

“Defending our Nation against its enemies is the first and fundamental commitment of the Federal Government. Today, that task has changed dramatically. Enemies in the past needed great armies and great industrial capabilities to endanger America. Now, shadowy networks of individuals can bring great chaos and suffering to our shores for less than it costs to purchase a single tank. Terrorists are organized to penetrate open societies and to turn the power of modern technologies against us.”

President George W. Bush, 2002 National Security Strategy

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Terrorism

Terrorists May Be Rehearsing at Sea

A sharp increase in armed assaults on ships in Southeast Asian waters has maritime security watchers worried that militants might be rehearsing for a terrorist strike at sea. The number of attempts and attacks on vessels passing through Southeast Asian waters is twice as high as compared to other commercial waterways around the globe. London-based maritime observer James Copinger-Symes said the attacks are getting more violent, more frequent, and more organized. He added that the number of oil and chemical tankers targeted is on the rise.

Andrew Tan of the Singapore-based Institute for Defense and Strategic Studies says that police have already uncovered terrorist plots to sink a ship in the Malacca Strait and crash a hijacked chemical tanker into Singapore’s port. An April 2004 report on worldwide threats to shipping, published by the Office of Naval Intelligence, lists an incident involving Abu Sayyaf militants.

Terrorism expert Rohan Gunaratna pointed out that

the maritime domain is the least policed environment in which terrorist groups have shown interest. “The Indonesian navy has been in a decrepit state for quite some time now. They are not able to adequately patrol and protect their waterways, in particular the Malacca Strait,” says Tan. Over a quarter of the world’s trade, half of its oil, and much of its liquefied natural gas pass through the poorly secured Malacca and Singapore Straits. As many as 50,000 large ships use the waterway each year. An attack on the Strait of Malacca would be a strike at the heart of Asia’s economy. The United States offered to help with joint patrols in the straits, but Indonesia and Malaysia rejected the offer. *(Combined Dispatches)*

Syria’s Mysterious Attacks

Until the mysterious gun battle between armed assailants and security forces in its capital, Damascus, Syria had been relatively free of the unrest that has gripped the rest of the Middle East since the invasion of Iraq. The Syrian government disclosed no new information about the identity or possible motives of gunmen who set off bombs in the city’s diplomatic district.

Although Syrian authorities are pointing fingers at Islamic militants, many in Washington claim the attack was orchestrated by the Syrian government to incite sympathy from the United States. Why Islamic militants would want to attack Syria, which is on the U.S. State Department list of countries that sponsor terrorism, is unclear. The United States has long accused Syria of aiding terrorist groups and most recently of failing to stop militants from crossing its border with Iraq. In this context, it is quite possible that the Syrian government staged or allowed a minor incident to occur to demonstrate that it too was a victim of terrorism.

On the other hand, an actual terrorist attack by any number of organizations is quite plausible. The modus operandi of the attacks is compatible with that of Al Qaeda and its affiliated organizations. In the 1970s and 1980s the Syrian government faced the threat of an Islamic uprising by the Muslim Brotherhood, a forerunner of Al Qaeda, which was brutally repressed in 1982 when some 20,000 people were slaughtered in Hama. This time the intended message was that Muslim fundamentalists, after 25 years of calm, are still a threat to Syria. Clashes with Syrian Kurds over the last few months also point to Kurdish separatists as prime suspects. There are further theories that the incident was a result of infighting within the governing clique.

With bodies and evidence at its disposal, Syria can quickly establish who was responsible, but the version given to the international community will be the one that suits the country's immediate political needs. (*Combined Dispatches*)

Pacific Islands Are a Terrorist's Paradise

Border controls across Pacific island states range from lax to nonexistent. The immigration controls on small islands lack computerized passport records despite an Australian aid program funding the installation of electronic passport-tracking technology. "People could travel to three different Pacific countries within a day, without anybody knowing their movements," Prime Minister Robert Woonton of the Cook Islands said. In March, an armed man from Papua New Guinea (PNG) boarded an Air Niugini flight in Port Moresby undetected. Even more worrisome is the theft last year of the PNG Department of Foreign Affairs' entire computer system and software for processing passports, along with a quantity of blank passports. "What this means is that potentially someone using a false passport could present to Australian immigration a passport that would appear completely valid on our systems" says Australian Strategic Policy Institute director Hugh White.

