

London First

**'The Future of Terrorism in a Fractious World'**

Breakfast briefing – 3 December 2013

Sponsored and Hosted by Delfont Mackintosh Theatre and MITIE



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# THE FUTURE OF TERRORISM IN A FRACTIOUS WORLD

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On 3 December 2013 a Breakfast Briefing was held by London First on the topic of 'The Future of Terrorism in a Fractious World'. The event was kindly sponsored and hosted by *Delfont Mackintosh Theatres* and *MITIE*.

The event was chaired by Robert Hall, Director of the Security & Resilience Network at *London First* and was programmed around a series of short presentations from:

- **Professor Anatol Lieven**, Department of War Studies, *King's College London*.
- **Commander Richard Walton**, Head of Counter-Terrorism Command (SO15), *MPS*.

## THE WIDER BACKGROUND OF ISLAMIST TERRORISM

As the European threat landscape continues to diversify, concerns over Islamic extremism are now being rivalled by an emerging radicalism of a political nature. The advent of this political form of terrorism is largely a reaction amongst extreme chauvinist, right-wing, indigenous, anti-immigrant groups to the practices of existing Islamic extremist elements. This reciprocal effect which sees terrorism generate and even legitimise the causes of wider extremist agendas is a worrying development for UK security. Extremism of this nature currently constitutes the greatest threat to security on the European continent.

Within the wider Middle East, however, Islamic extremism in the Muslim world is still a highly prevalent concern. The underlying narrative of the protracted struggle against Islamic extremism is punctuated by a number of factors which make this form of radicalism difficult to eliminate. These elements of the Islamic jihadist agenda are best understood through the causes of Islamic radicalism which are considered to be threefold:

- **Long History of Conflict:** While the conflict has not been between the Christian and Muslim world as a whole, it has involved elements from either side and began with several centuries of Muslim success and expansion. For the past four centuries, however, the conflict has involved the very severe contraction and loss of Muslim territory resulting in the perceived domination of Muslim culture, and of the world, by the West. Periodically over the course of this history, however, various forms of pressure developed which recurrently regenerated movements of jihad which over the last two centuries have been infused with anti-colonial sentiment.
- **Social and Economic Backwardness of the Muslim World:** The level of social backwardness and limited economic opportunity, particularly in the Middle East, have underlined and reinforced feelings of humiliation and anger

within the Muslim world and have strengthened both their resolve and hostility.

- **Role of the West (particularly the US) and Israeli Policy in the Middle East:** The strategic presence of West and the United States in particular within the Middle East has contributed to the stirring up of anger among Muslims against the West. Underlying this problem is the fundamental lack of legitimacy in Western policy within the Muslim world in the eyes of a vast majority of Muslims. This lack of legitimacy is particularly apparent in US-UK strategy in Iraq which has been met with unanimous hostility from the Muslim world, reinforced further by US support for Israel.

## PAKISTAN

Within the context of the global 'war on terror', Pakistan's approach to extremism, which has been characterised as two-faced, has been inconsistent and problematic to Western policy. On the one hand, the attitude of the Pakistani military has become progressively harder towards the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) rebels over the years as military casualties have mounted. On the other hand, despite supporting the US with intelligence support, the position of the Pakistani government regarding Osama Bin Laden has been somewhat ambiguous.

Underlying this contradictory approach, however, is the far more complex issue of popular will. It is apparent, that to some extent within the Pakistan Muslim League, and to a much greater extent within the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), that there is a deep will – which reflects the views of the wider population - to try and make peace with the militants of Pakistan. Should this goal be realised, however, it could lead to a further weakening of the state and reinforce the very complex nature of the Pakistani state in their attitudes towards controlling terrorism.

## THREATS OF THE FUTURE

The terrorism threat landscape that existed in 2011 looks very different to that which exists today. With American drone attacks effectively acting as a game-changer in Pakistan and Afghanistan following the elimination of a number of notable senior members of the Al Qaida leadership, 2011 was a year which carried a degree of optimism in the fight against terror. As the Arab Spring began to flourish across Africa and the Middle East shortly afterwards, there was hopeful discussion among officials in Washington that the 'war on terror' may soon be coming to an end.

However, looking forward to 2014 the global picture appears to be far less encouraging. The limited success of the Arab Spring has left a huge expansion of ungoverned spaces which provide the perfect recruiting and operating conditions for terrorist groups. The civil war in Syria in particular, is projected to have a profound effect on the UK threat landscape in years to come. With the Assad regime facing a fragmented opposition consisting of a myriad of Al Qaida affiliate groups in the name of a number of different causes, the situation in Syria is chaotic. Attractive not only to

Muslim extremists, there is also emerging evidence that Syria is fast becoming a popular destination for British nationals wishing to fight in the conflict. It is estimated that over 200 British nationals have travelled to Syria to participate in combat training, the result of which has turned many into hardened terrorists.

Additional to this concern is the rise of the lone actor threat which has increased in incidence in recent years, most notably with both the Boston bombings and the murder of Drummer Lee Rigby in Woolwich highlighting the threat in 2013. These acts of terror are predominantly driven by the narrative that exists on the internet and dark net and the rapid growth of this material is likely to cause an increase in such attacks.

Eliminating these threats, however, will require a multifaceted approach consisting of substantial policing of the internet/dark net, considerable messaging and counter-narrative to existing online material, and the development of a closer working relationship with the Muslim community. Additionally, greater collaboration between officers overseas and intelligence agencies to interdict and prevent terrorism at the source as well as intensive capacity building in vulnerable countries such as Somalia, Kenya, and Afghanistan is also an essential component to achieving a more credible and effective counter-terrorism strategy for the future.