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## **OSAMA BIN LADEN'S DEATH: IMPLICATIONS FOR UK FOREIGN POLICY AND HOMELAND SECURITY**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## GLOBAL WAR ON TERRORISM (GWOT)

- The death of Osama Bin Laden presents an opportunity for the UK to re-emphasize its commitment to winning the GWOT – both at home and abroad.
- In the short term, his death changes little about the threat of militant Islamism. In the long run, however, it is difficult to predict how his demise will affect Al Qaeda's global capabilities.

## AFGHANISTAN

- Bin Laden's death will have no discernable impact on insurgent activity in Afghanistan at an operational level.
- The population-centric counterinsurgency strategy currently being pursued is the correct one, and should continue.

## THE PAKISTAN RELATIONSHIP

- The location of Bin Laden's compound suggests collusion within the ranks of the Pakistani security services.
- Pressing questions about the future of the Coalition's alliance with Pakistan need to be asked.

## THE ARAB SPRING

- The 2011 pro-democracy uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East (MENA) demonstrate that support there for militant Islamism is extremely limited.
- Britain should use the death of Bin Laden as an opportunity to place greater emphasis on promoting democracy and human rights in the MENA region.

## HOMELAND SECURITY

- There is an immediate threat of retaliatory attacks against the UK. Bin Laden's death should propel the government to consider the effectiveness of the UK's current homeland security architecture.

## MANAGING PERCEPTIONS

- Bin Laden's death shatters the illusion of the invincibility of the Islamist cause and refocuses minds on what this conflict is about and why it matters.
- Recognising that the fight against militant Islamism is as much a battle of ideas as a conventional conflict, Britain and its allies should support Muslim voices challenging the Islamist narrative.



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# INTRODUCTION

In operational terms, the death of Osama Bin Laden changes little in the fight against militant Islamism, whether in the United Kingdom or abroad. However, his death is a significant symbolic and psychological victory for the UK, the United States and all those threatened by Islamism-inspired terrorism. Given that this conflict is as much a battle of ideas and perceptions as it is a conflict in the conventional sense, this is not to be underestimated.

As the founder and leader of Al Qaeda for two decades, Bin Laden was directly and indirectly responsible for the deaths of thousands of civilians, and has propagated a profoundly destructive ideology based on a deeply retrograde interpretation of Quranic precepts, and the belief that violence and intimidation are profitable and honourable strategies by which to advance its cause. His death is a major blow to Al Qaeda and its affiliates, who rely heavily on his status as a tool of recruitment and inspiration.

Despite this significant victory, global jihadist terrorism is a multi-headed hydra, and remains a grave threat to global peace and security. The current context presents a unique opportunity for the UK government to refocus minds on the importance of confronting and overcoming this threat at home and abroad, and working closely with Muslim allies in order to do so. This briefing addresses key areas the UK government should focus on in light of the death of Bin Laden.



# IMPLICATIONS

## GLOBAL WAR ON TERRORISM (GWOT)

Bin Laden's death gives the UK an opportunity to reinforce its commitment to the GWOT. The Prime Minister David Cameron has already emphasised the UK's continued support: '[...] Britain was with America from the first day of the struggle to defeat Al Qaeda. Our resolve today is as strong as it was then. There can be no impunity and no safe-refuge for those who kill in the name of this poisonous ideology.'<sup>1</sup>

The nature of the threat posed by Al Qaeda is dispersed and Bin Laden's death in no way marks an immediate end to the GWOT. With its spectacular attacks in the US on 11 September 2001, the group was brought to the forefront of the international stage and has since become a global brand. On the run since, Bin Laden has become a figure of symbolic, as opposed to operational, importance. Once a centralised organisation, Al Qaeda has evolved with franchises and affiliates operating worldwide.<sup>2</sup> Its core leadership now mainly provides operational and ideological guidance. Affiliates and those loosely connected can operate without necessarily receiving direct instructions from Al Qaeda's core leadership.



**US GROUND FORCES IN AFGHANISTAN**  
**SOURCE: ASSOCIATED PRESS**

Particularly strong are Al Qaeda's affiliates in North Africa and the Middle East. Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) – the group behind Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab's attempted attack on a US airline in December 2009 – has been described by the head of the Security Service as 'of increased concern in respect of the domestic terror threat to the UK'.<sup>3</sup> In April 2010, the group attempted to assassinate the British Ambassador in Yemen.<sup>4</sup> Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), which is based in North Africa, regularly kidnaps and often murders Westerners in the region. In Somalia, American, British and other European militants are known to have joined and trained with al-Shabaab, a network that aligned itself with Al Qaeda in 2007.<sup>5</sup>

Despite Bin Laden's death being a major strategic victory in the GWOT, officials in both the US and UK government have warned that Islamism-inspired terrorism is most likely to continue in the immediate future and that revenge attacks may occur.<sup>6</sup> Ismail Haniyeh, the head of Hamas, has already described Bin Laden as a 'holy warrior' and the Pakistani Taliban, which is allied to Al Qaeda and behind the attempted New York Times Square bomb attack in May 2010, has said that his death would be avenged.<sup>7</sup>

Bin Laden's death and symbol as a martyr in the cause of what is seen as a 'holy war' is likely to inspire individuals and groups to mount attacks against Western countries and their interests worldwide. The operational activities of Al Qaeda affiliates in Yemen, Somalia and



the Maghreb are likely to continue. Terrorist groups in Pakistan, such as the Taliban and Lashkar e-Taiba are also likely to continue their operational activities.