The Pacific islands' archaic security systems are an example of how weak state institutions constitute a threat to the region as a whole. Money launderers and organized criminals have already eyed vulnerable Pacific islands for their activities. Last year, *The Australian* revealed the trade in passports in Nauru, the world's smallest republic, which is now on the verge of bankruptcy.

It is hard to achieve fundamental shifts in how Pacific nations conduct their affairs. Foreign Minister Phil Goff of New Zealand complained that many countries in the region have not signed or legislated the 12 UN conventions on terrorism. Australia and New Zealand will continue to provide aid to Pacific islands. New Zealand last year contributed \$1.32 million for a new Pacific security fund to boost aviation security, customs, immigration, and forensic equipment. (*Combined Dispatches*)

Pakistani Militants Arrested in Iraq

U.S. forces have arrested Lashkar-i-Taiba rebels near Baghdad, exposing for the first time links between Iraq and cells of Islamic militants operating in Kashmir. A key Lashkar operative, Pakistani national Dilshad Ahmad, was arrested with four other militants in March. Washington was trying to keep a lid on the arrest until *The Hindu* first reported it on April 1, 2004. Ahmad played a key role in Lashkar's trans-Line of Control (LoC) operations, serving between 1997 and 2001 as the organization's commander for militant camps that launched terrorist groups into Jammu and Kashmir with Pakistani military support.

President Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan banned Lashkar along with another group Jaish-e-Mohammad in January 2002. Despite the ban Lashkar operates under a new name Jamaat-ud-Dawa and has been building its military infrastructure. In preparation for the Eid festival in March, the organization raised Rs. 780 million from the sale of hides of sacrificial animals donated by followers.

The details of Lashkar's activities in Iraq are hazy. Still, the arrests are a potential embarrassment for the United States as Washington has not put pressure on its ally Pakistan to rein in Lashkar-i-Taiba, whose operatives now seem to be working against U.S. troops in Iraq. (*Combined Dispatches*)

Chemical Terrorism

Chemical Threat "Worse Than Expected"

French counterterrorism officials warned that terrorists plotting to use chemical weapons in Europe have more advanced plans than security forces previously suspected. Small groups of chemical

experts, discovered in several European countries, seem to operate separately from other cells planning conventional bomb attacks. Several of these chemical groups may have links to Islamic militants in Chechnya. Western intelligence services believe that extremists linked to Al Qaeda have conducted experiments in chemical warfare in Chechnya. “We have underestimated the terrorists’ willingness and capacity to develop chemical weapons,” a French official told the *Financial Times*.

The recent discoveries in Britain and France attest to that. In January, French police arrested five people in the Lyon suburb of Venisseux, one of which received chemical weapons training in Georgia’s Pankisi Gorge. Two of the detainees admitted planning attacks using ricin poison and botulinum bacteria. The group also has links to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Intelligence officials claim that al-Zarqawi ran chemical warfare classes in an Al Qaeda training camp in Afghanistan.

On April 6, 2004, British police uncovered a plot to use osmium tetroxide, a toxic substance with corrosive effects on eyes and skin, in a terrorist attack. Police also discovered that plotters were in contact with extremists in Pakistan. The French official said that militants within Lashkar-i-Taiba have helped develop chemical weapons skills now dispersed to several parts of the Al Qaeda network. He pointed out, “The one thing that is most clear is that the people with knowledge of chemicals are very organized. There are links between groups that have chemical expertise.” (*Combined Dispatches*)

Terror Finance

Hungarian Bomb Suspect Received Saudi Money

Hungarian police arrested Saleh Tayseer, imam of Dar-Assalam mosque, on charges of plotting to bomb a Jewish museum. Demeter Ferenci, spokesman for the mosque in Budapest, admitted it had received money from a Saudi Arabian charity. “We have received funds from the Al Haramain foundation,” he said. Several branches of Al Haramain, one of Saudi Arabia’s largest nongovernmental organizations, were blacklisted by the U.S. State Department in 2002. The list includes foundation branches in Bosnia, Indonesia, Kenya, Pakistan, and Somalia according to the State Department’s Web site.

