

# TRANSNATIONAL THREATS UPDATE

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*“Globalization has broadened the number of threats and challenges facing the United States ... The nation requires more from our Intelligence Community than ever before and consequently we need to do our business better, both internally, through greater collaboration across disciplines and externally, by engaging more of the expertise available outside the Intelligence Community.”*

—The Honorable J. Michael McConnell, Director of National Intelligence, Statement for the Record to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, February 27, 2008

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## Terrorism

### “Jihad Recollections”

In April 2009, al Fursan (the Knights) Media released its first magazine, *Jihad Recollections*. Totalling 70 pages, the publication is the second English-language jihadi magazine. In contrast to its predecessor, which appeared to be little more than recycled translations of existing jihadi material, *Jihad Recollections* contains original essays, including “The Predications of the Conquering of Rome,” “Obama’s Questionable Economic Stimulus Package,” “Staying in Shape without Weights,” and “The Political Implication of the CIA’s Scandal in Algeria.” Some of the essays are said to have been written by Osama bin Laden and Ayman al Zawahiri, although the authenticity of these claims is unknown.

According to several blogs, Samir Khan is the founder of al Fursan Media and the brains behind *Jihad Recollections*. Born in Saudi Arabia, Khan emigrated with his family to Queens, New York, when he was seven years old. Khan is the author of the blog “Inshallahshaheed,” which translates to “a martyr if God wills.” According to a 2007 *New York Times* article, Khan appeared to be a “normal” teenager until August 2001 when he attended a week-long Islamic summer camp. It was at this camp, which was sponsored by the fundamentalist but nonviolent Islamic Organization

of North America (IONA), that Khan was inspired to become a more committed and fundamentalist Muslim. Khan allegedly desires to meet bin Laden and “would not rule out picking up a weapon himself one day.”

Al Fursan Media was launched in October 2008. According an online press release, the mission of al Fursan is “to expose the reality o these Neo-Crusaders and her allies, revive the ‘*Aqeedah* and Spirit of the Muslim *Ummah* in the West, counter the slinky deceit of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century House of Negroes, respond to the aggressive campaign of the disbelievers who openly hate our unadulterated religion, and show the Western people the ultimate alternative: the religion of Islam.” In November 2008, al Fursan released a one-hour video entitled *Voting in the Midst of the Neo-Crusade*. Another video, *My Eyes Wept*, was released in March 2009.

### Hezbollah’s Global Reach

Hezbollah, founded in 1982 following the Israeli invasion and subsequent occupation of southern Lebanon, has expanded into a global organization spanning several continents. Although Hezbollah is concerned primarily with domestic Lebanese affairs, it has been tied to international acts of terror and is now said to be operating throughout the globe, including in the Americas, Africa, and the Middle East.

#### *The Americas*

Hezbollah has long been involved in narcotics and human trafficking in South America, particularly along the tri-border region of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay. The organization’s reach, however, appears to be spreading beyond the tri-border area and into Mexico. Evidence suggests that Hezbollah is developing ties to Mexican

narcotics syndicates that control transit routes into the United States. These ties worry U.S. officials in light of the ongoing and increasingly violent war between Mexican authorities and narcotraffickers, which appears to be destabilizing Mexico. Current and former U.S. law enforcement, defense, and counterterrorism officials believe that Hezbollah is using narcotics trafficking routes to smuggle drugs and people into the United States—operations that not only finance the group’s activities but also threaten to increase Hezbollah’s ability to smuggle operatives and weapons into the United States.

To date, there have been no confirmed cases of terrorists transiting the U.S.-Mexican border to carry out attacks within the United States. Hezbollah members and supporters are known, however, to have entered the United States via Mexico, including Salim Boughader Mucharraffile and Moahmoud Youssef Kourani. Mucharraffile was arrested in 2002 for smuggling 200 people, including some suspected Hezbollah supporters, into the United States, while Kourani illegally crossed the border in 2001 and was later charged with and convicted of providing “material support and resources...to Hezbollah.”

