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Maritime-related Terrorism: Al-Qaeda, Hezbollah, What Next From the International Jihadist Network?

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Executive Summary

1. While terrorist attacks are predominantly land-based, this report shows that extremists have also sought to exploit vulnerabilities in shipping, ports and the container supply chain in Asia, the Middle East, Europe and North America. They have attacked the naval vessels that protect this vital sea trade. They are likely to continue doing so and may well strike with more powerful weapons.

2. Unchecked nuclear weapons and missile programs by North Korea and Iran will make it more likely that nuclear materials and know-how will find their way into terrorist hands. Most experts believe that a radiological or 'dirty' bomb (which uses conventional explosives to disperse radioactive material) is well within the technical capabilities of at least some terrorist groups and that they could get all the components without much difficulty. Such a device would probably be designed as a weapon of mass disruption - to cause panic, chaos and prolonged economic dislocation in a metropolis or port-city. A cargo-shipping container may be such a delivery device.

3. Conventional arms trade and smuggling, both highly profitable global businesses, are spreading increasingly sophisticated conventional weapons to non-state actors, including long-range anti-ship missiles, unmanned aerial vehicles and closer-range armour-piercing missiles and rocket-propelled grenades – all capable of causing serious damage to ships. In the Middle East, this proliferation is promoted by Iran, Syria and other governments that provide arms to militia, guerrilla and insurgent groups they support. For example, the Lebanese Hezbollah in July 2006 used a Chinese-designed C-802 radar-guided cruise missile supplied by Iran to severely damage one of Israel's most modern warships. The missile is rated by experts as one of the most lethal of its kind in the world. If this pattern is replicated in Asia, the potential for terrorism and political violence on land, in the air and at sea will rise.

4. So far, al-Qaeda and other Sunni extremists have shown the greatest interest in maritime-related terrorism. They have been exclusively involved in most of the plans and operations outlined in this report. But Hezbollah and other arms of the Iranian-sponsored terrorist movement have also carried out maritime-related strikes against Israel, as well as bombings against Israeli and US targets abroad.

5. The Lebanese Hezbollah has not carried out major bombings outside its immediate region since attacks against Jewish and Israeli targets in Argentina and against Americans in Saudi Arabia, all in the 1990s. But the group is likely to re-launch terrorist operations abroad if the US, supported by Israel, assembles and effective coalition of countries opposed to Iran's nuclear ambitions or the fragile truce in Lebanon breaks down and hostilities resume between Hezbollah and Israel.

6. Hezbollah has emerged as a new prototype for a guerrilla or terrorist organisation. Its global network is spread out over more than 40 countries and five continents, including Asia. In contrast to al-Qaeda and the now highly decentralised Sunni extremist network, Hezbollah is centrally directed from Lebanon and works in tandem with Iran. Its budget is estimated at about US$100 million a year and mainly comes from Teheran. The rise of Iran and Hezbollah, and the upsurge in fighting between Shiite and Sunni extremists in Iraq, is exacerbating the historic mistrust between Iran and many of its Arab neighbours in the Persian Gulf and other parts of the Middle East, the source of most of Asia's oil. This raises the prospect of intensified international terrorism on an increasingly wide range of fronts – on land, in the air and at sea – as Sunni and Shiite radicals compete, and perhaps in some case cooperate, to spread political violence.

7. Hezbollah has gone one up by showing al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups it can use high-tech cruise missiles, shorter-range armour-piercing weapons and pilot-less aircraft in combat. As a result, navies and commercial shipping face a significantly higher level of threat. The successful use of the C-802 anti-ship missile by Hezbollah shows the increasingly dangerous nexus between technology and terrorism. It also shows that there has been a quantum leap in the weaponry available for maritime-related terrorist attacks.

About the Speaker

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MARITIME-RELATED TERRORISM:
AL-QAEDA, HEZBOLLAH, WHAT NEXT
FROM THE INTERNATIONAL JIHADIST NETWORK?

SECTION I – BACKGROUND

Sea Shadow

In the past decade, maritime-related plans and operations carried out by Muslim militants against ships and their cargo have been far less numerous than strikes on land-based targets by these terrorist groups. They have also been overshadowed by aircraft hijackings and other terrorist attacks using civilian planes laden with fuel as weapons. The most spectacular of these was the 9/11 plot in which al-Qaeda operatives seized four civilian jet airliners in the United States and crashed three of them into landmark buildings in New York and Washington on 11 September 2001, killing nearly 3,000 people from 80 nations. As a result, much is now known about the activities on land and in the air of al-Qaeda, its affiliates and emulators in the violent jihadist network. Less is known about their maritime-related activities.[1]

Nuclear Terrorism

Officials and counter-terrorism experts in Asia, Europe and the US have warned that the next step up in mass casualty terrorism may be an attack with chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear (CBRN) weapons. A ship or container is regarded as a possible delivery device for a nuclear or radiological bomb.[2] Those who worry about such an attack believe that weapons of mass destruction and terrorism have become interlocking threats that could, if more effective safeguards are not put in

place, fuse in an extremely dangerous challenge to international security, stability and trade – and thus to the functioning of the globalised economy.

