



Behind Islamic Terror

“Al-Qaeda Stronger than Ever.” “U.S. Concern at Al-Qaeda Strength.” These and similar titles accompanied news stories that began breaking during the second week of July, announcing leaks of a disturbing new classified intelligence report. Prepared for President Bush by the National Counter Terrorism Center (NCTC), the five-page report entitled *Al-Qaeda Better Prepared to Strike the West* paints a picture of a revived, more dangerous terror network led by Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri.

The Associated Press reported on July 11 that an unnamed counterterrorism official familiar with the still-unreleased report paraphrased the briefing paper as finding that al-Qaeda is “considerably operationally stronger than a year ago,” and that it has “regrouped to an extent not seen since 2001.” The terror group is “showing greater and greater ability to plan attacks in Europe and the United States,” the same official reportedly said.

John Kringen, who heads the CIA’s analysis directorate, echoed this same grim assessment of al-Qaeda’s resurgence during his July 11 testimony to the House Armed Services Committee. “They seem to be fairly well settled into the safe haven and the ungoverned spaces of Pakistan,” Kringen said concerning al-Qaeda. “We see more training. We see more money. We see more communications. We see that activity rising.”

The same week, Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff set off a political furor when he expressed a “gut feeling” that the United States faced a heightened risk of terror attacks from al-Qaeda this summer. Accentuating reports of a revitalized al-Qaeda is a noticeable upswing in the group’s propaganda campaign over the Internet, radio, and television. As the *Christian Science Monitor* reported on July 16, there is “no question that Al-Qaeda propaganda outlets have been working at a high rate over the past year, with frequent and timely broadcasts from the group’s No. 2, the Egyptian doctor Ayman al-Zawahiri.”

The *Monitor* story noted that al-Qaeda’s media production unit, known as As-Sahab, has released at least 63 audio and video messages so far this year, compared with 58 in all of 2006. And in many of those messages, it points out, “Mr. Zawahiri has been able to respond to the news events within days,” indicating not only a high level of technological sophistication by the media-savvy Zawahiri, but a high level of confidence in his ability to get his message out without giving away his location.

Thus, six years after the 9/11 terror attacks on America, and after enormous expenditures of U.S. military and economic resources in the “war on terror,” we appear to be back to square one. At an October 25, 2006 White House press conference, President Bush was asked: “Are we winning?” He responded: “Absolutely, we’re winning. Al-Qaeda is on the run.” But as Georgetown University terrorism expert Bruce Hoffman noted recently, “Al-Qaeda is not on the run, it is on the march.” The new National Counter Terrorism Center report appears to agree with Professor Hoffman’s assessment.

Al-Qaeda, of course, is not the only kid on the terrorist block. Dozens of other groups are also very active and noteworthy players on the global terror stage: Hezbollah, Hamas, PLO/al-Fatah, Islamic Jihad Group, Taliban, Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, Jamaat ul-Fuqra, Abu Sayyef-to name but a few.

And those are only the “Islamist” actors. There are other important terrorist groups as well, despite the



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fact that the “radical Muslim” or “Islamic fundamentalist” organizations appear to be the only ones that obtain the terrorist label or news mention these days. Communist-oriented terrorist organizations seem to be completely off the mental radar screen, even when they are murderously active (like the Basque ETA in Spain) or when they control a vast narcotics empire and a geographical area the size of Switzerland (like the FARC in Colombia).

Modern international terrorism, especially as it came to the fore in the 1960s and '70s, was exemplified by Marxist-Leninist “liberation” groups that more or less openly aligned themselves with Moscow and/or Beijing. They operated out of the Soviet-bloc countries or Moscow’s surrogate Third World regimes in Africa, the Middle East, or Latin America. The Soviet KGB and its proxy intelligence services in East Germany, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Cuba were indispensable to the terrorists’ existence, providing arms, money, training, explosives, passports, safe houses, coordination, and critical intelligence. Virtually all counterterrorist authorities recognized that, with few exceptions, terrorist organizations were merely cats’ paws for the Soviet Union, which was both the primary benefactor and beneficiary of their violent campaigns.

However, a little over 15 years ago, conventional wisdom has it, a geopolitical paradigm shift occurred that changed all that. That 1991 sea-change event, usually referred to as the “collapse” of the Soviet Union, not only dramatically altered the East vs. West dimension that had dominated global political dynamics throughout the 20th century, but, supposedly, also brought an abrupt end to Russian sponsorship of terrorism worldwide.

