nation*, 7 September, 2011

⁴⁷ "Retreat from Mogadishu," *Jane's Terrorism and Security Monitor*, 23 August, 2011

THE GULF'S ADAPTIVE JIHAD

Of additional concern are al Shabaab's connections with al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), the jihadist group born out of the ashes of al Qaeda in Saudi Arabia. U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York, Preet Bharara, publicly confirmed the connection between the groups alongside allegations published in an indictment against Ahmed Abdulkadir Warsame, a Somali who was captured by American forces as he crossed the Gulf of Aden. As Bharara put it, 'Ahmed Warsame was a conduit between al Shabaab and al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula – two deadly terrorist organizations – providing material support to them both.'⁴⁸ Former Somali radicals spoken to claim they have received reports indicating that Somali fighters have appeared in Yemen.⁴⁹ And furthermore, evidence found in Abbottabad connects the two groups together.⁵⁰

AQAP is increasingly referred to as one of the most menacing of the al Qaeda affiliate networks. Its track record has thus far been relatively limited in terms of actual operations – it has been directly linked to the attempt by Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab to bring down a flight coming into Detroit airport in December 2009 using a bomb hidden in his underwear and then the double attempt in October 2010 to bring down a pair of flights using bombs carefully concealed in printer cartridges on air freight flights headed to America. But connections have also been found from the group to an individual working for British Airways in the UK, and to numerous individuals in Europe, North America, Singapore, Australia, South Asia and more.

The main thread for many of these individuals or plots seems to be Anwar al Awlaki, the American-Yemeni preacher who has turned the group into a bright light of English-language global jihadism. He has reportedly drawn in numerous young men and women from around the world either to train with the organisation in Yemen or increasingly to simply strike by themselves wherever they are living. And while security planners remain concerned by the group's capacity to strike in the west – the ingenious bomb maker, Ibrahim Hassan Tali al Asiri, who was able to design both devices that got past airport security is still alive and active in Yemen – it is this ideological outreach that is increasingly a concern that has not yet been fully understood.

As well as having the capacity to train individuals and then send them on to conduct operations armed with devices, the group has also established an impressive media outreach wing. Primarily driven by Anwar al Awlaki and a young American-Pakistani named Samir Khan, AQAP's ideological outreach comes in two primary forms. In the first instance there are the videos and recordings featuring Awlaki in which he expounds on the duty of jihad and other religious convictions. In the second place, there is the online magazine *Inspire*, irregularly published and supposedly edited by Samir Khan. Raised in the US, both Awlaki and Khan are fluent in English and have an awareness of the popular culture that will appeal to young westerners. As a result, when they craft and sell their message, it is one that is specifically directed at young westerners, something reflected in the wide array of young men from a variety of ethnicities and backgrounds drawn to join them in Yemen.

And beyond drawing people to Yemen, the group has also managed to provide through its magazine a handbook for radicals in the west. Increasingly found amongst items collected from arrested radicals, *Inspire* has provided the organization with a magnified outreach capacity. For example, a network disrupted in the UK over Christmas 2010 were apparently in part inspired by the magazine and were found in possession of it when arrested.⁵¹ In a more recent case, two young German radicals who had failed to go to Egypt, instead headed to London and were found to have in their possession at least one file from the magazine.⁵² This approach is what AQAP call 'open source jihad', which they define as: 'A resource manual for those who loathe the tyrants; includes bomb making techniques, security measures, guerrilla tactics, weapons training and all

⁴⁸ USA vs. Ahmed Abdulkadir Warsame, indictment filed at the US District Court Southern District of New York, 6 July 2011, <http://www.justice.gov/cjs/docs/news-07052011.html>

⁴⁹ Author interview, July 2011

⁵⁰ "Closer ties between Somali and Yemeni jihadists threatens oil through Aden Gulf," *Al Arabiya*, 18 July 2011

⁵¹ "Christmas terror plot suspects are remanded in custody," *Guardian*, 27 December 2010