North Korea declared on 9 October 2006 that it had carried out an underground test of a nuclear bomb. Iran has said it is determined to continue its nuclear development program, despite international pressure for checks to ensure that atomic weapons are not the end result. Both these developments are fuelling apprehension about nuclear proliferation.[3] North Korea and Iran have collaborated in developing nuclear arms and the long-range missiles to deliver them. Both regimes have traded their military know-how and technology.[4] In the case of Iran, this trade has included the Lebanese Hezbollah, which the US, Israel, Canada, Australia and Holland classify as a terrorist organization although many other countries do not. Confirmation that North Korea has a workable nuclear bomb will intensify concerns that it may at some point sell the knowledge and materials to terrorists, even if it is unable to make its nuclear warheads small enough to fit into the nose cone of its ballistic missiles.[5]

Spread of Modern Arms

Another trend is alarming Western officials and military commanders, particularly in the Middle East – the spread of increasingly sophisticated conventional weapons to non-state actors, including long-range anti-ship missiles, unmanned aerial vehicles and closer-range armour-piercing missiles and rocket-propelled grenades - all capable of causing serious damage to ships, both big and small. This proliferation is the result of arms smuggling and transfers by Iran, Syria and other governments to militia, guerrilla and insurgent groups they support, particularly in the Middle East.[6]

If this pattern is replicated in Asia, the potential for terrorism and political violence on land, in the air and at sea will rise. The trade in small arms and light infantry weapons is already extensive in conflict-prone parts of the region and the demand for more advanced equipment is strong.[7]

The problem is global in scope. There are around 100 countries that make weapons and ammunition. Sales of these products are estimated to be worth over US$1,000 billion in 2006 – fifteen times annual spending on international aid. In

October 2006, negotiations started in the United Nations General Assembly on a binding treaty to control the so-called light arms trade that kills at least 300,000 people each year, destabilises nations and ruins the lives of millions. But the negotiations are likely to be contentious and slow.[8]

Asymmetric Driver

Why is this happening? Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s, US and allied military power has become both preponderant and pervasive. This has been underscored by the US-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, the increased mobility of Western forces and their enhanced strike capability. It has provided an incentive, particularly for terrorists and other relatively small groups of non-state actors, to look for new ways of countering superior force, just as Communist insurgents in Southeast Asia during the Cold War adopted different means and tactics for fighting numerically superior and better armed local government forces and their foreign allies. The spread of modern weapons and explosives has made it easier for militants.

Post-Afghanistan

Al-Qaeda used Afghanistan as a base for operations until US-led forces entered the country shortly after the 9/11 attacks and drove its ally, the Taliban, from power in Kabul. Since then, al-Qaeda has had to disperse. Its fighters and agents, and those trained in its camps in Afghanistan, fanned out around the world. This and use of the Internet have helped to spread their influence.[9] Al-Qaeda's core ideology is that Islam is under attack from within by heretics, and from without by non-Muslims, and that the only way to protect the religion is to sweep away secular, nationalist government and establish exclusive theocratic rule over all areas of the world that are part of the Islamic community or were part of it at some point in history, from Spain through the Middle East, North Africa, Central and South Asia to Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines.[10]

Anti-American and anti-Western feeling is widespread among the world's 1.2 billion Muslims, who are concentrated in the Middle East, North Africa, Central Asia,

South Asia and Southeast Asia. The invasion of Afghanistan and then Iraq stoked the sentiment that Islam was under attack by non-Muslims, building on a pre-existing conviction that the US and its allies in Europe and elsewhere had long been biased in favour of Israel against the Palestinians in the Middle East's most deep-seated and emotive conflict. However, public opinion surveys suggest that only a relatively small minority of Muslims support terrorism and political violence.[11]

Islam's Inner Tension

The struggle within Islam between extremists and the non-violent or moderate majority is complicated by tension between the two main Muslim sects, Sunnis and Shiites. The latter comprise between 10 and 15 per cent of all Muslims. They are centred in predominantly non-Arab Iran, make up about 60 per cent of the population in Arab and Kurdish Iraq and form significant minorities in Saudi Arabia, other oil and gas-rich Arab-ruled Gulf states, as well as in Pakistan, India and Afghanistan. Although al-Azhar University in Cairo, a leading source of Muslim teaching and scholarship, has declared Shiites to be a legitimate form of Islam, Sunni xenophobes like the Wahabis of Saudi Arabia and many Salafists believe Shiites to be heretics.[12] Al-Qaeda in Iraq, under Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi until he was killed in June 2006, strongly espoused this view.

The Shiites have generally been repressed and treated as second-class citizens in the Sunni-dominated Arab world, although this is now changing in Saudi Arabia and some other countries in the Middle East. Reform is hastened by Iran's rise as a regional power and by the determined performance of the Shiite Hezbollah movement and its armed wing in Lebanon in fighting with Israel in July and August 2006. In this 34-day conflict, Hezbollah was armed, financed and given political support by Iran and by Syria, which is ruled by Alawites, a Shia offshoot, although most Syrians are Sunnis.

One of the reasons Indonesia and Malaysia were keen to contribute troops to the United Nations peacekeeping force in Lebanon at the end of this conflict was to calm Muslim opinion at home and dissuade any militants from going to the Middle East to fight Israel or the Americans in Iraq.[13] Indonesia has more Muslims than any

other country, followed by India. It is Asia, not the Middle East, that is the numerical centre of Islam. According to Zachary Abuza, a specialist in Southeast Asian terrorism at Simmons College in Boston, Southeast Asian Islamists and jihadists are always trying to bring the Islamic periphery into the Muslim core, and to convince their Arab co-religionists that they are true Muslims. Southeast Asian extremists are also seeking to exploit Middle East issues to recruit anew and tap into more mainstream Islamist movements.[14]

Iran's Rise

The US's military intervention in Iraq has profoundly unsettled the Middle East. By toppling Saddam Hussein, a brutal dictator, and dismantling his secular Sunni control of the state, the US empowered and emboldened the majority Shia community centred in the oil-rich south of Iraq. But instead of entrenching a new beacon of multi-religious democracy in the Middle East, Washington has removed a barrier to the expansion of Shiite Iranian influence in the Persian Gulf and surrounding areas. It has also turned Iraq into a magnet and operational training ground for al-Qaeda linked terrorists, and unleashed a sectarian conflict between Shiite and Sunni extremist factions that has worsened markedly since early 2006.[15]