Henceforth, the primary terror threats would emanate not from Moscow, Berlin, Havana, and Prague, but from Tehran, Damascus, Beirut, and Khartoum. They would march not under the red banner and hammer and sickle of communism, but rather, under the green banner and sword and crescent of Islam. Muhammad, not Marx, the *Q’uran*, not the *Communist Manifesto*, would provide the motive force to move the new revolutionaries.

The new dynamic in world conflict, many now insist, is no longer the clash of ideologies, as typified by the Cold War, but the *clash of civilizations*, as exemplified by the 9/11 attacks, the continuing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the increasing militancy of “fundamentalist” Muslims worldwide. “The Clash of Civilizations” is, of course, the title of a seminal 1993 article by Professor Samuel P. Huntington for *Foreign Affairs*, the journal of the Council on Foreign Relations. “It is my hypothesis,” wrote Huntington, “that the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural.” “The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics,” he averred, and “the fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future.”

The chief battle line in this global vision is the one between Western civilization and a militant Islam aligned with China. Huntington developed this theme more fully in his 1996 book, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, hyped by some as the most influential political treatise of the post-Cold War era.

Huntington’s hypothesis of a realigned world order based on a clash of civilizations has become the working blueprint for the policy elites of both the Republican and Democratic parties. According to this establishment-favored hypothesis, our longtime strategic adversary, (Soviet) Russia, has become our new strategic ally in the war on terrorism. After all, beneath Russia’s decades-long encrustation of communist repression bestirs an Orthodox Christian heritage. And, like us, our new Russian “partners” also are beset by Muslim extremists and terrorists, including al-Qaeda.



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One of the most forceful exponents of the clash of civilizations is Thomas P.M. Barnett, controversial author of *The Pentagon's New Map: War and Peace in the Twenty-First Century* (2004) and *Blueprint for Action* (2005). Barnett, a professor at the U.S. Naval War College who has had a great influence on the Bush administration, divides the world into regions labeled the "Functioning Core" — the United States, European Union, Russia, China, and the Pacific Rim countries, and others that are adapting to "globalization" — and the "Non-Integrating Gap," comprised of countries that must be forced militarily to accept globalization and become part of the "Core." That means, for starters, mostly Muslim countries. However, Barnett advocates using the troops of "Leviathan" (his term for a U.S.-led global army) to subjugate Christian countries as well. The Muslim problem, he says "only accounts for about 40 (max, 50) percent of the Gap's total population. The rest is largely Christian (Catholics and Protestants, with evangelicals and Mormons gaining fast), whose version of those religions is likewise far more fundamentalist than their counterparts in the Core."

Following the September 11, 2001 attacks, Russian President Vladimir Putin was one of the first foreign leaders to call President Bush to offer condolences and support. For those of the Huntington/Barnett school of thought at the Council on Foreign Relations and similar centers of influence, this was a transformational moment signaling an epochal opportunity to turn the former chief sponsor of global terror into our main ally against the new terror threats.

This amazing transformation of the old world order began almost immediately. Several months after the 9/11 attacks, leaders at the June 2002 G8 Summit in Kananaskis, Canada, launched the Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction. The main feature of this partnership was a \$20 billion investment by the G8 members toward the objective of "preventing terrorists, or those who harbour them, from acquiring or developing nuclear, chemical, radiological, and biological weapons." The bulk of this treasure chest was targeted first and foremost for Russia, which was deemed the most at risk to lose WMDs and related technology to terrorists.

Vladimir Putin and Russia are, arguably, the biggest beneficiaries of the 9/11 attacks, both monetarily and politically. More valuable to the Kremlin than the multibillion-dollar booty mentioned above are the diplomatic, trade, defense, and intelligence doors that have been opened to Russia as our purported valued partner in the war on terror. In fact, President Bush and other U.S. leaders are so solicitous of Putin's "aid" in this regard that they are more than willing to either ignore his aggressive installation of Soviet-style governance, or to let it pass with perfunctory verbal criticism.

Consider, for example, the mounting evidence that former KGB/FSB chief Putin was behind the very public execution-by-poison in England of FSB defector Lt. Col. Alexander Litvinenko. Despite the evidence, the Bush administration has said and done little to nothing in response, apparently unwilling to risk upsetting Putin and the supposedly vital U.S.-Russian "relationship" in the mutual effort against Islamic terrorism.

