WebMemo

Britain: A Central Front in the War Against Islamist Terrorism

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The recent conviction in London of the Muslim fanatic known as "Osama bin London" and five of his followers is a significant blow to Islamist terrorism in the United Kingdom. In one of the biggest anti-terrorist trials in British history, Mohammed Hamid was found guilty of leading an al-Qaeda–inspired terrorist cell and of running terrorist training camps on British soil with a view to sending recruits on to Afghanistan and East Africa. He has been jailed indefinitely.

Hamid is, as a family member described him, "evil personified"[1] and had a role in training the July 21, 2005, London bombers, who fortunately failed in their attempt to emulate the carnage inflicted by the 7/7 bombers two weeks earlier. Hamid's lead accomplice, Atilla Ahmet, admitted to three charges of soliciting murder and was a key figure at the notorious Finsbury Park Mosque run by the firebrand Muslim cleric Abu Hamza al-Masri, who is awaiting extradition to face trial in the United States on terrorism charges.

Hamid's conviction is just one part of a large-scale war that British authorities are waging against Islamist terrorists on the streets of Britain's cities. It is a conflict that will have major ramifications for the wider war against terrorism across Europe, as well as in the United States.

The Terrorist Threat to Britain. The scale of the terrorist threat to the U.K. is enormous. According to Britain's domestic intelligence service, MI5, there are over 2,000 identified al-Qaeda–inspired terrorist suspects in the U.K., with up to 200 terrorist networks in operation. In addition, there are an estimated 2,000 unidentified terrorists operating in Britain, for a total of up to 4,000 al-Qaeda–linked operatives based in the United Kingdom. In a major speech last November,[2] Jonathan Evans, Director General of the Security Service, outlined in stark terms the nature and tactics of the enemy Britain is fighting:

It is important that we recognise an uncomfortable truth: terrorist attacks we have seen against the UK are not simply random plots by disparate and fragmented groups. The majority of these attacks, successful or otherwise, have taken place because Al Qaida has a clear determination to mount terrorist attacks against the United Kingdom. This remains the case today, and there is no sign of it reducing. So although MI5 and the police are investigating plots, and thwarting them, on a continuing basis, we do not view them in isolation. Al Qaida is conducting a deliberate campaign against us. It is the expression of a hostility towards the UK which existed long before September 11, 2001. It is evident in the wills and letters left behind by actual and would-be bombers. And it regularly forms part of Al Qaida's broadcast messages....

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[T]errorists are methodically and intentionally targeting young people and children in this country. They are radicalising, indoctrinating and grooming young, vulnerable people to carry out acts of terrorism. This year, we have seen individuals as young as 15 and 16 implicated in terrorist-related activity.

Progress is being made by the security services in the fight against Islamist terrorism. British authorities have been investigating no less than 30 active terrorist plots[3] and have foiled at least 5 major attempted terrorist attacks since 9/11. According to the Home Office, over the past five years, British police have made over 1,200 terrorism-related arrests, with more than 400 individuals charged.[4]

But the war Britain is fighting is being undermined by a culture of political correctness and the damaging legacy of multiculturalism, as well as by the erosion of British national sovereignty within Europe, a decline in British military capability and defense spending, and a reduced willingness to project power abroad. The appalling comments earlier this month by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, supporting the adoption of aspects of Sharia law into British law were a potent symbol of the Left's continuing shameful appeasement of Islamist extremism in British society.

The RUSI Report. The Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), Britain's most respected think tank on security and defense issues, recently issued a scathing indictment of Britain's overall ability to combat Islamist terrorism. The report by Gwyn Prins and the Marquess of Salisbury, "Risk Threat and Security: The Case of the United Kingdom,"[5] is a must-read for anyone concerned about the current state of America's closest ally.

The courageous RUSI paper notes "a loss in the United Kingdom of confidence in our own identity, values, constitution and institutions" and paints a disturbing picture of "a fragmenting, post-Christian society, increasingly divided about interpretations of its history, about its national aims, its values and its political identity." The report points out that a lack of integration among immigrant communities and a "mis-placed deference to multiculturalism" have completely undercut the fight against extremism. "The country's lack of self-confidence," it finds, "is in stark contrast to the implacability of its Islamist terrorist enemy, within and without."