A religious civil war in the heart of Iraq, in which hard-pressed US forces are under attack by both sides, has eclipsed an anti-American insurgency that in the early stages of the occupation was mainly led by Sunnis.[16] In some ways, the cycle of reprisal killings – which serves to deepen sectarian division, suspicion and hatred - mirrors the conflict that took place for many years between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, although it is already on a far wider scale in Iraq. Some of the Shiite militias and their political parties have received military aid and other support from Iran. Others have been helped by Syria.[17] The Bush administration has long accused the clerical regime in Teheran of being the world's top sponsor of terrorism and of seeking nuclear weapons and the long-range missiles to deliver them.[18]

Reflecting a concern that is shared by a number of Sunni Arab leaders in the Middle East, Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak warned in April that "Shiites are almost always loyal to Iran and not the countries where they live." However, other

officials from the region doubt that Iraq will slide into full-scale sectarian strife, even if Iran is fomenting the conflict as part of a wider ambition to stir Shiite activism elsewhere and spread Iranian influence. Many Iraqi tribes and clans contain both Sunnis and Shiites. There are many Sunni-Shiite intermarriages. These tribal, clan and personal links cross sectarian lines, providing a bulwark against national disintegration.[19] However the conflict between Sunnis and Shiiites in Iraq is sorely testing national cohesion and providing opportunities for religious extremists on both sides, as well as criminals, to exploit.

SECTION II - SEA TERROR SO FAR

The list of foiled, failed and successful attempts in maritime-related terrorism over the last decade is significant. Yet there is a tendency to overlook or downplay what has happened, and thus ignore the possibility of further trouble. It is clear that terrorists can see the potential of using the maritime trading system and its land links through the cargo container supply chain to conceal weapons or agents for attack purposes or to provide funding or support for their operations. The terrorist network associated with al-Qaeda understands the vital role of sea transport and has exploited it for years.

East Africa

For example, an al-Qaeda-controlled cargo ship delivered the explosives that its operatives used to bomb two US embassies in East Africa in August 1998, killing 224 people and injuring more than 5,000. US investigators say they have evidence that al-Qaeda was buying ships at least as early as 1994.[20]

Yemen

In September 2004, two al-Qaeda operatives were sentenced to death and four others jailed in Yemen for the suicide attack in October 2000 on the US destroyer Cole.[21] They used a small boat packed with explosives to ram and seriously damage one of the US navy's most sophisticated warships. An earlier attempt to attack another US

destroyer, The Sullivans, in Yemen had failed when the over-laden attack boat sank. It was salvaged and used in the operation to strike the Cole. The blast, which left a gaping hole in the side of the destroyer, killed 17 US sailors and wounded 40. It took more than 14 months and cost around US$250 million to repair the ship.[22]

In October 2002, two years after the Cole was hit, the French-registered oil tanker, Limburg, carrying crude oil off the coast of Yemen, was crippled and set ablaze in another terrorist attack using an explosive-laden small boat. Al-Qaeda claimed responsibility.[23]

Iraq

In April 2004, suicide terrorists in several small boats packed with explosives tried to attack laden tankers and pumping and storage facilities in the main oil export terminal in southern Iraq. The attack boats either blew up or were blown up before they reached their targets. But they came perilously close and it took several days to restore normal output from the terminal.[24] The assault was ordered by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, then head of al-Qaeda in Iraq. He was killed in June 2006 but the movement is under new leadership and fights on.

Jordan

The terrorist group led by Zarqawi, who was born in Jordan, claimed responsibility for the Katyusha rocket attack in August 2005 that narrowly missed hitting two US warships in the Jordanian Red Sea port of Aqaba. Three rockets were fired at the two docked vessels, the amphibious assault ship Kearsarge and the landing ship Ashland. The Katyushas missed the ships, but a Jordanian soldier was killed and a taxi driver wounded when they exploded.[25]

Turkey

Also in August 2005, authorities in Turkey arrested Louai Sakka, a senior al-Qaeda operative and longtime associate of Zarqawi in Iraq. Sakka was picked up and interrogated after a one-ton bomb he was making in a rented harbour-side apartment in the resort town of Antalya, in southern Turkey, went off prematurely. He had

intended to put the bomb into final shape on his 27-foot motorized yacht, the Tufan, which was moored in a marina close to the apartment. Sakka planned to ram the explosive-laden yacht into a cruise ship carrying Israelis - and, he believed, US soldiers on rest and recreation - as it approached Antalya to disembark passengers. Sakka said later that he was prepared to attack NATO warships in the area if he was unable to locate Israeli passenger vessels.[26]

Strait of Gibralter

Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri, captured in late 2002, gave CIA investigators information that reinforced concerns about plans for terrorist attacks against shipping. He was al-Qaeda's head of operations in and around the Arabian peninsula and its de facto naval chief. al-Nashiri is the alleged mastermind of the attack on the USS Cole and the tanker Limburg. He has also been linked to the bombings of the two US embassies in east Africa in 1998.

In addition, al-Nashiri confessed to planning attacks on shipping in the Strait of Gibraltar. Early in 2002, he sent a team of several Afghan-trained Saudis to Morocco to prepare for bomb-laden speedboat attacks on US and British warships as they passed through the strait between the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean.[27] The Moroccan intelligence service, working with Western intelligence agencies, foiled the scheme.

Persian Gulf

Evidently drawing on information from interrogation of al-Nashiri and other captured al-Qaeda operatives, President George Bush said in October 2005 that the US and its partners in the war on terror had disrupted at least 10 serious al-Qaeda terrorist plots since 9/11. Two of these attempts were directed against shipping.