### *West Africa*

According to reports, Africa is becoming a haven for Hezbollah due to weak governance, porous borders, and limited security on the continent. Hezbollah has allegedly been operating within Africa since the early 1980s and currently dominates the illicit gem trade in parts of the continent. Many analysts attribute Hezbollah’s strength in Africa to Charles Taylor, the former president of Liberia, who protected the group during the 1990s. Despite experiencing less than favorable conditions since Taylor’s forced exile in 2003, Hezbollah’s presence and activities in Africa have persisted.

West Africa is currently considered Hezbollah’s “most critical area of operation outside of the Middle East.” Hezbollah has exploited the region, using it for fundraising, recruitment, and as a base in which to operate gray and illegal business that helps fund operations elsewhere. Increasing support for Hezbollah has allowed it to tap into established ethnic Lebanese businesses in Liberia, Sierra Leone, the Ivory Coast, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. There is evidence of additional Hezbollah activity in Senegal, Cameroon, Mali, Guinea, and Namibia.

According to South Africa’s International Relations and Security Network (ISN), “Hezbollah’s virtually unchecked presence and activities on the continent pose a security threat and works to further entrench illegal and corrupt

practices in some of Africa’s weakest states and key industries.”

### *Egypt*

In mid-December, Egyptian security forces arrested a group of 25 Egyptians, Palestinians, and Lebanese for allegedly being Hezbollah agents. Since then, the Egyptian state prosecutor has charged these individuals with forming a cell to smuggle weapons across the border into Gaza, to monitor the Suez Canal, and to plot attacks against Egypt. Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hezbollah, has said that one of the men arrested was a party member performing logistical work to aid the Palestinian cause, that no more than 10 of the accused had any links to his party, and has denied that they were planning to act against Egypt.

Hezbollah’s presence in a Sunni Muslim state is concerning, especially to the Mubarak regime. During Israel’s assault on Hamas in Gaza, Nasrallah accused Mubarak of cooperating with Israel and called on Egyptians to protest against the regime. Since the arrest of the 25 suspects, Arab mediators have been attempting to ease the tensions between Egypt and Hezbollah. The Egyptian government has demanded information on any individuals that have been involved in covert Hezbollah activity in order to try them. Additionally, Israeli media outlets have reported that “Mubarak expects Hezbollah to sign a document stating that the Lebanon-based organization regrets having made use of Egyptian soil for illegal purposes that could put the country in danger.” Regardless of the extent of Hezbollah’s activities in Egypt, the Egyptian government perceives Hezbollah activity as a threat to Egyptian stability and security and is attempting to combat the threat.

There is evidence suggesting that Hezbollah’s activity and influence extends beyond these three regions. For example, in 2008, Azeri Intelligence discovered and foiled a Hezbollah plot to attack the Israeli embassy in Azerbaijan. Hezbollah’s increasingly global presence is worrisome and demands greater international intelligence cooperation.

### **Using Google to Target Terrorist Web sites**

The British government has announced plans to teach pro-Western, moderate Islamic groups how to bolster their rank in Google search results. By doing this, the British government hopes to drown out extremist voices online and provide an alternative to radical Web sites. A spokesman from the British Home Office confirmed that search engine optimization training is part of the

government's antiradicalization strategy. The program is currently in the early stages.

Academics doubt the effectiveness of search engine optimization. A report produced by the International Center for the Study of Radicalization (ICSR) said that "young Muslims were much more likely to be directed to extremist material online by web forums and offline associates than by Google or other search engines." Other experts believe that online radicalization is only one component of the process, and perhaps not a very important one.

In addition to the search engine optimization project, the British Home and Foreign Offices have also set up the Research, Information, and Communications Unit, which produces and distributes anti-extremist propaganda.

### **Al Qaeda and Obama**

On April 20, a new audio message from Ayman al Zawahiri, al Qaeda's second-in-command, began appearing on jihadi Web sites. The message, released by al Qaeda's media wing al Sahab, is entitled "Six Years since the Invasion of Iraq; and, Thirty Years since the Signing of Peace Treaty with Israel" and addresses the peace agreement between Israel and Egypt and the U.S. invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. The message differs from previous ones because it contains no English subtitles and is edited with extracts from recent Arabic TV interviews with Arab political analysts.