Zoltan Bolek, the leader of Hungary’s main Islamic group, the Hungarian Islam Society, said that Saleh’s mosque received cash in suitcases and frequent visits from the Al Haramain group. The authorities are investigating any links Saleh might have had with foreign terrorist organizations.

Bolek estimated that approximately 20,000 Muslims live in Hungary and added that “1 percent” is attracted to extremist views. Hungary supported the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq and sent 300 troops, but the government says it does not consider the country to be a major target for terrorist attacks. (*Combined Dispatches*)

Al Qaeda/Osama bin Laden

A New Threat: Suicide Raids on Oil Platforms

Top Al Qaeda operative Abu Musab al-Zarqawi issued a statement claiming responsibility for a boat attack on Iraq’s Basra oil terminal. Three boats of suicide bombers blew themselves up in and around the Basra terminal zone, which is one of the most heavily guarded facilities of its kind. The attack marks the first time U.S. troops have faced suicide bombers on boats in Iraq and is the most serious attack yet on the oil industry.

The Basra terminal accounts for 85 percent of Iraq’s crude oil exports, handling around 1.7 million barrels a day. The smaller Khawr al-Amaya platform, which handles around 700,000 barrels a day reopened a day after the attack, while the main al-Basra terminal remained closed. The delay alone will cost Iraq 1 million barrels a day in lost exports. Shutting the terminals for two days translates into \$110 million in revenue lost. The editor in chief of the *Middle East Economic Survey*, Walid Khadduri, said insurance costs for tankers will increase, and ships will be pressing for more security before they use the waters. “What happened was a big setback. I understand there is no serious physical damage but it is quite a threat that they could send all these boats near it,” he added.

As al-Zarqawi pointed out in his claim of responsibility, the aim of this operation conforms to one of Al Qaeda’s tactics of striking vital economic interests. The kidnappings of Western contractors, sabotage attacks on oil pipelines in recent months, and the first big coordinated suicide bomb attack in Basra are all troubling signs of coordinated violence

across Iraq led by insurgents. The greatest worry is that the suicide boats represent a widening of the insurgency in Iraq. (*Combined Dispatches*)

Saudi Companies Linked to Al Qaeda

According to information collected by German intelligence analysts two private Saudi companies linked with suspected Al Qaeda cells in Hamburg and Indonesia also have connections to the Saudi Arabian intelligence agency. Germany's intelligence service (the BND) states that Riyadh-based companies Twaik Group and Rawasin Media Productions served as fronts for the Saudi General Intelligence Directorate. The *Chicago Tribune* reported that in the late 1990s both firms employed Reda Seyam, who is suspected by Indonesian authorities of helping finance the Bali nightclub bombing.

A year before the October 2002 Bali bombing, Seyam, at the time an employee of Rawasin, traveled to Bali where he distributed thousands of dollars to militant Islamists including convicted mastermind of the Bali bombings Imam Samudra. The *Tribune* also reported that between 1995 and 1998 Twaik deposited more than \$250,000 in bank accounts controlled by Mamoun Darkazanli, a longtime Al Qaeda associate with close ties to the September 11 hijackers in Hamburg.

Twaik's holdings inside and outside Saudi Arabia reach \$100 million a year, whereas Rawasin reports \$4 million a year from producing and selling audio and video tapes promoting Wahhabi Islam.

Al Qaeda & Cyber Threats

Old Weapons, New Terror Worries

Experts are reexamining the vulnerabilities of atomic arsenals and looking into new terror tactics in an effort to stay ahead of the terror groups' learning curve. One possible scenario is that computer hackers working for Al Qaeda would break into Russia's nuclear weapons network and "spoo" the system into believing it is being attacked, thus setting off a chain reaction and a real nuclear counterattack. Ironically, Russia's older system, which is self-contained and not connected to the Internet or other outside portals, may be less vulnerable to cyber warfare than cutting-edge U.S. systems. The U.S. Department of Defense infrastructure consists of over 2.1 million

computers, with 10,000 local area networks, and 1,000 long-distance networks. In a still-classified report by the Pentagon's Commission on Nuclear Fail-Safe, in the 1990s investigators found an "electronic back door" into the U.S. Navy's system for broadcasting nuclear launch orders to Trident submarines. "This deficiency allowed unauthorized hackers to potentially insert a launch order and transmit it to the Trident" said Bruce Blair, a nuclear security expert and former Minuteman launch officer who heads the Center for Defense Information (CDI).