'Lone' individuals who draw inspiration and guidance from Al Qaeda ideology and tactics, can still easily access online material to gain the know-how on explosive making and attacks. AQAP, for example, has encouraged and provided operational instruction for individuals in Western countries to launch attacks that need not be spectacular, as evidenced in its online English magazine *Inspire*.

Bin Laden's death may have the potential to destabilise the group at its core, if members do not follow its new leaders.<sup>8</sup> Analysts note that Ayman al-Zawahiri, widely thought to replace Bin Laden as Al Qaeda's next leader, can be a divisive force. In fact, Al Qaeda followers and members may refuse to even follow al-Zawahiri's lead.<sup>9</sup> Though al-Zawahiri is considered to be less charismatic than Bin Laden, he is, however, considered to be its chief ideologue. Some experts also believe he was the 'operational brains' behind the 9/11 attacks.<sup>10</sup>

The long-term effect of Bin Laden's death on Al Qaeda recruitment and support is simply difficult to predict.<sup>11</sup> With its allies, the UK government must nevertheless continue its struggle in the GWOT in the immediate future, as Islamism-inspired terrorism is unlikely to end.

## AFGHANISTAN

For all this year's momentous geopolitical developments in North Africa and the Middle East, Afghanistan remains the most significant theatre in which British forces are currently engaged. It is also the country from which Al Qaeda planned the 9/11 attacks, making success there of particular significance. Today, more than 132,000 International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) troops from 48 countries continue to operate in Afghanistan, including 9,500 from the United Kingdom.<sup>12</sup> Understanding what implications the death of Bin Laden will have for operations in this theatre, therefore, is vital.



**THE AFGHANISTAN-PAKISTAN REGION**

In operational terms, Bin Laden's death will likely have no discernible impact on the capabilities of the insurgency at either the leadership or the ground level. From the time that US forces drove Bin Laden and other Al Qaeda operatives from the Tora Bora region of eastern Afghanistan and into Pakistan in December 2001, his significance has been primarily symbolic, as the figurehead of global jihad, as opposed to practical, in terms of the influence he can bring to bear on operations. Indeed, his prominence as the former directly limited his capacity to be of influence on the latter.

The compound in which Bin Laden was found and eventually killed on 2 May 2011 was in Abbottabad, Pakistan, a military town located some 100km north of the Pakistani capital, and



more than 200km east of the border with Afghanistan. Without access to the internet or modern telecommunications, Bin Laden's ability to communicate with the outside world, still less to help direct operations in a war in another country, was necessarily limited.<sup>13</sup> The discretion with which Bin Laden had to operate meant that communication with the Al Qaeda leader was extremely difficult, and limited to a few close confidantes, who acted as couriers.<sup>14</sup> The true extent of the limitations imposed on Bin Laden's ability to act as anything more than a symbolic figurehead whilst still alive is perhaps best demonstrated by the fact that Al Qaeda did not release a message marking the anniversary of the 9/11 attacks in September 2010, but instead followed up with a tape released on 21 January 2011.<sup>15</sup>

It should also be noted that Al Qaeda, though closely connected to, is not and never was synonymous with the Taliban as an organisation. Like its leader, the potency of Al Qaeda in Afghanistan exists not so much in terms of its ability to exert hard influence as in terms of its potential to motivate and inspire other movements with similar ideologies, including the Taliban. It is estimated that only 50-100 Al Qaeda operatives are now left in Afghanistan.<sup>16</sup>

Bin Laden's significance as a symbol of what the insurgency in Afghanistan is working to achieve, however, makes him a threat still in the short-term. The Taliban have promised to attempt reprisal attacks, and this threat must not be underestimated.<sup>17</sup> In order to properly comprehend the dynamics of the conflict in Afghanistan, it is vital to understand the importance and power of perception, both on the belligerents and ordinary people. On their own, the Taliban are nothing more than 30-40,000 militants armed with Kalashnikovs, confronting close to 150,000 of the most well-trained and well-equipped soldiers on earth, supported by an equal number from the Afghan National Army (ANA).<sup>18</sup>