The White House noted that in the first, in late 2002 and 2003, the US and a partner nation disrupted a plan by al-Qaeda operatives to attack ships in the Arabian Gulf.[28] This may be a reference to an abortive attempt to bomb the US Navy's Fifth Fleet headquarters in Bahrain in the Persian Gulf, a plan linked to al-Nashiri who was captured in the United Arab Emirates in November 2002. Or it may be a reference to

another audacious plot Al-Nashiri was working on at the time of his arrest. He was arranging funding to crash a small aircraft into the bridge of a Western navy vessel when it was docked in the UAE's Port Rashid.[29]

Strait of Hormuz

The White House said that in the second plot in 2002, the US and partners disrupted a plan to attack vessels transiting the Strait of Hormuz, a vital shipping channel both for tankers carrying oil exports from the Gulf to Asia, Europe and the US, and for US and allied warships patrolling the area and supporting military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.[30]

Al-Nashiri's procurement arm in the United Arab Emirates, through a series of front companies, had bought a general cargo vessel and several small fast attack boats. The aim was to fit a special lifting rig on deck to lower the boats, packed with shaped explosive charges, into the water when they were close to the Hormuz strait, which about 40 miles wide. The waterway consists of 2-mile wide channels for separate inbound and outbound tanker traffic, with a 2-mile wide buffer zone between them. Once in position within striking distance of a passing US warship, the small craft manned by suicide crew were to be launched from the mother ship in a combined attack from different directions on the chosen target. The freighter itself was to be loaded with explosives and blown up in the shipping lanes as close as possible to the transiting US naval target. The plot was reportedly intended to coincide with the attacks on the US in September 2001. But Al-Nasheri, fearing that the operation's coordinators were under surveillance, called it off.[31]

Philippines

Maritime terrorism has not been confined to the Middle East, Africa and the Mediterranean. In Southeast Asia, al-Qaeda's affiliates, including the Abu Sayaff Group, the ASG, and Jemaah Islamiyah, the JI, have attacked shipping or planned to do so.

Philippine officials say that the Abu Sayaff - working with the Rajah Solaiman Movement, made up of converts to Islam from among the Christian majority in the

Philippines - was responsible for placing the bomb that sank a passenger ferry, the MV Superferry 14, in Manila Bay in February 2004, leaving 116 people either dead in the fire or drowned or still missing, presumed dead.[32] In terms of loss of life, this is the worst maritime terrorist attack in recent years.[33] In August 2005, another bomb on a ferry, MV Dona Ramona, docked in the southern Philippines, injured at least 30 people. Security officials said the incendiary device was the work of Abu Sayaff terrorists.

Singapore

The Singapore government has said that when it started its crackdown in December 2001 on Jemaah Islamiyah – the Southeast Asian terrorist network with links to al-Qaeda and Abu Sayyaf militants - it discovered that the group had made preliminary plans for suicide attacks on US warships visiting Singapore. The JI also intended to carry out multiple truck bomb attacks against Western and Israeli diplomatic and other targets in Singapore, including naval bases used by the US military, and had started buying the ammonium nitrate to be used in the explosives.

The plans to attack US warships with explosive-laden small boats manned by foreign suicide bombers were started in the mid-1990s and were fairly well developed, although never activated. They included a detailed targeting map for a seaborne attack using a small craft against US naval vessels travelling eastwards from Singapore's Sembawang Wharf, in the northern part of the island state opposite Malaysia, via Tekong Island. The markings on the map identified a strategic "kill" zone where the channel was narrowest and where the target ship would have had no room to take evasive action to avoid colliding with the suicide boat. The plan took advantage of local geography to hide the attack boat from radar and visual detection until the very last minute. The route and patrol schedule of Singapore's Police Coast Guard in the area had also been monitored.

In early 2001, the plans were revived when two unidentified Middle-Easterners approached Faiz bin Abu Bakar Bafana, the Malaysian JI leader, for information on US military vessels in Singapore. Faiz then instructed members of the JI in Singapore to survey Sembawang Wharf and Changi Naval Base, both of which

were being used by visiting US warships. They video-recorded what they observed and a copy of the video was later given to the Middle-Easterners in Kuala Lumpur.[34]

Malaysia & Indonesia

The planning for the attack on the USS Cole in Yemen in October 2000 began in Malaysia. One of the key suspects – Walid Bin 'Attash, best known as Khallad – worked with al-Qaeda maritime commander al-Nasheri on the Cole attack.[35] Khallad, a Yemeni born and raised in Saudi Arabia, was plotting another attack on a US naval vessel visiting a Malaysian port in 2000. Less than year later, Malaysian intelligence foiled a plan to attack a second US warship while in Indonesia al-Qaeda - evidently acting through Omar al-Faruq, a leading liason operative in Southeast Asia, and the Jemaah Islamiyah - intended to attack a US naval vessel in Surabaya, a major Indonesian naval port and the country's second largest city.[36]

Japan

Japan along with Singapore, Australia and South Korea are among the countries that have been singled out for attack by al-Qaeda for supporting the US-led military coalition in Iraq. In May 2004, Japanese police arrested five foreigners – three from Bangladesh, one from India and the other from Mali – who had been in contact with Lionel Dumont, a 33-year old French national of Algerian descent with ties to al-Qaeda. Dumont was arrested in Germany in December 2003 and extradited to France in May 2004. (Washington Post, "Deadly Muslim Convert: trial of French Islamic radical sheds light on the role of converts", 2 January 2006.) He had been involved in criminal activity in France in the 1990s while belonging to a radical Islamist group known as the Roubaix gang.[37]

Dumont tried to establish an Al-Qaeda cell when he worked as a used-car exporter in Japan in 2002 and 2003. He sent substantial amounts of money to one of the arrested Bangladeshis who had an office near the US navy base in Yokosuka on the outskirts of Tokyo. The office was being used to gather information on the base - the largest American naval facility outside the US - in preparation for a terrorist operation.[38]

United States

These are examples of terrorist attacks on naval and commercial vessels or plans to attack them and the bases from which they operated. However, al-Qaeda has also shown interest in cargo containers on ships to ferry agents, weapons and terrorist-related material around the world. Shortly before his capture in Pakistan in March 2003, al-Qaeda's head of global operations, Khalid Shaykh Muhammad, through two trusted lieutenants, offered to invest about US$200,000 in an export firm in exchange for access to the containers used by the firm to ship garments to Port Newark in the New York-New Jersey harbour complex.[39] He wanted to use the containers to smuggle explosives into the US for various al-Qaeda attacks.[40]

Khalid Shaykh Muhammad, described by the US national intelligence office as one of al-Qaeda's most capable senior operatives, is the alleged mastermind of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington. His interest in ships and their cargo containers, and the fact that he was prepared to invest an unusually large amount of al-Qaeda's money in a company that regularly moved textiles into the maritime heart of the US financial capital and sold them to leading retail outlets, must be regarded as an ominous warning sign.