⁵² "The Path of a Young German Salafist," *Der Spiegel*, 30 August 2011

other jihad related activities.’ The group goes on to call Inspire ‘America’s worst nightmare’ since ‘it allows Muslims to train at home instead of risking a dangerous travel abroad.’⁵³

The logic of this approach is to try to incite individuals and groups around the world to take jihadi activity into their own hands and to simply launch attacks without any direction. As time has proceeded, however, the group has tried to use their magazine to further claim responsibility for the growing emergence of individuals launching seemingly unaffiliated terrorist attacks. Most prominent and effective amongst these are Roshonara Choudhry and Arid Uka, both of whom launched solo terrorist attacks in London (Choudhry stabbed MP Steven Timms for his role in voting for the Iraq war) and Frankfurt (Uka shot two US servicemen to death and wounded two others as they waited at Frankfurt airport prior to deployment in Afghanistan) respectively using a knife and a gun. Neither was affiliated to any known group, and both appear to have primarily been radicalized through the Internet. And yet in their respective actions, they were able to carry out attacks more successful than anything that any organization has been able to dispatch or coordinate in the west since 7 July 2005.

These two are part of a bigger trend towards what has alternatively been called Lone Wolf or Lone Actor terrorists (attacks launched by individuals seemingly self-radicalizing). Earlier cases can be found across Europe and increasingly in North America and will be looked at in some greater detail later. This is a trend that AQAP has observed and in its way has attempted to harness and claim for its own, describing it as a form of ‘borderless loyalty.’ As they put it in the fourth edition of *Inspire*, ‘We say to the kuffar: The borderless loyalty is a religious sentiment of the people in your midst. As long as the Muslims remain in your focus, you will remain in ours. No matter the security precautions you may take, you cannot kill a borderless idea.’⁵⁴

But it is not yet clear that AQAP have actually managed to directly instigate these lone actors/wolves into action or whether they are simply trying to chase a zeitgeist. In the article they specifically praise the actions of Roshonara Choudhry and Taimour Abdulwahab al-Abdaly as examples of what they are talking about. And while a case could be made for Choudhry as an example of their plan working – she was apparently quite heavily inspired to carry out her action after watching Awlaki videos – as we have seen earlier from al-Abdaly’s possible links to Iraq, it is unclear whether they can claim responsibility for him too.

Nevertheless, AQAP’s capacity to spread ideas in forms that are easily receivable by confused young Muslims and their continuing capacity to hold terrain and orchestrate complex plots demonstrates the great danger posed by the group. The fact that much of their senior leadership continues to operate, their key ideologue Anwar al-Awlaki is still alive alongside their key bomb maker, and Yemen is currently in chaos providing the group with an unknown capacity to re-organize and plan, all point to an organization that is still a live threat. However, from a European perspective, the group may be less of a direct threat than some of the others listed thus far. In an email sent to British-Bangladeshi plotter Rajib Karim, who was working for British Airways as an IT specialist at the time, Awlaki declares, ‘our highest priority is the US. Anything there, even on a smaller scale compared to what we may do in the UK, would be our choice.’⁵⁵ This obsession with the United States is reflected in the group’s media output, and also with its almost successful attacks against the west: Umar Farouk ‘underpants bomber’ Abdulmutallab and the parcel bombs plot of October 2010. In both plots, the airplanes’ destination was the US and while in both cases there were opportunities for an explosion in European airspace, it seems most likely that their ultimate target was the US. This is not of course something that European planners will celebrate or take as a signal to lower their guard, but at the same time, it remains clear that the group’s primary target is the US mainland.