The Taliban's strength is derived from its capacity to intimidate and influence the local population to support, or at least to acquiesce to, its cause. As is being demonstrated by the pro-democracy uprisings taking place elsewhere in Muslim majority countries, support for extremist Islamist ideology amongst Muslim populations is generally low, and in that regard, Afghanistan is no different. Extensive polling conducted in 2010 revealed that just 6 per cent of Afghans would support a return to Taliban rule, as opposed to 90 per cent who favour the government.<sup>19</sup> The Taliban's ability to coerce the population into supporting its activities is derived both from the failure of the Afghan government (GoA) and its NATO partners to provide security in certain areas, and corresponding threats from the Taliban against any member of the population who tries to support the government side. Equally as important is the ability of the Taliban to persuade Afghans that even if the GoA is making progress now, withdrawal of NATO military support by 2015 will result in the collapse of government influence in the regions, if not altogether. In other words, support the government now, and you'll pay for it later.

The reason why this matters in terms of the death of Bin Laden and the potential for reprisal attacks is that it will be vitally important for the Taliban that the GoA and NATO do not capitalise in terms of advancing the perception amongst ordinary Afghans that the Islamist cause is not so enduring and indefatigable as many were being led to believe it was. With the symbolic icon of militant Islamism now dead and his body dumped unceremoniously into the sea, the great clarion call of Mullah Omar that "the jihad will go on, even for a thousand years", seems somehow less potent.<sup>20</sup> Reprisal attacks to remind Afghans of the Taliban's ongoing strength will therefore be considered important. Indeed, the Taliban will also be



concerned about the potential impact on their own ranks, as many as 80-90 per cent of whom are not considered to be part of the ideological 'hardcore', but who fight for reasons of poverty, lack of opportunity, and disillusionment with the GoA.<sup>21</sup>

It is unsurprising; therefore, that the Taliban have already begun attempts to sow doubt as to the truth of Bin Laden's killing. On 3 May 2011, a Taliban spokesman insisted in a statement to journalists that, "this news is only coming from one side, from Obama's office, and America has not shown any evidence or proof to support this claim."<sup>22</sup> The reality, however, is that any decisions that either low-level Taliban insurgents or the Afghan population make with regards to which side to support in this conflict will be based on current conditions on the ground, and their perception as to the conflict's future direction and outcome, not on the death of Bin Laden.

This is why the next ramification of Bin Laden's death, an increase in calls for premature Western withdrawal from Afghanistan, is so problematic. Less than 24 hours after the death of Bin Laden, Carl Levin, the Democrat Chairman of the US Senate's Armed Services Committee, was calling for a "robust reduction" of troop numbers in Afghanistan, reasoning that with Bin Laden gone, there is less cause for Afghans to support his



**DAVID CAMERON & TROOPS IN AFGHANISTAN**  
**SOURCE: GETTY**

extremist ideology.<sup>23</sup> What those who hold to such an interpretation fail to recognise, however, is that Afghans already reject extremist ideology for the most part, but that ongoing conditions of insecurity, poverty and fear continue to generate a support for – or at least an acquiescence of - extremist activity that would not otherwise exist.

The elimination of Al Qaeda operatives will not lead to Al Qaeda's demise, precisely because Al Qaeda's strength lies in its potency as an idea. Not until the conditions that give rise to support for extremist ideology and activity are eliminated in Afghanistan will it be possible to say that Al Qaeda itself has been defeated there. What a failure it would be if the death of Bin Laden led to the premature withdrawal from Afghanistan that both he and the Taliban have always demanded, which in turn led to the return of conditions in Afghanistan that led to the rise of Al Qaeda there in the first place.

It is important to recognise that what is required for success in Afghanistan is not so beyond the realms of possibility as many seem to think. What is required is the establishment of a government and infrastructure that can carry progress forward independently, by providing essential security and economic opportunities to its citizens, and denying terrorists safe areas of operation. This is a realistic goal, and since the commencement of the properly resourced, population-centric counterinsurgency strategy at the start of 2010, genuine progress is being made in that regard, albeit with many setbacks. In Helmand province, the theatre in which UK forces are deployed, the central districts of Lashkar Gah, Gaoreschk, Nad Ali, Garm Ser, Nawah-ye-Barakzai and Marjeh are now considered secure and increasingly fall under GoA control.<sup>24</sup>

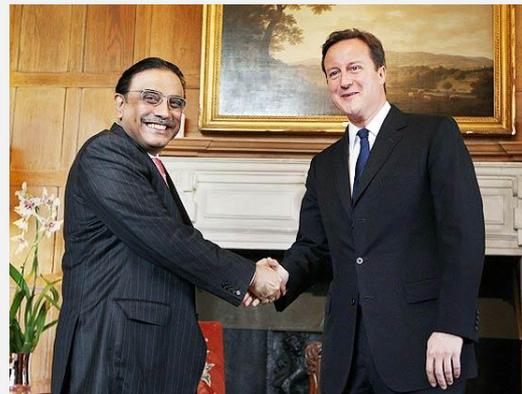


What has the potential to undo this progress, however, is the perception amongst ordinary Afghans, the insurgency and indeed the GoA itself that the UK, the US and their allies in Afghanistan are committed to withdrawal before these gains can take root. Once this perception takes hold, generating support for the NATO strategy from any of these quarters becomes far more difficult. Finally, success in Afghanistan is imperative in order to deny not just Al Qaeda, but other terrorist movements around the world, the massive and dangerous psychological boon that would be provided by the vindication of Bin Laden's central assertion, that to challenge Western countries by violent means is sound strategy.