Cargo Containers

The millions of containers that carry most of today's general cargo around the world are a security nightmare. These uniform steel boxes are potential Trojan Horses in the 21st century when advanced technology, including weapons and the information needed to build and operate them, is increasingly accessible to terrorists and criminals. Just as it is easy to hide smuggled goods and people inside a container, so it is easy to conceal arms or bombs. Once a container is loaded and sealed, inspection is a problem. The contents can be misrepresented and undeclared items hidden inside with relative ease. Even when sealed, containers can be surreptitiously opened and then closed again without great difficulty to remove or add contents. This is a made-to-order method of transport for terrorists – just as it is for drug and other contraband smugglers.[41]

More than 17 million containers are in circulation, criss-crossing the globe by sea and making over 230 million journeys through the world's ports each year. Some nine million containers arrive by sea in US ports alone. Physical checks of containers reaching US ports by sea increased to 5.2 per cent of total arrivals by September 2003, from 2 per cent two years earlier. But worldwide, less than 1 per cent of shipped cargo is screened using Gamma-Ray devices and radiation detectors to peer inside and check for explosives, radioactive substances or other dangerous materials. However, homeland security officials in the US have argued that the key to preventing a terrorist attack using cargo containers is not the amount of physical inspection that takes place. It is the ability to marshal intelligence on the contents of the boxes so that only suspect ones are chosen for inspection, while the genuine trade proceeds without delay. Critics of this approach, including the world's leading container terminal operator, say that the risk analysis method being used by the US is flawed and that all containers moving through the global supply chain by sea should be monitored using non-intrusive inspection equipment to scan and clear containers quickly in terminals.[42]

Italy

The fear that terrorists could exploit the container transport system was confirmed barely a month after the al-Qaeda hijackers crashed civilian airliners into the World Trade Centre twin towers and the Pentagon. In October 2001, authorities in the southern Italian port of Gioia Tauro discovered an unusually well-equipped and neatly dressed stowaway locked inside a shipping container. It was furnished as a makeshift home with a bed, water, supplies for a long journey and a bucket for a toilet. Italian police named the stowaway as Rizik Amid Farid and said he was born in Egypt but carried a Canadian passport.[43]

Unlike most stowaways, Farid was smartly dressed, clean-shaven and rested as he emerged. He was found to be carrying two mobile phones, a satellite phone, a laptop computer, several cameras, batteries and, ominously given recent events in the US, airport security passes and an airline mechanic's certificate valid for four major US airports.[44] Gioia Tauro is a leading trans-shipment hub for cargo in the

Mediterranean. The container fitted out as a makeshift home had been loaded in Port Said, Egypt. Had the stowaway not been trying to widen ventilation holes when workers in Gioia Tauro were nearby, the box may well have passed unhindered to its final destination in Canada via Rotterdam. After he was discovered, Farid was investigated by Italian prosecutors who suspected that he was an al-Qaeda operative. He was charged with illegal entry into Italy and detained. But a court released him on bail and he disappeared before further information about him and the purpose of his unorthodox means of travel could be gathered.[45]

Israel

More recently, on 14 March 2004, two Palestinian suicide bombers gained access to the Israeli seaport of Ashdod, near Tel Aviv, by concealing themselves in a 40-foot container. They hid in a secret compartment behind a false wall at the back of the box which was loaded with marble and ceramic tiles. An electronic scan and a physical inspection of the container, both inside and out, by Israeli officials failed to detect the bombers. In blowing themselves up, they killed 10 port workers and injured 18. This was the first attack in a closely guarded Israeli port, which was considered one of the most secure in the world. It shows how cargo containers can be used to hide people on military or terrorist operations.[46]

In July 2002, Israeli security officials in Ashdod had seized a shipment of guns and other weapons intended for Palestinian militants. Two months earlier, a container - supposedly filled with a donation of toys sent to the Gaza Strip by an Islamic charity - had been opened by officials in Ashdod and found to be packed instead with hundreds of pounds of guns, ammunition, telescopic lenses and night-vision equipment.

Summary

If one looks at the plans and operations of the first generation of al-Qaeda leaders like Khalid Shaykh Muhammad, Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri and others, it is clear that by 2001 and 2002 they were conducting trial runs for opening a maritime-related front in global terrorism. They could see that:

1) the vast commercial shipping and cargo container business around the world was open to infiltration and abuse;
2) naval ships are iconic targets;
3) busy ports, too, are tempting because they are key nodes through which so much of world trade is shipped.[47]

Why then have terrorists not succeeded, at least so far, in causing greater damage to naval operations and to international shipping and the cargo container supply chain that carry the bulk of world trade?

SECTION III – FUTURE TRENDS

Reasons for Relative Calm on the Maritime Front

First, violent jihadists have lacked modern and lethal anti-shipping weapons. Their most effective weapons so far have been small boats packed with explosives and manned by suicide bombers. But this is changing as more and better weapons fall into the hands of terrorists.

Second, many of the trans-national terrorist network's most capable and ruthless planners have been killed or captured. They include Khalid Shaykh Muhammad, al Nashiri, Khallad and eleven others whom US President George Bush said on 6 September 2006 had been transferred to Guantanamo Bay detention centre in Cuba for trial before military tribunals. There have been dozens of terrorism-related prosecutions in many countries.