The London-based digital security analyst company Mi2g, which traced the rise of electronic crime in 2003, also pointed out that "extremist group activity" had risen by several hundred percent.

A handful of Russian and U.S. nuclear experts are launching a year-long modeling exercise to identify new dangers. (*Combined Dispatches*)

Organized Crime & Terrorism

Islamic Terrorists Linked to Camorra

Italian investigators have found links between Islamic terrorist groups and the Camorra, one of Italy's main organized crime groups. "We have evidence that groups within Camorra are implicated in an exchange of weapons for drugs with terrorist groups," Peierluigi Vigna, Italy's national anti-mafia prosecutor said. Although he could not disclose the exact nature of the involvement, Vigna suggested that the links may have begun when Camorra members who converted to Islam met fellow Muslims jailed in Italy.

A top antiterrorism official in Milan said militant Islamic cells are scattered across Italy. Many of them are used to support attacks abroad but could start looking for targets inside the country. (*Combined Dispatches*)

Arms Trafficking in Bangladesh on the Rise

In a raid on government-controlled Chittagong Urea Fertilizer Limited (CUFL), the Bangladeshi police and coast guard stumbled across a massive consignment of sophisticated illegal arms and ammunition. Though it could be the largest in the history of Bangladesh, it is by no means the only significant arms seizure in the country. All the latest seizures seem to indicate the emergence of the

country as a major transit point for arms smuggling in South Asia.

Even more worrisome are reports that, in this latest seizure, the smugglers were unloading the weapons with help from local police. Few details about the consignment are known, yet the government is already taking steps to weaken the probe. One of the police officers unloading the consignment, thus one of the main suspects, is now in charge of conducting an investigation.

Equally troubling is the suggested link between the seized weapons and the growing force of radical Islamists in the country. Over the past decade a number of extremist groups have become active in Bangladesh, some of which are linked to international terrorist networks. An Al Qaeda-allied group, Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islam, has a cadre of about 15,000 men with a strong base and training camps in the Chittagong area.

At least 37 arms-smuggling syndicates are active in Chittagong, controlling the illegal arms market and the supply to terrorist groups.

March 11 Attackers Trade Drugs for Explosives

The Islamic terrorists responsible for the Madrid train bombings financed their plot with sales of hashish and ecstasy and engaged in ritual purification acts before the attacks, Interior Minister Angel Acebes said at a news conference. Using traffickers as intermediaries, the bombers swapped the drugs for 440 pounds of dynamite, while money from the drug trafficking paid for an apartment hideout, a car, and cell phones.

In charge of the group's finances was a Moroccan, Jamal Ahmidan, who had an extensive criminal record for drug trafficking but was not considered a terrorist.

Investigators have found no hard evidence directly linking major figures in Al Qaeda's terror network to the Madrid cell. Instead an equally worrisome phenomenon, which transpired in the investigation, is the complex web of alliances forged through bonds of blood and a local village. Despite the lack of proof that Al Qaeda gave an order to the cell, the bombers were happy to let Al Qaeda take responsibility for the Madrid attacks. Investigators say that the Madrid attacks resulted from an unusual collaboration of educated, middle class, and

ideologically radical Muslims with drug dealers and petty criminals. (*Combined Dispatches*)

Organized Crime

EU Unprepared for Enlargement Drug Problems

The head of the European Union (EU) drug agency, Georges Estievenart, expressed grave concern about the bloc's ability to deal with trafficking and abuse of drugs in light of the EU's historic enlargement on May 1, 2004. European police sources say that Russian criminals are well established in Poland and the Baltic states, which are important transit points for Afghan opium destined for Europe. After expansion the EU is sharing 2,000 kilometers (1,250 miles) of borders with Russia. In the Balkans, Albania has become a focal point for smuggling narcotics, weapons, and people into the European Union. The well-established Balkan route for transporting heroin from Turkey has a north branch running through Serbia and Croatia entering the EU through its new members Hungary and Slovenia. The other turns west crossing into Albania and then to Italy by speedboat. Marco Nicovic, an attorney and former chief of Belgrade police, estimates that four tons of heroin pass through the Balkans every month.