The report's powerful conclusion should serve as a wake-up call to Britain's political establishment, which for the past two decades has been sleepwalking toward disaster in the face of the Islamist militant threat:

> The deep guarantee of real strength is our knowledge of who we are. Our loss of cultural self-confidence weakens our ability to develop new means to provide for our security in the face of new risks. Our uncertainty incubates the embryonic threats these risks represent. We look like a soft touch. We are indeed a soft touch, from within and without.

Strengthening Britain's Defenses. The Royal United Services Institute is right to point out that Britain's survival depends upon a renewed faith in her own identity, traditions, beliefs, and culture, together with a commitment to rebuilding her armed forces. Crippling defense cuts under the Labour government have seriously depleted British naval power and reduced the British Army to its smallest level in centuries.

Britain must be willing to invest at a minimum 3 percent of GDP on defense, and ideally 4 percent, to

1. "Mohammed Hamid is 'evil personified'," *The Daily Telegraph*, February 27, 2008, at *http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2008/02/26/nterror226.xml.*

2. Jonathan Evans, Address to the Society of Editors, Manchester, November 5, 2007, at *http://www.mi5.gov.uk/output/Page562.html.*

3. Dame Eliza Manningham-Buller, former Director General of the Security Service, "The International Terrorist Threat to the UK," Speech to Queen Mary's College, London, November 9, 2006, at *http://www.mi5.gov.uk/output/Page374.html.*

4. U.K. Home Office, *Terrorism and the Law*, February 2008, at *http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/security/terrorism-and-the-law/.*

5. Gwyn Prins and Robert Salisbury, *Risk, Threat and Security: The Case of the United Kingdom*, Royal United Services Institute, February 2008, at *http://www.rusi.org/downloads/assets/Prins_and_Salisbury_RUSI_Journal_FEB08.pdf.*

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ensure that her military operations can be sustained across the globe. Without such a commitment, the U.K. can only expect to decline as a power, wield less influence diplomatically, and face an increasingly dangerous world from a position of weakness. It is vital that Britain maintain its commitments to both Iraq and Afghanistan, crucial theaters of operation in a long global war that the West is waging against the forces of militant Islam. There can be no doubt that the withdrawal of British and American forces from the Middle East or South Asia would hand a huge propaganda victory to al-Qaeda.

On the domestic front, Britain must take steps to further strengthen existing anti-terrorist legislation, including greater powers for police to detain suspected terrorists without charge for periods longer than the currently allowed 28 days and an accelerated process for deporting or extraditing "preachers of hate." Militant Islamist groups such as Hizb-ut-Tahrir (the Islamic Party of Liberation) should have no place in British society and should be included on the government's list of proscribed organizations. Conservative Party leader David Cameron is right to call for the banning of this dangerous movement,[6] already outlawed in Egypt and Pakistan, which supports the establishment of a Muslim caliphate, or empire. The U.K. should also resist efforts by the European Union to restrict British anti-terrorist efforts and should withdraw from the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).

In addition, a concerted effort must be made to cut the terrorist supply routes that run from Pakistan to Britain. As MI5 chief Jonathan Evans pointed out, "over the last five years much of the command, control and inspiration for attack planning in the UK has derived from Al Qaida's remaining core leadership in the tribal areas of Pakistan—often using young British citizens to mount the actual attack."[7]

A War Britain Must Win. In many ways, Britain today is the central front in the battle against Islamist militancy in Europe, and developments there will be closely watched by al-Qaeda's high command, keen to gain a foothold in the West. Al-Qaeda can be defeated in Britain, and the conviction of Mohammed Hamid and his murderous cohorts is an important strike against some of the group's key British-based supporters.

This success, though, will have to be emulated against thousands of other Islamist terrorists based in the U.K., who must be hunted down as part of a long conflict that may last for decades. It is a war that has to be waged and ultimately won by a self-confident nation that believes in the rightness of its cause and is willing to defend the Western traditions of liberty and freedom, whether on the streets of London, Kabul, or Baghdad.

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6. David Cameron MP, Speech to the Community Security Trust, March 4, 2008, at *http://www.conservatives.com/ tile.do?def=news.story.page&obj_id=142782&speeches=1.*

7. Evans, Address to the Society of Editors.