Third, there has also been a worldwide crackdown on the sources of terrorist finance, their communications and means of moving money around. Visa and border controls have been tightened. In addition, counter-terrorist cooperation and intelligence sharing between nations and among law enforcement agencies have been enhanced in recent years, although there is still much room for improvement.[48]

Fourth, it will take time not just to replace dead or captured planners but also to put any major maritime-related operation into effect. Remember that Khalid Shaykh Muhammad started to think about how to strike New York and Washington with hijacked planes in 1995, six years before the plot was actually carried out.

According to the 9/11 Commission Report, al-Qaeda's chief, Osama bin Laden, summoned Khalid Shaykh Muhammad to Kandahar in southwestern Afghanistan in March or April 1999 to tell him that al-Qaeda supported the "planes operation".[49] This was nearly two and a half years before the strikes took place.

Fifth, the shipping business, like the aviation industry, is now better protected by a range of measures to prevent terrorist attacks. So, too, are the US Navy and other naval forces around the world that have learned protective lessons since the attack on the USS Cole six years ago next month.[50]

The international community, spurred by the US, has tightened controls over the movement of containerised cargo at sea and on land. But given the scale of maritime trade and the huge volume of commerce moving through the global supply chain in cargo containers, the task is far from complete. Indeed, assuring total security from terrorism in a trading system designed to maximise efficiency and minimise costs is probably impossible, even if a new generation of so-called smart and secure containers become affordable and universally used, and all containers shipped on international trade routes by sea are scanned at their departing and arriving terminals.

Accurate and timely intelligence of any terrorist threat will remain the key to success. Those looking for signs of terrorist activity on ships or among the many millions of containers moving around the world by sea carrying legitimate cargo are checking for the proverbial needle in the haystack. And they are under pressure to do so without unnecessarily slowing global trade or increasing its cost.

A sixth reason why terrorists have not succeeded, at least so far, in causing greater damage to shipping may lie in the breakdown of centralized control. In the past few years, al-Qaeda has franchised its ideology around the world following the loss of Afghanistan as a base and training area. Holed up - possibly in the porous border zone between Afghanistan and Pakistan – al-Qaeda's leaders have watched as affiliates and emulators, often in home-grown and largely autonomous cells, have taken root and launched their own terrorist activity in Asia, Europe, the Middle East, North Africa, Australia, Canada and the US itself.

Second Generation Leadership

So far, this wave of second generation al-Qaeda inspired terrorism has been directed against mainly land-based and air targets, including laden jet airliners, crowded commuter rail systems; US embassies and consulates; landmark buildings; places frequented by tourists; expatriate housing communities; and oil production, refining and storage facilities.[51] Using remotely detonated explosions or suicide bombers to attack targets that are part of everyday urban and industrial life may be easier, cheaper and quicker to organize than striking from the sea. These attacks on 'soft' targets are planned and carried out in secret by just a few people using relatively small amounts of explosives that can be bought and put together without great difficulty. Such attacks are hard to detect and stop. Yet they are effective in causing fear and conveying a political message.[52]

The US intelligence community has concluded that violent Sunni jihadists, although a small percentage of Muslims, are increasing in both number and geographic dispersion, partly because Iraq has become a focal point of resentment against the US. It says that apart from al-Qaeda, other affiliated Sunni extremist organizations, such as Jemaah Islamiyah, Ansar al-Sunnah, and several North African groups, unless countered, are likely to expand their reach and become capable of multiple and/or mass casualty attacks outside their traditional areas of operation. Such groups, in this assessment, are less of a danger to the US homeland than al-Qaeda but will pose varying degrees of threat to US allies and interests abroad and that the focus of their attacks is likely to ebb and flow between local regime targets and regional or global ones.[53]

WMD Terrorism

However, the US intelligence community has also cautioned that jihadist groups will continue to seek chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) capabilities. Mustafa Setmariam Nasar, often referred to by the nom de guerre Abu Musab al-Suri, has urged clandestine terrorist cells to use weapons of mass destruction or radiological bombs if they can get them. He is the Syrian-born strategist for decentralized global jihad who was arrested in Pakistan in October 2005 and then handed over to US

intelligence agents. Some analysts argue that the risk of terrorists being able to acquire or build a nuclear explosive device is overstated. Others say that the fissile material needed to build a bomb is available, or could become available and that there are terrorists groups that have already demonstrated the technical abilities and organizational reach to make an improvised nuclear device.[54]

Most experts believe that a radiological or 'dirty' bomb (which uses conventional explosives to disperse radioactive material) is well within the technical capabilities of at least some terrorist groups and that they could get all the components without much difficulty. Such a device would probably be designed as weapon of mass disruption - to cause panic, chaos and prolonged economic dislocation in a metropolis or port-city. US-led counter-proliferation programs, such as the Container Security Initiative and the Megaports Initiative, are intended to prevent terrorists from shipping dangerous nuclear or radioactive material into US ports. But critics of existing measures say they fall far short of what is needed to detect the clandestine shipment of dirty bombs wrapped in lead shielding, bomb-grade highly enriched uranium or even a nuclear weapon into the US in cargo containers.[55]

The majority view among international officials and specialists is that some form of CBRN attack is highly likely in the next decade. The nightmare scenario, in which terrorists would move from a position of relative technological weakness to approximate symmetry of power with their perceived enemies in the US and elsewhere, is certainly no longer unthinkable. A survey was commissioned in late 2004 and early 2005 by the US Senate Foreign Relations chairman Richard Lugar. It canvassed the views of more than 80 international arms control and national security experts. They put the likelihood of a nuclear, biological, chemical or radiological attack in the next 10 years at 70 per cent. There was strong, though not unanimous, agreement that any nuclear attack is more likely to be carried out by a terrorist organization than a government. A majority of those surveyed said a black market purchase was the most likely way for terrorists to get nuclear weapons or fissile material.[56]

Sunni-Shiite Extremists: Competition or Common Front?

