



This unique series of podcasts will address various aspects of Homeland Security here and abroad. You will hear well known geopolitical experts share their perspective on the following: terrorist activity in the Middle East and Asia, the potential for a biological and nuclear attack on US soil, the US Government resources that have been assigned to Homeland Security, and the most recent "grades" on the Weapons of Mass Destruction Scorecard.

Please join the second installment of the series to listen to Brian Michael Jenkins, one of the world's leading authorities on terrorism and sophisticated crime. He will be discussing the current status of the Al-Qaeda organization and other terrorist groups as well as his perspective on the potential of a terrorist attack in the US.

Brain, what is the current status of Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups?

We have made undeniable progress against Al-Qaeda since 9-11. Their Taliban protectors in Afghanistan have been toppled. The training camps in Afghanistan have been disbursed, disrupting Al-Qaeda's through put of volunteer terrorists. Pakistan, although still a problematic ally has been kept on board. Some of Al-Qaeda's key operational planners have been removed. Al-Qaeda's top leadership is on the run. Its post 9-11 attacks against other governments galvanize those governments to carry out crack downs on their own; that further weakened its global network. Unprecedented international cooperation has made the operational environment a lot more dangerous to the terrorists. As a consequence, many terrorist plots have been foiled. At the same time there are failures. We have failed to capture Al-Qaeda's top leadership. We certainly have not dented their determination to continue the struggle. Their radicalization and recruiting continues. Galvanized for awhile by our invasion of Iraq they are dedicated, still dedicated to large scale violence.

Between 2001 and 2006 Al-Qaeda was able to continue its terrorist campaign with a fairly high frequency of attacks. We were seeing major terrorist attacks in some part of the world from Bali to Istanbul, from Riyadh to London on an average of about one attack every two months. The frequency of attacks, however, declined in 2007. However, the Madrid and London attacks underscored fears of radicalization to violence and homegrown terrorism in Europe.

We are now in the eighth year of the campaign since 9-11. Al-Qaeda's central leadership has survived in Pakistan. Al-Qaeda contributes to escalating violence in Afghanistan. The November, 2008 attack in Mumbai demonstrates that Al-Qaeda is not the only constellation in the Jihadist extremist universe. There are other groups that we must worry about. Pakistan is increasingly fragile owing to Taliban and tribal unrest. India faces a growing Jihadist threat. There are new Al-Qaeda franchises in the Maghreb, in Libya and Lebanon. These give the illusion of an expanding global Jihad, although the operative word here is illusion. Except for Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb which

includes North Africa these others are largely tiny organizations; nothing more than names on banners. We do see Jihadist ideology spreading into Sahara and Africa. Since 9-11 Al-Qaeda has devoted increasing attention to its media Jihad, always regarded as 90% of its struggle. The frequency of these communications and their quality has improved. On the other hand this has not been reflected in increasing terrorist operations.

What is the actual threat of Al-Qaeda to the United States?

As I mentioned there's been a declining number of major Al-Qaeda terrorist operations outside of Afghanistan, Pakistan and a greater number of the terrorist plots are being uncovered and thwarted. As a result far few terrorist operations in 2007 and 2008 and no successful attack in the west since 2005. Numerous terrorist plots have been disrupted. Clearly Al-Qaeda is having some quality control problems. More importantly, Al-Qaeda never managed to provoke the Muslim uprising that it sought. It appears that antipathy towards the West did not translate into support for Al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda's interpretation of Islam and its terrorist tactics are increasingly being challenged by scholars and by the Arab street. Indeed they're being challenged by other Jihadist strategists. As a result, Al-Qaeda's leaders are spending more time rebutting criticism. Clearly their bloody tactics notably in Iraq have provoked a backlash. Not only in that country, but among the broader Muslim community.

Analysts right now are debating about the strength of Al-Qaeda and its appeal. Is Al-Qaeda still a potent center, actively involved in operations or has it been reduced to a hand full of talking heads capable of little more than exhortation to local action. How much is this center? That is Osama bin Laden shake I'm an Alzorwahian, a small cluster of leaders hold up in Pakistan. How much are they involved in directing operations? Are they a driving force behind the Taliban and urgencies in Afghanistan and Pakistan or a minor auxiliary? Is Al-Qaeda capable of implementing new strategies that are applicable to its current circumstances or does it merely fabricate strategies that are nothing more than recognitions of its dire strengths? Widely popular among young alienated Muslims perhaps but really increasingly unpopular among Muslims throughout the community. Beyond Al-Qaeda we're seeing some things that concern us. Will this wave of Jihadist terrorism decline as previous waves have? Is there any other group that is likely to replicate Al-Qaeda's global Jihad? These are questions we can't answer yet. Certainly we have seen that military contests against determining Guerillas have not gone well in Afghanistan. Israel's invasion of Lebanon, it's fighting in Gaza, Ethiopia's invasion of Somalia and certainly that's going to have some effect on future military thinking.