For, as a November 24, 2006 Reuters report on the Litvinenko assassination pointed out, "Putin has been an ally of the West against Islamic extremism since the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States," even though "relations have been strained in recent years over what Western governments call Moscow's slide towards authoritarianism."

However, the Litvinenko assassination—apparently an act of state terror—should have shined a very important spotlight on our budding relationship with Putin and called into question just how "mutual" the concerns of our two nations are when it comes to terrorism. Lt. Col. Litvinenko's murder was obviously intended to silence him as well as to set an example that would dissuade others from



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defecting. Regarding the former, Litvinenko was bringing out many disturbing charges and facts showing that Putin's KGB/FSB is continuing to sponsor the global terror network launched by the Soviet KGB in the 1960s and nurtured by them through the 1980s. That includes current sponsorship and direction of al-Qaeda and its two top leaders, Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri.

FBI's "Most Wanted" Terrorists

Very likely, one of the specific reasons for Alexander Litvinenko's liquidation was the publication of his exposé, *Blowing Up Russia: The Secret Plot to Bring Back KGB Terror*. Litvinenko's explosive book provided an FSB insider's confirmation that the sensational terrorist bombings in Russia attributed to Chechen Islamic nationalists were actually the work of Putin's FSB Special Operations Groups, part of the restructured and renamed Soviet KGB. Extensive evidence already published by independent investigators and journalists had pointed to the same conclusion, but having that conclusion confirmed by Litvinenko undoubtedly unnerved the Russian commissars.

However, Litvinenko upped the ante in 2005 when he revealed, from his ex-FSB contacts, that "Islamic fundamentalist" Ayman al-Zawahiri had been trained by the Russian FSB. This is incredibly significant since Dr. al-Zawahiri is the reputed operational mastermind behind al-Qaeda and is second only to Osama bin Laden on the FBI's "Most Wanted Terrorists" list. "Ayman al-Zawahiri trained at a Federal Security Service (FSB) base in Dagestan in 1998," Litvinenko told the Polish newspaper *Rzeczpospolita*, in a July 17, 2005 interview. "He was then transferred to Afghanistan, where he became Osama bin Laden's deputy," the defector said. "I was working in that section at the time and I can confirm the fact Zawahiri was not the only link between the FSB and Al-Qaeda."

Bin Laden and Zawahiri had been closely associated in *jihadi* activities for more than a decade by that time. By 1998, Zawahiri formally merged his Egyptian Islamic Jihad with bin Laden's al-Qaeda, creating a single unified command.

Is there anything besides Litvinenko's sensational charge indicating that Zawahiri might actually be an FSB operative? As a matter of fact, yes. We will digress to 1996 and an account of three travelers in Azerbaijan. Parts of this story have been told in various public sources ranging from the *Wall Street Journal* to the websites of intelligence analysts from the Jamestown Foundation and Axis Information and Analysis (AIA). We have drawn from these and other sources to put together this brief rendering of a very telling episode.

In December 1996, a minivan carrying three men was headed toward Chechnya, making its way across the narrow strip of Russian territory between the Caucasus Mountains and the Caspian Sea. Near the city of Derbent, the men ran into a Russian roadblock. Lacking visas, they were arrested and turned over to the FSB for interrogation. One member of the trio, a "businessman" traveling on a Sudanese passport, carried \$6,500 worth of cash in several currencies, a satellite phone, a laptop, and other electronics equipment. The laptop contained many coded messages in Arabic. The Sudanese "Mr. Amin" was, in reality, the head of Egyptian Islamic Jihad — Ayman al-Zawahiri. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, "Dr. Zawahiri spent the next six months in a crumbling jail, fretting that the Russians would discover his true identity." But, in the end, "his cover held, and he was freed."

The authors of the 2002 *Wall Street Journal* article, Andrew Higgins and Allen Cullison, are inexplicably willing to accept at face value Dr. Zawahiri's wildly implausible explanation for his travels in Russia and his even more unbelievable account of his release. Higgins and Cullison write:

The [Russian] judge rejected prosecution demands for a three-year sentence and gave the men only



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six months. They'd already been in jail five months, so the Russians soon freed them.

"God blinded them to our identities," Dr. Zawahiri wrote later, in his account of his trip. "God's mercy accompanied us during these months." The Russians returned the cash, the communications gear, and the computer, its mostly Arabic-language documents nearly all unread. Abulkhalik Abdusalamov, their court-appointed lawyer, says he never got close to his clients and couldn't figure out what they were up to or why they were carrying so much electronic equipment.