## THE PAKISTAN RELATIONSHIP

The fact that Bin Laden was found living in a fortified \$1 million mansion 35 miles north of Islamabad rather than a cave in the darkest recesses of the Northwest Frontier Province have brought questions about the state of Pakistani cooperation in the GWOT to the forefront. Indeed, it is difficult to fathom that Bin Laden's location could have remained secret when he was hiding in a town that is home to one of Pakistan's largest garrisons, a national military academy, and only three blocks away from a local police station.

One of the most consistent themes of Coalition policy in the GWOT has been its partnership with Pakistan. At the same time, the past decade has seen increasing evidence that elements within the Pakistani intelligence and security apparatus have actively aided the Taliban and Al Qaeda. Abdullah Abdullah, the former Afghan foreign minister and presidential candidate observed that the location of Bin Laden's death was very telling, remarking that it '...shows that the [Al Qaeda] network of support is very strong. And it says something about the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI)'s willingness - or unwillingness - to take a serious look at these issues.'<sup>25</sup>



**ASIF ALI ZARDARI AND DAVID CAMERON**  
SOURCE: PETER MACDIARMID

As David Cameron indicated in his speech to the House of Commons on 3 May 2011, this has serious consequences for Pakistan's role in the GWOT, as well as its relations with the state members of ISAF – including, of course, the UK. However, the Prime Minister reaffirmed the vital importance of counterterrorism cooperation with Pakistan, which he claimed '...helped lead us to Bin Laden and the compound where he was hiding.'<sup>26</sup>

Despite the billions of dollars in Western aid dispensed to Pakistan since 2002, both the US and the UK have failed to secure sufficient commitments from the Pakistan in the form of meaningful promises to weed out the elements in their security and intelligence services aiding the Coalition's enemies. The UK provided approximately £140 million in aid to Pakistan in 2010 alone<sup>27</sup>—a significant sum in proportion to the UK's size and current economic circumstances—while the US has contributed over \$18 billion in aid to Pakistan



since 2002, with President Obama committing a further \$7.5 billion in aid over the next five years.<sup>28</sup>

This could be a policy of conscious duplicity, a result of the many divisions and internal dysfunction of the Pakistani government, sheer incompetence or indeed all of these factors. Whatever the reason, there is substantial evidence that Pakistan has, in the words of David Cameron, ‘...look[ed] both ways’<sup>29</sup> on extremist groups for a long time, enabling extremists with secure bases within Pakistan to operate with alarmingly few constraints over the past decade, as the Wikileaks release of a tranche of clandestine US documents has confirmed.<sup>30</sup>

The Pakistani government’s lack of democratic legitimacy is a significant cause of the instability which has enabled the Government to pursue measures which both help and hinder the GWOT. Indeed, although the government of Pakistan is technically elected, it relies on the military for its survival, and as a consequence was rated as only ‘Partly Free’ by the Freedom House 2010 ‘Freedom in the World’ report.<sup>31</sup> This plays into the hands of extremists, as the resentful populace has become more susceptible to the allure of extremism.

There is also reason to believe that Pakistan has intentionally remained on both sides of this issue because of the perceived strategic advantage that support for militant extremists might give them in the region, particularly in relation to India, which remains their most formidable rival. Allowing extremist groups to operate within Pakistan has sustained organisations such as Lashkar e Taiba in order to project Pakistani power against India in the violently-contested Kashmir. It also allows Pakistan to enhance their power within Afghanistan by forging relations with the Taliban and affiliated extremist groups like Al Qaeda as well as the ISAF forces. Maintaining relations with the Taliban and affiliated extremists may be motivated by a cynical – and potentially accurate – suspicion that the US and her allies will withdraw from Afghanistan out of political and military exhaustion, leaving a weakened country that will once again fall into Taliban control.

In the final analysis, the status quo in Pakistan presents a grave security challenge to ISAF efforts in Afghanistan, and a direct terrorist threat to the UK, which has already suffered terrorist attacks from individuals trained in Pakistan. It is the Pakistani people who have suffered most from Al Qaeda and its affiliates—with an estimated 30,000 Pakistani civilians killed in terrorist attacks over the past decade.