⁵³ *Inspire*, issue 1, summer 2010, p.32

⁵⁴ *Inspire*, issue 4, February 2011

⁵⁵ “Terror planning by Muslim cleric al-Awlaki described in UK trial,” *CNN*, 1 February 2011

LONE WOLVES AND THE INTERNET

The problem of Lone Wolves, or Lone Actors, is one that predates the push by AQAP to try to claim the phenomenon in some way. In the UK alone there has been a series of troubled young men who have decided for their own reasons to lash out at society and have used the garb of Islamist extremism to try to express themselves. The most famous cases are the aforementioned Roshonara Choudhry, Andrew Ibrahim in Bristol and Nicky Reilly in Exeter – Ibrahim had managed to get some explosive together, but was reported by the local community before he could do anything, while Reilly only failed since his bomb blew up in his face. While both men had loose connections to others, they were for all intents and purposes (like Roshonara Choudhry) lone actors/wolves.⁵⁶

The danger from Lone Wolf terrorism is largely underestimated at the moment. While it is unlikely that a terrorist inspired by AQAP's ideas or from some other source would be able to cause the sort of chaos created by 9/11, the recent attack in Norway by Anders Behring Breivik showed the sort of havoc that a well-coordinated Lone Wolf attacker could cause. Whether Breivik was alone or not is still being investigated, but his effectiveness showed the potential danger that such individuals can cause. However, given their random nature it is hard for security planners to effectively conceptualize how to counter the threat, leading to a tendency towards grouping it under the same bracket as mass shootings by disgruntled employees or psychopaths. Distinguishing those who are motivated by political ideologies from those who are motivated by their own personal demons can be increasingly difficult when one looks at the brutal and random nature of their actions.

In fact, when the phenomenon of Lone Wolf Islamist terrorism first started to be felt, the most common blame was ascribed to the Internet as the driver behind this emergent problem. This is something of a misinterpretation as ultimately, the Internet is merely a vehicle – what the Internet has permitted is that individuals looking for some meaning in their lives can seek it out and find validation of pretty much any sort online. For those angry at society in general, often the seemingly loudest voice out there is Islamist extremism and given the proliferation of English-language material out there and the facility with which groups like AQAP paint it to become involved, it is also an easy one to become involved in if you feel so inclined. It is not clear, however, that it is only as a result of the Internet that these individuals have been able to move from being merely angry into carrying out acts.

There has also been an increase in what some have described a 'jihobbyists' – these are individuals who are highly active online in jihadist forums and in some cases are in contact with serious extremists in foreign countries. But mostly these individuals restrict themselves to spreading hate online. We have seen some complex plots emerge from this milieu. A series of cells disrupted from October 2005 onwards linked cells in London, Bradford, Canada, the US, Denmark, Sweden and Bosnia – the running thread between them was the internet and some forums managed primarily in the UK that brought together a global community of young Muslims some of whom were disrupted in the middle of preparing terrorist acts and others who had chosen to go and try to fight abroad. One of the key individuals in the UK, Aabid Khan of Bradford, was a connector between the group and extremist groups in Pakistan, while another, Younis Tsouli, was a key webmaster for al Qaeda in Iraq from his bedroom in Shepherd's Bush.⁵⁷ Recently, across Europe there has been an increase in targeting of such individuals, with arrests in Germany, Spain and the UK. In the UK heavy sentences were handed down to Mohammed Gul (4 years) of London for disseminating home-made YouTube videos extolling the virtues of jihad, and Bilal Zaheer Ahmad (12 years) of Wolverhampton for posting messages inciting people to follow Roshonara Choudhry's lead and attack other MPs.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ For more detail on both Ibrahim and Reilly and their characterization as Lone Wolves, please see: Raffaello Pantucci, "A Typology of Lone Wolves: Preliminary Analysis of Lone Islamist Terrorists," *JCSR Policy Brief*, March 2011

⁵⁷ Raffaello Pantucci, "Operation Praline: The Realization of Al-Suri's *nizam la tanzim?*," *Perspectives on Terrorism*, vol. 2, issue 12, October 2008

⁵⁸ "Blogger who encouraged murder of MPs jailed," *BBC News*, 29 July 2011; "Man who created extremist videos convicted of terrorist offences," *Met Police Press Release*, 24 February 2011

