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Global Terrorism Threat in 2006

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Highlights in 2006:

- Most nations will recognise terrorism as their tier-one security threat;
- Iraq will emerge as the international epicentre for the production of global terrorism;
- In Afghanistan, the terrorist threat will grow;
- Parallel to Al Qaeda, the Iraq-based Zarkawi will build a global network;
- Rifts over strategy will develop within the global jihad movement.

The Context:

Three profound developments characterise the contemporary threat landscape. First, the singular threat posed by Al Qaeda will be surpassed by a larger threat posed by the global jihad movement. A conglomerate of four-dozen groups, linked ideologically, will wage both local and global jihad campaigns worldwide. Second, Iraq has replaced Afghanistan as the epicentre of jihad. Like Afghanistan produced the last generation of fighters, the insurgency in Iraq is producing and catalysing a new generation of urban and suicidal terrorists and guerrillas. Third, the increasing porosity of the borders between the threat groups has led to greater cooperation between them. Greater exchange of ideas, technology, and personnel between the groups has increased the scale and magnitude of threat.

Assessment:

As the terrorist threat globalises, most governments will recognise terrorism as the tier-one national security threat. Despite enhanced government investment to combat terrorism, the year 2006 will witness the spread of terrorism with increasing frequency and lethality. With an escalation in attacks in Iraq and the renewal of violence in Afghanistan, the threat of politically-motivated violence will grow both in the Middle East and Asia. The primary threat to North America, Europe and Australasia will be from the continuing radicalisation of the émigré pockets.

Although Al Qaeda, the most hunted terrorist group in history, will decline in power, strength and size, the threat posed by the global jihad movement will grow. The intermitted successes by governments against terrorist cells planning and preparing attacks will be overshadowed by the tempo of the insurgency in Iraq. The momentum of attacks in Iraq will influence Jihadi

and Islamist groups worldwide to both support as well as attack targets of the US, its allies and friends. Like Osama bin Laden built a global terrorist network using Afghanistan, Abu Musab al Zarkawi is using Iraq to build a global network parallel to Al Qaeda. Wherever the leaders and key operatives have been arrested, Zarkawi is seeking to control Al Qaeda cells from North America to Northeast Asia. The insurgency in Iraq is breathing new life to a global jihad movement.

Icons of Jihad:

Although Al Qaeda, the operational organisation, has declined in strength, its ideology of global jihad has infected and is driving forward the global jihad agenda. Other groups are emulating Al Qaeda signature tactics – particularly suicide. The operational knowledge to conduct coordinated simultaneous attacks particularly against high profile Western targets killing, maiming and injuring civilians is spreading.

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

Threat in the Middle East:

With increasing US investment in the creation of new intelligence platforms and collaboration with Pakistan's Inter-Services-Intelligence, the threat to the core leadership of Al Qaeda will increase. In 2006, the Al Qaeda leadership is likely to suffer unprecedented losses. While Iraq will remain his principal hunting ground, Zarkawi will seek to attack overseas. He is likely to repeat his Jordan-style chemical attack of April 2004 and suicide attacks on three international hotels on November 9, 2005, either in the Middle East or the West. Over time, Zarkawi's jihadi support cells will mature and mutate into attack cells. The networks from Iraq have penetrated at least ten European countries, the Maghreb, Levant, the Gulf, and is seeking to establish a presence in Asia.

Threat in Asia:

The post 9-11 environment witnessed both the strengthening of existing groups and the emergence of new jihadist and Islamist groups in South Asia and Southeast Asia. Despite tremendous successes by General Musharraf to combat the Al Qaeda threat, the local jihad groups in Pakistan are providing support to Al Qaeda. Having shared common training infrastructure with Al Qaeda, the Pakistani groups - notably Laskar-e-Toiba (LeT), Jayash-e-Mohamed (JeM), and Harakat-ul-Jihadi-Islami (HuJI) - are supporting Al Qaeda to survive. To compensate for the dismantling of the camps in Afghanistan, Al Qaeda's closest ally in Southeast Asia, Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), has established a number of facilities and opportunities for training both in the Philippines and in Indonesia. As the Southeast Asian vanguard of jihad groups, JI has been training the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and other Southeast Asian groups. The ideological,

financial, and technological collaboration between these groups have increased their resilience.

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

Government failure to control the jihadist threat in Bangladesh is likely to embolden Jamiatul Mujahidin Bangladesh (JMB). The group is likely to mount attacks overseas starting with India. Unless the international community intervenes, the insurgency in Nepal is likely to deteriorate further culminating in a Maoist government in 2006 or 2007. With the failure of Norway to develop a structured peace process, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) is likely to assassinate key political leaders and military chiefs and mount spectacular attacks in the south of Sri Lanka in 2006. Despite sporadic terrorist attacks in their capitals and in northern India, the Indian and Pakistani leaders will work towards peace in the internationally-disputed Kashmir. In Afghanistan, the bulk of the US forces will withdraw, handing over security to NATO forces. Asia’s most threatened leaders Musharraf and Karzai are likely to face renewed assassination attempts.

Conclusion:

To reduce the global terrorist threat, three measures are necessary. First, support Muslim elites to develop a robust response to the ideology of global jihad. Second, maintain intelligence-led operational effectiveness on the ground to neutralise operational cells. Third, build capacity and resolve to terminate regional conflicts that produce human suffering, internal displacement, refugee flows and production of future terrorists. Without developing an ideological counterweight to the ideology of global jihad and resolving regional conflicts where Muslims are suffering, the terrorist groups and their support bases will grow. They will replenish their human losses and material wastage. As such governments must invest not only in the immediate operational measures but in strategic counter terrorism that take the long view.

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