There may be another looming threat as well: the prospect of intensified international terrorism on an increasingly wide range of fronts - on land, in the air and at sea - as Sunni and Shiite radicals compete, and perhaps in some cases cooperate, to spread political violence.[57] In Iraq, al-Qaeda in the second half of 2006 sought to mend its virulently anti-Shiite reputation by distinguishing between those supporting the US-backed government and those who were neutral or actively resisting it.[58]

However, continuing rivalry between Sunni and Shiite extremists is likely to predominate in their relationship as the historic feud between the two main branches of Islam intensifies in Iraq and elsewhere.[59] In September 2006, as Hezbollah trumpeted its claimed victory over Israel to the applause of the Arab populace in the Middle East, al-Qaeda warned that it would be making Israel and the Gulf Arab states its next targets in a campaign it said would seal the West's economic doom in the world's top oil exporting region. The implication of this call to arms is that Sunni radicals intend to compete with their Shiite counterparts for control of the Palestine-Israel-Lebanon heartland and the Gulf region.[60]

Sunni Arab Reaction to Iran's Rise

However, the rise of Shiites in Iraq and Lebanon, backed by the Shia theocracy in Iran, is challenging traditional Sunni Arab authority in the Middle East, creating new ferment and instability. This is exacerbating the historic mistrust between Iran and many of its Arab neighbours in the Persian Gulf and other parts of the Middle East, the source of most of Asia's oil. These regimes want to defend the primacy of Sunni/Arab Islam in the region, which they see as an integral part of their own self-defence. This may incline them to cooperate, either openly or covertly, with the US and Israel against Shiite/Persian Iran.[61]

Hezbollah's Global Reach

So far, al-Qaeda and other Sunni extremists have shown at lot of interest in maritime-related terrorism. They have been exclusively involved in nearly all the plans and operations outlined so far in this report. But Hezbollah and other arms of the Iranian-

sponsored terrorist movement have also carried out maritime-related strikes against Israel, as well as bombings against Israeli and US targets abroad.

In the aftermath of the fighting with Israel in July and August 2006, Hezbollah backed by Iran may be planning to mount terrorist attacks abroad against Israeli and US targets, since Hezbollah and its foreign patrons publicly identified the US as Israel's key ally in the fighting. Hezbollah's global network is spread out over more than 40 countries and five continents. In contrast to al-Qaeda and the now highly decentralized Sunni extremist network, Hezbollah is centrally directed from Lebanon and works in tandem with Iran. Its budget is estimated at about US$100 million a year and mainly comes from Teheran.[62]

New Prototype

Hezbollah has emerged as a new prototype for a guerrilla or terrorist organisation – one with foreign state patrons (Iran and Syria), an international support network, a satellite television and media outreach program reaching an estimated 10 to 15 million viewers daily around the world, and ready access to money and increasingly sophisticated arms. Its original ideological and military leadership is still intact and has not been affected to anywhere near the same degree as al-Qaeda by the killing and capture of key operatives. Formed by Iran's powerful clerical army in 1982 to counter Israel, Hezbollah remains committed to the Iranian theocracy's extremist vision of a Shiite dominated caliphate in the region, and of confrontation with the West, especially the US. In 2002, then US Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage suggested that Hezbollah, not the Sunni extremist movement, might be the premier terrorist threat to international peace and security. "Hezbollah may be the 'A team' of terrorists," he said. "Maybe al-Qaeda is actually the 'B team.'" This may well be true today and his assessment reportedly reflects a long-standing consensus in the US intelligence community: Hezbollah is a terrorist group with global reach and extensive asymmetric capabilities, due largely to its strategic partnership with Iran.[63]

Trigger Points

The Lebanese Hezbollah has not carried out major bombings outside its immediate region since attacks against Jewish and Israeli targets in Argentina (1992 and 1994, when the group also tried but failed to bomb the Israeli embassy in Thailand) and against Americans in the Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia (1996). Hezbollah is likely to re-launch terrorist operations abroad if:

1) the US, supported by Israel, assembles an effective coalition of countries opposed to Iran's nuclear ambitions[64]

   or

2) the fragile truce in Lebanon breaks down and hostilities resume between Hezbollah and Israel.[65]

Hezbollah's Strikes from the Sea

Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the military wing of Fatah claimed responsibility for the container attack in the Israeli port of Ashdod in March 2004. They are all Sunni Arab militant groups. But the Lebanese Hezbollah and Iran have become increasingly involved in the Palestinian struggle against Israel in recent years, providing arms and other assistance to fighters of Hamas and other units.[66] Israeli forces have intercepted at least three major shipments of these weapons by sea in the last five years.

Abu Hassan

In the most recent, in May 2003, naval commandos boarded an Egyptian fishing boat, the Abu Hassan. Of the eight people aboard, at least one was a Hezbollah operative. Hidden in the vessel were fuses for Katyusha rockets, electronic bomb-making components, materials used to make explosive vests for suicide bombers and Hezbollah compact discs containing instructions.[67]

Karine A

The biggest arms haul was taken from a 4,000-tonne freighter, the Karine A, in January 2002. When boarded off the Israeli Red Sea port of Eilat, it was found to be carrying 50 tons of rockets, mines, anti-tank missiles, guns and C-4 plastic explosives

from Iran for Palestinian terrorists. The Karine A's captain was a longtime Fatah activist and adviser to the Palestinian Authority's naval police. The freighter went from the Jordanian port of Aqaba to an Iranian island in the Persian Gulf where its military cargo was loaded. Further investigation revealed that the arms were purchased through Iran's so-called "Export Committee of the Islamic Revolution" for US$15 million. Payment was made through Lebanon via Hezbollah agents. Senior US intelligence officers in Iraq say that the Iranian government is now spending millions of dollars to train and equip Shiite extremist groups in Iraq and that Iranian C-4 captured in Baghdad in 2006 is identical to the C-4 taken by the Israelis from the Karine A in 2002.[68]