The first part of the message focuses on the repercussions of the Camp David Accords: "One of the most important results of the agreement is removing Egypt from the arena of the Arab-Israeli struggle, and therefore Israel took control of the region and occupied Lebanon a few times, attacked the nuclear reactor in Iraq, and, lastly, it killed, destroyed, and damaged in Gaza, and the Arabs, on top of all the Egyptian government, did not flinch." This message is not new—recent videos by Osama bin Laden and al Zawahiri have called for Muslims to rise up and retaliate on behalf of the Palestinians and have singled out Egypt for its refusal to open its border with Gaza to allow Palestinians entry into Egypt. Zawahiri also criticizes the Mecca Agreement, in which Hamas and Fatah agreed to form a government of national unity, and other international resolutions pertaining to the Israeli-Arab conflict.

The second part of Zawahiri's message focuses on the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq, claiming that it has been an overwhelming failure: "Regarding Iraq, six years has passed since its invasion by the crusaders, and thanks due to Allah six years of loss, failure, and American

involvement in a lake of two wars with the Islamic World. They don't know how to pull out from them without defeat, losses, and economic bleeding." Zawahiri then compares Obama's decision to withdraw U.S. troops from Iraq to the U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam in the early 1970s, claiming that it represents a victory for the jihadi powers. He also criticizes Obama's attempt to reach out to the Muslim world, claiming, "America came to us with a new face, trying to trick us. A face that calls for change, which is our change—to give up on our faith and rights—not changing their criminality, aggression, larceny and bewilderedness." Finally, Zawahiri asserts that Obama won the election merely because he was able to exploit the U.S. failure in Iraq, which represents a victory for al Qaeda.

In his diatribe on the invasion of Iraq, al Zawahiri also addresses Iran's role in Iraq and Afghanistan. Zawahiri criticizes the "dangerous role of Iran...in cooperating with the crusader invader against the Muslims in Iraq and Afghanistan" and the failure of Shi'ite clerics to issue fatwas urging jihad against the invaders. Although Zawahiri's discussion of Iran ends with this, it is an interesting topic for him to bring up. This criticism could be an attempt to draw attention to the divisions between Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims in Iraq, or serve as evidence that perhaps Iran is not cooperating with al Qaeda, as some have asserted.

Zawahiri's message ends with two messages, one for the American people and one for Muslims. In his message for the American people, he claims that Obama has not changed Bush's policy toward the region as the United States is "still the one killing Muslims in Palestine, Iraq, and Afghanistan, and is the one stealing their resources, occupying their lands, and supporting the thieving corrupt traitor leaders in their countries, so subsequently the problem did not end but is [actually] getting bigger and increasing." In his message to Muslims, al Zawahiri urges young Arabs to wage jihad, especially in Iraq, by joining local al Qaeda cells.

Zawahiri's message is not unique as he addresses themes and topics discussed in previous al Qaeda messages. It is interesting that recent al Qaeda messages have focused on the Palestinian conflict and Egypt's role in it. This is not a traditional area of concern for al Qaeda, as they are not an active participant in the conflict. Some analysts suggest that al Qaeda leverages widespread concern for the plight of Palestinians to appeal to Muslims that might not otherwise agree with them.

## Tamil Tigers Nearing Defeat

Sri Lankan authorities directed the army to suspend its use of heavy artillery and aerial bombardment on April 27 in an effort to minimize civilian casualties as it conducts the “conclusion” of operations against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The announcement coincides with the visit of UN under-secretary general for humanitarian affairs John Holmes and growing international concern for tens of thousands of refugees trapped by the fighting.