Unlike the aforementioned coordinated threats, it is much harder to effectively quantify or predict the degree to which this aspect of the violent Islamist terrorist threat posed to Europe is on the increase or on the wane. It is certainly one that has increased in the past few years, but whether this is a trajectory that is going to continue or not is uncertain. Roshonara Choudhry's relatively easy act has not yet been imitated, but a number of other similar incidents have taken place and individuals who seemed to be on a similar trajectory have been intercepted. When this is coupled with the fact that there has been no noticeable diminution in online radical material and no evidence that other ideologies have yet arrived in large enough numbers to displace violent Islamism as one of the preeminent flames to which people are drawn online, it would seem as though this is a problem that is not going to go away.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper highlights that the threat from violent Islamists to Europe no longer simply comes from Osama bin Laden and his immediate organization in Waziristan – the ideas that Osama espoused have gone out into the world and latched onto a whole host of local grievances and shot off in different directions. It seems that in some cases, there remains a close link between AQ core and the affiliates, but in other cases, less so – documents obtained in Abbottabad are slowly being released into the public domain and show that the level of connection in some cases was much higher than was previously thought.⁵⁹ Osama's death, however, is unlikely to impact these groups' desire to attack the west – if they wanted to before, they will continue to want to afterwards. The loss to the organization of its most famous figurehead is hard to calculate, but it is likely to have a profound long-term effect. As Abu Musab al-Suri, an important ideologue whose ideas have found a new life amongst the 'open source jihad' espoused by AQAP, put it, Osama was 'the symbol of our jihad' and 'the sun of the Muslim firmament.'⁶⁰

And this loss is something that is likely going to exacerbate a trend that already seemed underway. According to EUROPOL figures, since 2007, there has been a steady decrease in terrorist attacks in Europe: from 583 in 2007 to merely 249 in 2010. While these figures are largely dependent on what member states choose to hand over hence not entirely reliable, the overall downward trend is undeniable.⁶¹ This is further reflected in the lowering of national terrorism threat levels – in the UK, earlier this year the threat was lowered to 'Substantial' from 'Severe' and Home Office figures showed that in the past year arrests were down to 125 from the previous year 209.⁶² Furthermore, according to British intelligence officials, the number of individuals from the UK going to train in Pakistan 'never more than a few score in any one year.... has now been reduced to a handful.'⁶³ This drop is not, however, universal. In Germany some 105 individuals were of concern in early 2005. While this figure dropped to 65 in 2007, it leapt up again to 130 by January 2011.⁶⁴ A more recent count from March put this number at 220.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, these numbers remain relatively small, especially when compared with the last official UK count, given by MI5 Head Jonathan Evans in late 2007, of some 2,000 people 'involved in terrorist activity,' and a further 2,000 'that we don't yet know of.'⁶⁶ And all of these numbers remain marginal when compared to the larger community of Muslims in Europe.

But the key problem for European counter-terrorists is that while this threat is reducing, it is continuing to fragment in different directions, leading to a far wider array of directions in which the threat can come from. This presents all sorts of logistical problems in terms of linguistic capabilities and outreach to new foreign services. And atop this, there are the ongoing problems that have been thrown up by the Arab Spring. On the one hand, this has undoubtedly helped devalue the potency of the al Qaeda brand as the only way for Muslims to shake off the yoke of tyranny. On the other hand, it is not entirely clear yet what the actual impact is going to be on terrorist networks with links to the countries that have overturned old regimes. Stories continue to emerge of radicals fighting amongst the rebels in Libya; while in Egypt and Tunisia it is unclear what role the Islamist factions will play. And at a practical level, there has been a substantial erosion of trust between intelligence services in North Africa and their western counterparts, as well as an unknown loss of intelligence information in the sacking of intelligence ministries in Tripoli, Cairo and Tunis.

⁵⁹ For example, it now appears confirmed that the organization had quite close ties to AQAP in Yemen and al Shabaab in Somalia. Previous estimates about the levels of command and control that were being exerted had supposed this to be much lower.