Estievenart said that the situation in the bloc is not good and that changes in trafficking and drug use in Central Asia, the Caucasus, Russia, and Ukraine are a "time bomb" for both Eastern and Central European countries as well as other EU members. The use of heroin has risen exponentially in Lithuania and Estonia to twice the EU average. The number of heroin addicts in Russia is around 2.5 million.

Estierevan also warned that the removal of borders could facilitate traffickers' movements through European countries. (*Combined Dispatches*)

Cyber Threats

Internet Users Hooked by Identity Theft Schemes

Identity fraud attacks known as "phishing" are rife on the Internet. A phishing scam looks and reads like a legitimate e-mail but is actually a trap to obtain bank information such as PIN numbers and passwords from Internet bank users. People are sent an e-mail claiming to be from their bank, which asks the person to verify or change their password and

account details. Mail filtering vendor MessageLabs announced an 800-fold increase in the number of phishing e-mails in the last six months. In September 2003, MessageLab tracked 279 phishing e-mails, but by January 2004 that number had risen to 337,050.

In the United States, phishing e-mails have masqueraded as mail from Citibank, eBay, Wachovia, Visa, and Bank of America, while in the UK, customers of Barclays, NatWest, and Lloyds TBS are among the targets. E-mail scams have cost Britain's banks undisclosed million of pounds. As the scams are getting more sophisticated, that bill is bound to rise.

The chief privacy officer at EarthLink, Les Seagraves, says "A year ago most people involved in these scams were teenagers and other people fooling around." The main culprits now are members of organized crime groups and terrorist support groups.

"Identity theft is the single greatest type of consumer fraud," said Christopher Wray, an assistant attorney general at the Justice Department, "and phishing is the identity theft du jour." (*Combined Dispatches*)

Weapons Proliferation

A Lucrative Explosives Market

Terrorists' use of fertilizer ingredients to produce bombs is not a new development. More alarming is the apparent ease with which terrorists gain access to large amounts of ammonium nitrate fertilizer. With hardly any regulation or government oversight, ammonium nitrate is produced in millions of tons a year for agricultural and mining industries. The consequence of even a small percentage of this chemical falling into the wrong hands proved to be devastating in the Oklahoma City bombing, Bali bombing, the 1993 New York City Twin Tower attack, and the 2003 Istanbul bombings.

Last month, British police seized 500 kilograms of ammonium nitrate stockpiled by terrorists. There have been three large thefts of explosives just in the past month: 1.4 tons of ammonium nitrate stolen in Thailand, along with 56 sticks of dynamite and 176 detonators; 660 kilograms (1,400 pounds) of dynamite and 5,000 detonators stolen from a storage

depot in Norway; and 3.5 tons of fertilizer stolen from a warehouse in Australia.

Each theft sparked concerns of terrorist involvement. Certainly terrorist cells could have conducted these thefts and stored the explosive for a potential local terror operation. On the other hand various gangs and organized crime groups have probably picked up on the fact that selling explosives to terrorists can yield hefty profits. Organized crime groups with well-established trafficking channels could supply explosives to terrorist groups globally. The investigation into the Madrid train bombings revealed such cooperation between criminals and terrorists, which resulted in an exchange of drugs for explosives.

Amid growing concerns of a terrorist attack, Australia's biggest supplier is the first to pull the product off the market. The company, Incited Pivot, called for retailers to return 80 percent of the 40,000 tons of ammonium nitrate fertilizer.

Governments can take coordinated steps to tighten controls over chemical substances that could be used as explosives. But persisting demand, as terrorists will always have an appetite for explosives, will only drive up the market value of substances such as ammonium nitrate, creating a lucrative black market for such commodities. (*KGersak*)

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