What appears to be the final stage of the government’s two-year offensive began on April 20, after Sri Lankan forces broke through a massive LTTE earthwork that constituted the last Tiger stronghold in Sri Lanka’s predominantly Tamil north. Following the breakthrough, the fighting has shifted to a narrow six-kilometer stretch of coastline in the northern Mullaitivu District formerly designated as a no-fire zone. Refusing government demands to surrender, the LTTE and founder Vellupillai Prabhakaran instead called for a cease-fire to protect civilians flooding out of the no-fire zone.

The government of President Mahinda Rajapaksa, emboldened by a landslide victory in local elections held April 25, rejected calls for a cease-fire, characterizing them as a cynical attempt by the LTTE to avoid defeat. Although this characterization is almost certainly correct, especially in light of reports that the LTTE is using civilians trapped in the no-fire zone as human shields, there is mounting international concern that the government is displaying little regard of its own for civilians attempting to flee the fighting. An estimated 140,000 civilians have fled the no-fire zone since April 20, prompting the United States, United Kingdom, and a number of other nations to call for a halt to the offensive. Adding to their concerns is the government’s prohibition on independent access to the conflict zone, as well as the April 28 denial of a visa for Swedish foreign minister Carl Bildt who was scheduled to participate in an EU humanitarian mission. As of April 28, there were reports that the government had already broken its pledge to avoid using artillery.

The conflict is Asia’s longest-running civil war.

## Al Qaeda in Iraq Recruiting Children

In mid-April, Iraqi security forces arrested four children under the age of 14 who were allegedly members of the “Birds of Paradise,” an al Qaeda youth group. According to General Abdelamir al-Zaidi, the commander of the Iraqi army division in Kirkuk where the children were detained, the “Birds of Paradise” recruits children and youth under the age of 16 to participate in the insurgency—often to

carry out suicide attacks. The group derives its name from the Islamic belief that children become birds of paradise after they die. According to one Iraqi official, the use of children demonstrates that al Qaeda is becoming more desperate.

Al Qaeda’s use of children in Iraq is not a new phenomenon—between 2006 and 2008, al Qaeda used at least 24 children to carry out suicide bombings. Of these 24, 5 had a mental disability, and the remainder were assumed to be homeless. The number of teenage insurgents in Iraq has also grown, as has the use of children as weapons of war. Evidence suggests that al Qaeda targets orphans, street children, and mentally disabled youth as suicide bombers. Other evidence suggests that al Qaeda has also paid parents to persuade them to allow their children to participate in the group.

In 2007, then-U.S. deputy undersecretary of defense Paul Brinkley warned that if U.S. reconstruction efforts fail and economic opportunities do not improve, the youth of Iraq could be driven to join the insurgency. This is particularly worrisome considering that 39 percent of Iraq’s population of almost 29 million is under the age of 15.

## Propaganda Video from ETIM

In late January, the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) released a new propaganda video entitled *Persistence and Preparation for Jihad*. The 43-minute video was produced by the group’s media wing, Sawt al Islam, and includes a statement by the group’s current leader, Sheikh Abdul Haq. In the video, Haq, who was recently placed on the United Nation’s list of persons associated with bin Laden, al Qaeda, or the Taliban, says that jihad is a religious duty of all Muslims. Haq also pledged more attacks against Chinese forces, asserting, “The operations of the mujahedeen in East Turkestan will make the Chinese suffer just as America suffered in Iraq and Afghanistan, from shame, scandal, and defeat.” Finally, Haq claimed credit for the bus bombings and the attack on the police station in Shanghai and Yunnan in May and July of 2008.

In late April, the U.S. Department of Treasury decided to freeze the assets of Abdul Haq and prohibited transactions with him. According to Stuart Levey, undersecretary for terrorism and financial intelligence, “Abdul Haq commands a terror group that sought to sow violence and fracture international unity at the 2008 Olympic Games in China...we stand together with the world in condemning this brutal terrorist and isolating him from the international financial system.”

The ETIM is a militant Muslim separatist group in the Xinjiang Province in northwest China that shares borders with several countries, including Afghanistan and Pakistan. According to the Council on Foreign Relations “the ETIM is one of the most extreme groups founded by Uighurs, the Turkic-speaking ethnic majority in Xinjiang, seeking an independent state called East Turkestan.” The Uighurs are an ethnic minority in China. According to the U.S. State Department, most Uighurs do not support the movement to establish an independent East Turkestan.