Will the apparent long term escalation of terrorist's violence continue?

A report by a national commission on the prevention of WMD proliferation in terrorist concluded that there was a 50/50 chance or better that terrorists would use biological or nuclear weapons within five years.

Indeed, in September 2008 the Director of the U. S. Central Intelligence Agency said that Al-Qaeda is the CIA's top nuclear concern. Now, obviously this assessment was based on intentions rather than capabilities. We know that countries like North Korea have nuclear weapons. We know that Iran's nuclear weapons ambitions are backed up by a large contingent of nuclear scientists in an extensive network of nuclear facilities. Nonetheless, it was the Director of the CIA saying that he considers Al-Qaeda the bigger threat. Probably because the CIA assumes that if Al-Qaeda had nuclear weapons it would be most likely to use them.

What are Al-Qaeda's nuclear capabilities and will they go nuclear?

We know that Al-Qaeda has nuclear ambitions. Osama bin Laden tried to acquire nuclear material when he was still in Sudan and he spoke with two nuclear scientists from Pakistan shortly before the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Documents later discovered an Al-Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan indicate interest in nuclear weapons but insofar as we know, and that's always the phrase we're going to hear. Insofar as we know, Al-Qaeda has not acquired nuclear weapons or FISA material unnecessary to build them and the captured documents do not indicate that Al-Qaeda knows how to make a nuclear bomb even if it had the necessary nuclear material. Now that's based upon documents we discovered seven years ago. What do we know about development since then? Probably not enough. It is, however, interesting to note that even as Al-Qaeda's operational capabilities were being degraded by the combined action of intelligence services and law enforcement organizations its so called media Jihad was increasing in volume and sophistication and here themes of mass destruction play a significant role in its communications.

Al-Qaeda appears to have discovered that by claims, threats, and broadcasting religious rulings granting at the right to kill millions of infidels it cannot only excite its followers who embellish its nuclear fantasies and but it also can create nuclear terror among its folks. I suppose in one way of looking at it Al-Qaeda has become the world's first terrorist nuclear power without demonstrating possession of a single nuclear weapon. So here we have to make a distinction between nuclear terrorism and nuclear terror. Nuclear terrorism is about the frightening possibility that terrorist will, someday, acquire and use nuclear weapons. Nuclear terror is about the anticipation of that event. Nuclear terrorism is about intelligence, evidence, assessments of terrorist capabilities. Nuclear terror is driven by our imagination. The history of nuclear terrorism can be briefly summarized. There hasn't been any. Many would hasten to add yet. Nuclear terror has a rich history and is deeply imbedded in our popular culture and policy making circles.

How likely is nuclear terrorism?

Did the commission get it right when it said that there is a 50/50 chance that terrorists will use biological or nuclear weapons in the next five years? Well, let's put aside biological weapons. What about nuclear weapons? The experts don't agree. Their guesses ranged from one in a million to a virtual certainty. Not if, but when, to use the famous phrase. American estimates have the probability tend to run higher than

estimates by European respondents when asked these questions. But, of course, none of these estimates have any predictive value. They're a reflection of perceptions of nuclear terror. It's my own estimate that requires prophesy for which I'm not qualified. Indeed, the debate itself has a theological quality with disbelievers on one side versus the apocalypticians on the other. In this debate I suppose I should regard myself as a prudent agnostic. Although I don't think nuclear terrorism is inevitable and there are no indications that it is imminent insofar as we know. What we do know is still grim enough. We have to take the threat seriously. So clear terrorism is a threat we are going to have to live with for a long time.

Brian,

Thank you for sharing your expertise on Homeland Security.

We invite you to tune in for our 3rd and final segment on Homeland Security with Ambassador Frank Wisner, International Affairs Advisor at Patton Boggs, LLP.

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