Santorini

A year earlier, in May 2001, Israeli naval forces intercepted the Santorini, a 65-foot wooden boat laden with a large shipment of munitions that included SA-7 Strela man-portable anti-aircraft missiles. The shipment smuggled from Libya was arranged by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command for delivery to Palestinian Authority representatives. Israel has thwarted many other more recent attempts to smuggle explosives, weapons and terrorists by sea into Gaza.[69]

Singapore

While Hezbollah is based in Lebanon, it casts an increasingly long shadow across the Middle East and into other parts of the world. For example, in 1998, several operatives from the Iranian-backed network were planning to attack US naval vessels and Israeli commercial ships in Singapore or as they approached, using small boats packed with explosives.[70] Singapore's Internal Security Department disclosed Hezbollah's activities in June 2002, saying that the operatives had been expelled after they tried to recruit Singaporeans and establish a cell in the island-state similar to those working elsewhere in Asia and in North and South America, Europe, the Middle East and Africa.[71]

Hezbollah: Iran's Arm's Length Strike Force

These cells, front organisations and support groups have been involved in fund raising, recruitment, and intelligence gathering as well as criminal activity and money laundering. They have also been preparing for terrorist attacks should Hezbollah and its main patron, Iran, decide to launch them. Hezbollah gives Iran an international capability for retaliation against US interests on several fronts and on several continents.[72]

Hezbollah's Lethal Arsenal

The military wing of the Shiite Hezbollah movement in Lebanon is sometimes described as a militia. But the recent fighting with Israel has revealed it to be one of the best equipped guerrilla forces in the world. Hezbollah is a militia trained like an army and equipped like a state, an Israeli soldier who had just returned from combat against the group in southern Lebanon in August 2006, told the New York Times. With some 3,500 fighters, an infantry brigade size force, Hezbollah's military wing proved to be very well organised, equipped and armed.

Its weapons included some that have rarely, if ever, been seen before in the hands of non-state actors:

…advanced anti-tank missiles and rocket-propelled grenades such as the Russian-designed RPG-29 which proved to be effective against Israeli tanks and armoured vehicles. The RPG-29, which Russia had sold to Syria, has a tandem warhead. The first explosion is designed to blow away the target's protective armour and the second penetrates it;[73]

…the Ababil unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV), a pilotless aircraft with a self-guidance system that is capable of carrying an 88-pound warhead for up to 150 miles. Iran builds the Ababil and supplied it to Hezbollah. Three were launched against Israel but were shot down.[74]

The UAVs and the armour-piercing missiles are potentially new weapons in the hands of terrorists for use against ships.

C-802 Anti-Ship Missile

Among Hezbollah's arsenal of modern arms was a weapon not normally associated with even the fanciest guerrilla group. On 14 July, two days after Hezbollah triggered the conflict by capturing and killing some soldiers inside Israel, it fired two C-802 radar-guided cruise missiles. One seriously damaged an Israeli corvette about 16 kilometres off the coast. The ship was helping to enforce Israel's blockade of Lebanon. Four sailors were killed. The second C-802 narrowly missed another Israeli corvette. Instead, it hit a Cambodian-registered freighter, sinking the vessel and killing 11 Egyptian crewmen.[75]

Neither Israel nor the US knew that Hizbollah fighters had such sophisticated weapons as the C-802 in their arsenal. As a result, the Israeli vessel did not have its missile-defence system on. Even if it had, the system would probably have been unable to protect it from the sea-skimming missile traveling at just under the speed of sound.[76]

The C-802 is rated by experts as among the most lethal anti-ship missiles in the world. How did Hizbollah get such an advanced weapon? From Iran - by sea, air or overland through Syria, another Hizbollah ally. Iran bought at least 75 of the missiles from China in the mid-1990s. It reportedly received help from China and North Korea to extend their range and improve their accuracy. With its own product line, Teheran clearly felt it had enough of the C-802s to send some to Hizbollah in Lebanon and provide the training needed to operate them successfully.[77]

Epitath

There is global arms bazaar where cash is king and state controls lax. Arms smuggling is rife in the Middle East and the region is awash with weapons, reflecting its many conflicts. In September 2006, after the first RPG-29 was discovered in Iraq following Hezbollah's use of the weapon against Israel in southern Lebanon, the commander of US forces in the Middle East, General John Abizaid, warned that it might be a hint of things to come.[78]

For those who regard Hezbollah as an international terrorist organization armed by Iran and Syria, the transfer of high-tech anti-ship cruise missiles, shorter-

range armour-piercing weapons and UAVs is an alarming development. Hezbollah has gone one-up by showing al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups it can use these weapons in combat. As a result, navies and commercial shipping face a significantly higher level of threat, especially if there is a resurgence in fighting between Hezbollah and Israel or a major conflict with Iran involving the US and Israel.[79]

The use of the C-802 by Hezbollah shows the increasingly dangerous nexus between technology and terrorism. It also shows that there has been a quantum leap in the weaponry available for maritime-related terrorist attacks.

NOTES

1. The phrase 'maritime-related' encompasses merchant and private shipping, as well as the naval vessels that help protect the sealanes carrying the bulk of global grade. It also covers the cargo container supply chain that is an integral part of modern commerce and now stretches into most parts of the world. Sea trade does not begin and end in ports or at the dockside. For those who have to police international trade and keep it secure, responsibility starts in the factories and wharehouses on land where containers are loaded. It ends where they are unloaded. In between, the containers may have been carried by road and rail, as well as sea, on their journeys around the world.

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