## Drug Trafficking

### Israeli Heroin Market Funding Hezbollah

In 2008, somewhere between four and five tons of heroin entered Israel, and according to Israel’s Anti-Drug Authority, most of the heroin originated in Afghanistan, with a small portion produced in Turkey, Iraq, and Lebanon. The heroin is largely supplied by channels running through the Bekaa Valley in southern Lebanon.

Israeli police believe that the drug trade, which is worth hundreds of millions of dollars a year, is controlled in large part by Hezbollah. According to Israeli evidence, Hezbollah takes a cut of the trade and uses the money to fund operations and recruit agents inside of Israel. Lt. Col. Omar el-Heib, for example, was sentenced to 15 years in prison in 2006 for relaying maps and information about tank positions, troop deployments, and the whereabouts of top Israeli commanders to Hezbollah in exchange for heroin, hashish, and thousands of dollars. On the Israeli side, the trade is allegedly controlled by Israeli Arab crime families who maintain close ties to their counterparts in Lebanon.

In Israel, the heroin trade is very lucrative—a kilo of pure heroin goes for about \$25,000 on the border but sells for at least four times that amount on the street. The border with Lebanon is only one of the ways drugs enter Israel. In 2008, the Israeli military thwarted a rare attempt to smuggle drugs in from Syria. Drugs, including marijuana, hashish, cocaine, and ecstasy, are also smuggled into Israel from Jordan, Egypt, and Europe.

## Human Trafficking

### Human Trafficker Sentenced in Texas

In November 2005, more than 120 women were liberated in a nighttime raid on five bars and restaurants in Houston, Texas, after a year-long investigation yielded information on one of the largest human-trafficking rings ever uncovered in the United States. In late April, Maximino

Mondragon, an El Salvadorian native, was the last of eight to be convicted and sentenced for his role in the ring. Mondragon, allegedly the mastermind of the ring, was sentenced to 13 years in federal prison and, along with others convicted in the case, ordered to pay \$1.7 million in restitution to his victims.

According to the evidence, Mondragon lured women from El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Honduras to the United States with false promises of legitimate jobs. Once in the United States, however, the traffickers charged the women huge fees for their journey and held them as prisoners until they could work off their debt. The women were forced to work at bars and restaurants owned by Mondragon, wear skimpy clothes, and sell drinks to men who were then allowed to touch them. According to several victims, they were threatened and beaten or told their families would be harmed or killed if they attempted to escape.

According to estimates, approximately 14,500–17,500 individuals are trafficked into the United States every year. Since 2001, more than 20 percent of the total number of identified trafficking victims in the United States has been located in Texas; nearly all of those were in Houston.

## Organized Crime

### Mafia Slaying Highlights Gaps in Police Cooperation

Efforts to heighten cooperation on transnational organized crime across the European Union (EU) have been frustrated by bureaucratic barriers, according to a report in *Der Spiegel*.

Six Italians were gunned down in front of a restaurant in the western German city of Duisburg in August 2007, the result of a feud between rival mafia factions. Although German and Italian authorities established a joint task force and pledged to intensify their cooperation in the wake of the killings, concrete assistance has not been forthcoming. German authorities still have not received from their Italian counterparts DNA data on Giuseppe Nirta, one of the suspected shooters, requested in September 2007, and are questioning specious Italian claims that a search of Nirta’s car failed to uncover any evidence. Dutch police similarly refused a German request for a saliva sample from Nirta after he was arrested in Amsterdam in November 2008 and have been unresponsive to German entreaties for information on Giovanni Strangio, the alleged mastermind of the murders who was arrested in Amsterdam in March.

The case highlights difficulties in prosecuting transnational organized crime, even among the highly integrated states of the European Union. In a depressing

sign of growing disillusionment among those handling the case, German prosecutors withdrew their request for Strangio's extradition in April, believing the effort to be futile.

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