## **THE ARAB SPRING**

The pro-democracy uprisings that swept across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) at the start of 2011 revealed many things, but one in particular: the assumption that support for violent Islamist ideology is widely held in Muslim majority countries is false. Islamist movements, including Al Qaeda franchises such as AQIM and AQAP, were conspicuous only by their relative absence from these protests.

One of the most important lessons for British and other Western policymakers to draw, therefore, is that the downfall of the autocratic governments that have held sway across the



MENA region for so long need not yield to Islamist regimes in their place. The death of Bin Laden undoubtedly represents a further, and major, psychological blow to Islamist movements that have long positioned themselves as the most viable and desirable alternative to the region's autocratic regimes.

A better comprehension of what motivates support for extremist organisations such as Al Qaeda in the MENA region will be vital going forwards. The fact that only a fractional minority of Muslims in the Middle East and North Africa actively support extremist movements, particularly when offered an alternative that is not the extant state apparatus, should not detract from the fact that many of the underlying conditions that lead people to sympathise with extremist ideologies remain. Poverty, oppression, and lack of opportunities are prevalent in many countries in the MENA region, the vast majority of which remain under autocratic rule. Hard data on the precise breakdown between those whose support for Islamist extremism is predominantly ideological and those whose support is more pragmatic does not exist for the region as a whole, but it is certain that non-ideological grievances are a significant factor. The following statement, obtained recently from a Yemeni tribesman, is not uncommon: 'I know in my village some people who are from Al Qaeda, but I swear to you that they do not have ideological motivation. They are joining Al Qaeda because of poverty.'<sup>32</sup>

Another popular recruiting-sergeant for extremist groups such as Al Qaeda has been the strength of their narrative regarding Western support for MENA dictatorships. This support, borne of a misguided sense that these regimes, however imperfect, were reliable guarantors of Western interests, has proven to be false. Oil prices alone – frequently cited as the



primary Western concern in the region – rose by almost 25 per cent, from just over \$100 per barrel at the start of 2011 to more than \$122 per barrel on 4 May 2011, a spike driven significantly by MENA unrest.<sup>33</sup> Building on the momentum of the Arab Spring to rectify this situation, and adopt a more coherent pro-democracy and development agenda in the MENA region will further undermine the Al Qaeda narrative must now become a priority for Western governments.

#### **PROTESTS IN EGYPT**

**SOURCE: ASSOCIATED PRESS**

The reality is that in the short-term, the implications of Bin Laden's death on the course of developments in the MENA region will be insignificant. However, in terms of challenging and overcoming the corrosive narrative that he represented, the long-term implications could well be driven by how effective the UK and other democracies are at working with regional partners to address the underlying causes of extremism.



## THE THREAT AT HOME

Al Qaeda and Al Qaeda inspired terrorism remains the biggest threat to UK national security. In September 2010, the head of the Security Service, Jonathan Evans, said:

[...] there are real plots uncovered on a fairly regular basis [which] demonstrates that there is a persistent intent on the part of Al Qaida and its associates to attack the UK [...] There remains a serious risk of a lethal attack taking place.<sup>34</sup>

In response to Bin Laden's death, David Cameron stated Al Qaeda inspired terrorism is unlikely to end and has warned that the UK must continue to remain vigilant for attacks by extremist groups or individuals. The current threat level from international terrorism remains at 'severe', meaning an 'attack is highly likely' in the UK but not imminently expected.<sup>35</sup>

Since 9/11, seven out of the eight major bomb plots in the UK have involved individuals with direct links to Al Qaeda.<sup>36</sup> Between 1999 and 2010, 134 individuals were convicted for Islamism-related terrorism offences or committed suicide attacks in the UK.<sup>37</sup> 28% had attended terrorist training camps either in the UK or in countries such as Pakistan and Afghanistan.<sup>38</sup>

The actual number of British citizens who travelled abroad for terrorist training, including those who have not been convicted, however, is much higher. In November 2008, the Security Service revealed that over 4,000 British Muslims had attended terrorist training camps in Afghanistan and Pakistan.<sup>39</sup> In 2009, the government estimated that up to 20 British nationals had travelled to Yemen to be trained by AQAP.<sup>40</sup> In September 2009, it was reported that the numbers going to fight or attend terrorist training with al-Shabaab in Somalia, 'has more than quadrupled to at least 100 since 2004.'<sup>41</sup> In January 2010, it was reported that close to a dozen young British Muslims had joined al-Shabaab over the past year<sup>42</sup> and in September of that year, Jonathan Evans stated that there were a 'significant number' of UK residents training in al-Shabaab camps.<sup>43</sup> It is highly likely that such individuals have gained the operational know-how on how to commit terrorist attacks.