⁶⁰ Camille Tawil, translated by Robin Bray, *Brothers in Arms: The Story of Al Qaeda and the Arab Jihadists*, London: Saqi, September 2010, p.178

⁶¹ "TE-SAT 2011 – EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report," Europol, 19 April 2011: www.europol.europa.eu/publications/EU_Terrorism_Situation_and_Trend_Report_TE-SAT/TE-SAT2011.pdf

⁶² 'Operation of police powers under the Terrorism Act 2000 and subsequent legislation: Arrests, outcomes and stop and searches Quarterly update to December 2010', Home Office <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/science-research-statistics/research-statistics/counter-terrorism-statistics/hosb1411/>

⁶³ Jason Burke, "Smoke and Dust," *The World Today*, August-September 2011, pp.7-9

⁶⁴ Sajjan M. Gohel, "Germany increasingly a center for terrorism in Europe," *CTC Sentinel*, August 2011

⁶⁵ <http://icsr.info/blog/Terror-in-Germany-An-interview-with-Guido-Steinberg>

⁶⁶ Jonathan Evans, "Intelligence, counter-terrorism and trust," Address to the Society of Editors, November 5, 2007

But the biggest problems in European counter-terrorism in the next few years are likely to be the ongoing incapacity of Europe to forge an effective and coherent voice in addressing global problems. In the past year we have seen an increased shift in power from Brussels back to the member states – Germany, the great European motor, has grown sceptical of the value of this experiment; the Italians, French and Danes have thrown free-movement into question; and the response to Libya has shown the primacy of member states over Brussels in foreign policy decision-making. All of this will have strategic consequences for counter-terrorism – for example, the problems around the Schengen zone may have implications for counter-terrorist planning. Also, a lack of strategic decision-making on Libya risks letting it fester and becoming a sort of Bosnia, which was both a humanitarian disaster, but also a terrorist training ground as it turned out. This is not happening yet, but the longer things proceed with no clear resolution in sight, the more potential there is for something like this to happen.

Secondly, the world has not yet found an effective and comprehensive solution to the problem of young people becoming excited by globalist Islamist anti-establishmentarian narratives and becoming persuaded to go and fight abroad and in some cases come back and plot terrorist acts. Broadly captured under the banner of Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) by the British government and subsequently emulated by many, the world has notably not managed to crack this code. Millions have been spent, some doubtless to good effect but some doubtless wasted. There is so far no real way of knowing which is prevailing. In some member states there is evidence that this sort of approach is hinting at positive results, but other countries have taken a more hardline approach that dismisses these sorts of notions and focuses on expulsion and detention as the keys to solving terrorist problems.

Given the free movement within Europe (recent problems notwithstanding), this scattered approach is not going to bring any benefits to an overarching European approach. Especially when we consider the junior roles European counter-terrorism departments play: the counter-terrorism coordinator, Europol and the Joint Situation Center. This is not to say that they are not doing good work, but at the same time, the member states continue to understandably guard counter-terrorism activity as primarily a national remit and leave the Brussels organs to their own devices. This is the result of domestic intelligence management concerns, but at the same time it does mean that Europe might not be reaping some of the benefits that might accrue from a greater coordination of intelligence capacity and counter-radicalization efforts.

The Islamist terrorist threat that Europe faces is complex and will become more so in the wake of Osama's death. However, the numbers involved are going down, and the capacity of groups to conduct large-scale operational planning is substantially reduced. The potential for Lone Wolf terrorism to be a major spoiler exists, but while it might cause mass mayhem, it is unlikely to stir the same sort of reaction as a major externally coordinated attack. While it is clear that intelligence services across Europe have now begun to understand what it is that they are facing and to go about chasing it, they remain unclear of how exactly to stamp it out. Consequently, ten years after 11 September 2001, Europe is continuing to manage its terrorist problem rather than eradicate it.

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