**AFTERMATH: AN EXPLODED LONDON BUS**  
**SOURCE: PRESS ASSOCIATION**

Al Qaeda's ideology is just as potent in inspiring individuals to commit attacks without direct guidance from either the group or its affiliates. There have been a number of attempts in the UK that have involved individuals with no known direct links to Al Qaeda or any of its affiliated groups. These include Roshonara Choudhary, who in May 2010 stabbed Stephen Timms MP because he supported Britain's role in the war in Iraq. Convicted in November 2010, she admitted to being influenced by the English speaking Al Qaeda cleric Anwar al-Awlaki, who is currently based in Yemen, after watching his videos on YouTube.<sup>44</sup> Andrew



Ibrahim, a British convert to Islam convicted in July 2009 for planning a suicide attack in shopping centre in Bristol,<sup>45</sup> was also inspired by Al Qaeda's ideology and literature.

Other than possible revenge attacks, Bin Laden's death will have little effect in the immediate future for the UK's national security. The country still very much faces a national security threat from Al Qaeda and its affiliates as well as from individuals inspired by the group's ideology.

## **HOMELAND SECURITY APPARATUS**

The threat of retaliatory attacks in the wake of Bin Laden's death underscores the vital need to continually enhance our homeland security apparatus. As Al Qaeda and its affiliates have a well-known talent for organisational and operational adaptation, the UK's homeland security apparatus needs to cultivate its capacity for continual improvement and renewal.

Britain's approach to homeland security has altered significantly in the last decade, in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks in the US and the 7/7 attacks in London. There has been much debate over whether the global nature of the threat posed by Islamism-inspired terrorism would be better met by moving to a more centralised model on the lines of the US Department of Homeland Security – although, in some ways, the UK was better prepared for the threat posed by domestic Islamism-inspired terrorism than the United States was due to its long experience with the IRA.

Yet the nature of the current threat, which has successfully attracted adherents who are British citizens working within a supranational, decentralized terrorist movement, presents unique challenges beyond those encountered in the struggles with the IRA. Globalisation has made the struggle with global Islamist terrorism even more challenging, as worldwide travel and communication is easier than ever before. For example, Anwar al-Awlaki has delivered sermons broadcast from Yemen to various Islamic societies and mosques in London. Websites such as YouTube have also been a significant resource for jihadist propagandists to spread their message.

In the past decade, the British government has made significant strides in addressing the threat posed by terrorist operations and recruitment online in their Cyber Security Strategy, operating through the Cyber Security Operations Centre (CSOC), a multi-agency body hosted at GCHQ and responsible for analysing trends and improving technical responses to the host of online threats against the UK.<sup>46</sup> There is also the Office of Cyber Security which operates alongside the CSOC, based within the Cabinet Office and tasked with '...provid[ing] strategic leadership across government for cyber security issues.' Cyber Security has been increasingly strengthened over the past five years, and has received a budget commitment of £650 million in new investment over the next four years.<sup>47</sup>

Since the publication of the first National Security Strategy in Britain in 2008, annual reappraisal has resulted in shifts to this strategy to reflect the changing nature of Al Qaeda and its affiliates. Structurally, the UK has remained reliant on the Lead Government Department model through the Home Office, which oversees much of counterterrorism and



homeland security-related issues. The Government has benefitted from the strengthened Civil Contingencies Secretariat (CCS), which was moved to the Cabinet Office in June 2001 to give it added leverage throughout the government and better ability to coordinate governmental response to emergencies like terrorism.<sup>48</sup> The CCS has since become centrally engaged in the homeland security structure, ensuring government continuity in the event of a crisis, delivering a wide-ranging capabilities programme on government, public sector and community resilience, and working across central government and in support of regional governments.

The coalition government's creation of a National Security Council chaired by the Prime Minister represented a significant change to organisation of the homeland security apparatus, and has enabled the new government to demonstrate its commitment to improving national security. The NSC has its own secretariat in the Cabinet Office headed by the new post of National Security Adviser, and has been described as a 'half way house' between the US and UK models of homeland security.<sup>49</sup>

The 2010 Strategic Defense and Security Review (SDSR) has also provided innovative additions to the UK's homeland security strategy – although its proposal to create a '...small permanent [armed forces] capability to enhance cross-government homeland security crisis response', without providing any further detail about what segment of the armed forces this would involve.<sup>50</sup>

The UK government is also committed to retaining an appreciation for concerns that excessively zealous measures intended to enhance homeland security may restrict civil liberties, and lead to policies which effectively reverse the adage of 'innocent until proven guilty.' The Protections of Freedoms Bill of 2011, currently in Committee Stage in Parliament, has committed to redressing some of the supposed excesses which may have resulted from the rash of homeland security measures taken in the past decade, including the permanent reduction of the maximum detention period to 14 days, and the repeal of existing stop and search powers.

The numerous threats of retaliatory attacks which have followed the demise of Bin Laden will put the effectiveness of the homeland security apparatus to the test in the short term. In the long term, that apparatus will need to continually adapt to the shifting nature of the threat of global jihadist terrorism.



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## RECOMMENDATIONS

The demise of Bin Laden presents the UK government with a number of opportunities on how to: tackle Al Qaeda and Islamism-inspired terrorism both at home and abroad; improve its homeland security apparatus; manage negative perceptions of Bin Laden's death; manage its relationship with Pakistan; continue its efforts in Afghanistan; and move forward the debate in the Middle East.

### TACKLE AL QAEDA AND ISLAMISM-INSPIRED TERRORISM

It is difficult to predict how Bin Laden's death can affect the way Al Qaeda, its affiliates and supporters operate in the long term. However, in the short-term, the government should:

- **Capitalise on bin Laden's death and support us efforts to kill or capture key Al Qaeda leaders to limit the network's ideological and operational reach.** Key figureheads that provide ideological, theological and operational guidance should be targeted. These include individuals such as Ayman al-Zawahiri, widely anticipated to take over bin Laden's leadership; Nasir al-Wahishi, head of Al Qaeda in Yemen; and Anwar al-Awlaki, al Qaeda's English propagandist based in Yemen.
- **Enhance conflict building in failed/failing states** that have become safe havens for terrorist training in countries such as Yemen and Somalia.
- **Improve cyber security** as well support the development of a counter-narrative to al Qaeda, specifically on online forums.
- **Fight the ideological battle both at home and abroad.** The government should combat the extreme Islamist ideology propagated on British university campuses that creates an environment for radicalisation. Abroad, it must support and promote democratic values, consistent with the aspirations of the people of North Africa and the Middle East.

### SUCCEED IN AFGHANISTAN

The effect of Bin Laden's death will have no discernable impact on insurgent activity in Afghanistan at the operational level. In continuing its efforts in Afghanistan, the UK government should:

- **Recognise that Bin Laden's impact on insurgent operations on the ground in Afghanistan was effectively non-existent, and to resist any temptation to deviate from the current strategy.** For all the continued difficulties and failures in Afghanistan, the strategy of providing sufficient resources to clear and then hold population centres, in order that development can take place to address the root causes of conflict is the right one, and must continue.
- **Reassure the GoA and Afghan civilians that Western engagement, both military and civilian, will continue in the wake of Osama Bin Laden's death.** The most ironic and disastrous outcome of Bin Laden's death would be for it to precipitate precisely the kind of premature withdrawal that both he and the Taliban always



demanded, potentially condemning Afghanistan to a return to the conditions that gave rise to the Taliban and Al Qaeda in the first place.

- **Should use, along with the GoA and others in Afghanistan, Bin Laden's death as an opportunity to encourage Taliban fighters and other extremist groups in Afghanistan to renounce their support for terrorist activity.** Of the estimated 30-40,000 Taliban insurgents fighting in Afghanistan, it is reckoned that between 80-90 per cent do not belong to the ideological hardcore. Persuading this majority, whose grievances are rooted in conditions of poverty, insecurity and disillusionment with the GoA, to turn their back on the Taliban is a vital component of success in the conflict. This will require tangible progress in the development of governmental and local institutions, however, and the perception on all sides that this progress is sustainable beyond the withdrawal of NATO forces.
- **Work with both the GoA and international allies to enhance the development of economic alternatives to conflict in Afghanistan and to integrate the country with international markets.** Though economic strategies designed to increase Afghanistan's internal economic capacity are well underway, the development of a coherent strategy to connect the country to international markets is vital if the country is to become economically sustainable in the long-term.
- **Take the opportunity of Bin Laden's death to recalibrate the debate about the significance of Afghanistan away from simply 'combating terrorism', and towards a recognition of Afghanistan's vital strategic importance.** Resting at the heart of Eurasia, in the vicinity of four and potentially five (including Iran) nuclear-armed powers, Afghanistan's strategic significance is not to be underestimated. Ensuring the development of a stable and viable government in Afghanistan is necessary not just to safeguard against global terrorism, but also to help further stability and progress in one of the most volatile and strategically important locations on earth.

## TACKLE THE PAKISTAN RELATIONSHIP

The disturbing fact that Bin Laden was hiding in plain sight in Pakistan suggests that the extent of cooperation with Al Qaeda and its affiliates by elements of the Pakistani state may be far worse than previously realised. The UK should:

- **Reform the way in which aid is given to Pakistan, tying funding to meaningful action against the elements of the security and intelligence apparatus that aid and abet ISAF enemies.** This measure should be part of a new strategy, forged in concert with the US, with the direct leadership of the Foreign Secretary and the US Secretary of State.
- **Aid should also be dispensed in a way that incentivises better governance – a deficiency which has contributed to Pakistan's dysfunctional double-dealing.** This should be incorporated into a wider strategy of providing incentives for political



**US DRONES PATROL ABOVE PAKISTAN**  
**SOURCE: REUTERS**



reform across the troubled region of the Middle East, where long-oppressed populations have come out to demand full political rights in the Arab Spring.

- **Consider incentivising Pakistani cooperation by extending military and economic ties with India**, which would play upon the Government's fears of Indian hegemony in the region.
- **Support the US in pushing for increased scope for intelligence and military counterterrorism operations within Pakistan.** Islamabad's claims that its sovereignty is compromised by such an approach are no longer legitimate given the circumstances surrounding Bin Laden's killing.

## IMPROVE OUTCOMES IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The death of Bin Laden, who long profited from the oppression and human misery rife in the Middle East, gives the UK, and indeed the world, the opportunity to reorient the current debate to the positive change that can, and must, take place in this region if we are to prevail in the GWOT. To this end government should:

- **Use the death of Bin Laden as an opportunity to renew its commitment to strengthening its alliances with key allies in the Middle East**, and work to create the conditions in which extremism cannot develop a foothold, and terrorists will no longer have safe haven.
- **The demands for political freedom that have swept through much of the Middle East provide an apt opportunity to include a more robust, pro-democracy, institution-building and development component into the overall strategy behind the GWOT.** Free societies are far less likely to succumb to the forces of extremism than autocracies, so participants in the GWOT have a clear interest in supporting any movement with the potential to create freer societies in the realm in which jihadism has flourished.
- **Offer concrete support to transitioning countries like Tunisia and Egypt, for instance, by helping to strengthen the education and health infrastructures or offer advice in drafting new constitutions.** Secondments or exchanges between the civil service may also be a helpful way to support these states in building sustainable and free societies.
- **Recognise that the struggle against militant Islamism is as much a battle for ideas as it is a conflict in the regular sense. Supporting Muslim leaders to voice the legitimate counter-narrative to the Islamist world view must take a higher priority.**
- **Continue to do everything in its power to isolate and punish the Syrian and Iranian governments for their continued tyranny and longstanding sponsorship of terrorism.** In particular, the UK should work with the EU and UN to push for swift targeted sanctions against the Syrian regime in light of its ongoing campaign to brutally suppress protestors. If cooperation is not forthcoming from international bodies, the UK should pursue sanctions in concert with other allies or, if necessary, independently.
- **Make clear that the UK will not acknowledge the legitimacy of any organisation or political body that embraces the legacy of Bin Laden, including Hamas,**



which offered one of the strongest expressions of regret at his demise. Hamas's open embrace of Bin Laden should signal to any serious person that they are not a party that anyone committed to the 'peace process' can negotiate with.

- **In concert with its allies, do all in its power to convince Fatah to renounce its power its power-sharing deal with Hamas**, renew efforts to marginalize Hamas in any way necessary and encourage Fatah to continue the—albeit slow—progress they had been making away from extremism and towards building a prosperous, stable and terror-free Palestinian state.

## ENHANCE THE HOMELAND SECURITY APPARATUS

The UK government has the opportunity to reaffirm its commitment to avert domestic terrorism and improve its current security apparatus. The government should:

- **Shorten the five year review period for the National Security Strategy to a bi-annual National Security Review**, to facilitate continual reassessment of the effectiveness of its security policies.
- **Clarify its intention, stated in the 2010 SDSR, to create a small permanent [armed forces] capability to enhance cross-government homeland security crisis response.** They should lay out in detail what this capability would consist of and beginning the process of bringing this initiative to reality.
- **Work to support the new structures of the NSC so that it may establish itself as the central authority on security matters.**
- **Continue to invest in the Office for Security and Counterterrorism**, and further streamline the CONTEST counterterrorism guidelines by ensuring their adoption and implementation by the relevant departments.
- **Retain its commitment to protecting civil liberties** by keeping the more controversial aspects of homeland security, such as detention policies and surveillance, under constant consideration for their effectiveness, mindful of the threat of becoming over-intrusive.

## MANAGE PERCEPTIONS AROUND BIN

### LADEN'S DEATH

The government has the opportunity to re-emphasize its commitment to winning the GWOT, both at home and abroad, and to give itself a strong role in shaping the wider world's perceptions of the importance of his demise. The government should:

- **Dispel conspiracy theories that Bin**

**Laden was not actually killed, and encourage the US to release as much**



**OSAMA BIN LADEN & AYMAN AL-ZAWAHIRI**  
SOURCE: SCRAPE TV



**information as possible to confirm his identity.** This includes providing a more detailed report of the DNA test results, which reportedly confirm Bin Laden's identity with 99.9% accuracy.

- **Publicly criticise and condemn individuals and groups that have embraced Bin Laden's legacy and expressed grief at his death.**
- **Continue to emphasise in the strongest terms that Bin Laden's death is a victory for the entire world, but particularly for Muslim majority countries, which have suffered disproportionately.** As David Cameron has pointed out, Bin Laden was '...a man who posed as a leader of Muslims but was actually a mass murderer of Muslims all over the world,' and killed more Muslims than people of any other faith.



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