Freed from Russian jail in May 1997, Dr. Zawahiri found refuge in Afghanistan, yoking his fortunes to Mr. bin Laden. Egyptian Jihad, previously devoted to the narrow purpose of toppling secular rule in Egypt, became instead the biggest component of al-Qaeda and major agent of a global war against America.

"Eight months after the Russian fiasco," Higgins and Cullison continue, "Dr. Zawahiri and Mr. bin Laden announced an alliance dedicated to killing Americans, a task they called the 'duty of every Muslim.'"

Another news account quotes an FSB spokesman named Sergei Ignatchenko who says that Zawahiri "had four passports, in four different names and nationalities. We checked him out in every country, but they could not confirm him. We could not keep him forever, so we took him to the Azerbaijani border and let him go." Which is even more fantastic than the *Journal's* account.

Keep in mind that this episode takes place during a period when the FSB and the Russian military were waging a vicious genocidal war against Chechnya because, they said, the Chechens, aided by outside Islamic fundamentalists, were carrying out a terrorist campaign against Mother Russia. Now think in terms of how the Russian FSB might respond to three foreign Arabic men who are traveling under false identity, have multiple aliases and passports, claim to work for a non-existent company, possess sophisticated communications equipment and a laptop with coded messages, and are detained trying to sneak through a little-used back door to the embattled area, under the pretext of checking out the market potential for health foods and leather goods. After their arrest, guards report that the men are visited by Islamic radicals who petition for their release and leave coded messages that investigators cannot decipher. Would the FSB not have uncovered their identities, and have let them go?

"Perhaps most difficult to believe from Zawahiri's version is that his captors would not have read the Arabic information contained within his laptop computer," commented Dr. Evgenii Novikov, a Russian defector and scholar in Islamic affairs who is now a senior fellow at the Jamestown Foundation in Virginia. "Russian intelligence has probably the best Arabists in the world.... These individuals would have been able not only to read Zawahiri's Arabic text, but also to decode his encrypted messages without any problem."

But we are supposed to believe that a generous Russian judge and some kindly KGB/FSB guys simply said: "Gee, fellas, you've really stumped us with your codes here, and nothing in your stories checks out, and everything else about you is incredibly suspicious, but we're in an especially good mood. So here's all your money, fake IDs, computer, and spy stuff. Be sure to be more careful next time. So long now and drive safely."

More likely, says Dr. Novikov, the KGB/ FSB would have realized very quickly who Zawahiri was and would have applied to him the torture and blackmail techniques for which they are infamous. Zawahiri, after all, was a well-recognized and much-photographed leader of one of the world's major terrorist groups, Egyptian Islamic Jihad. Novikov believes Zawahiri "broke" under torture and became an asset



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of the FSB. Which makes much more sense than the *Journal's* story.

However, there is another explanation that makes even more sense, and that is that Zawahiri was already working for the FSB when he was "arrested" in 1996. That is, he was thrown in jail as a cover (a common ploy of police and intelligence agencies) while he and his superiors worked out future terror plots. This fits with earlier suspicions among the Afghan Mujahedeen concerning Zawahiri's ascendance there following the assassination of Sheikh Abdullah Azzam.

Sheikh Azzam, a Palestinian professor who had mentored young Osama bin Laden, urged Arabic Muslims to declare *jihad* against the Soviets for their invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979. Setting up camp in Peshawar, Pakistan, Sheikh Azzam, backed by the wealth of bin Laden, soon was *the* recognized leader of the Arabic Mujahedeen.

Zawahiri sought Azzam's influence over the wealthy bin Laden, and with that objective in mind Zawahiri soon became the young billionaire's personal physician. He also began placing his Egyptians in critical slots around both bin Laden and Azzam. Zawahiri tried to get Azzam to change his focus from fighting the Soviet invaders and their communist Afghan appointees to instead directing the Mujahedeen to attack America and overthrow secular Arabic regimes. When Azzam adamantly refused, Zawahiri began spreading rumors that Azzam was a CIA spy. On November 24, 1989, Azzam and two of his sons were killed when their car was blown up while on the way to the Peshawar mosque.

Many who were close to the situation have expressed their beliefs that Zawahiri was the one who ordered the hit. Finnish terrorism expert Aansi Kullberg is among those who state it as a fact. Regardless, we do know for sure that the murder of Azzam resulted in bin Laden and Zawahiri inheriting Azzam's Mujahedeen army. They began its radical reorientation into a virulently anti-American terrorist group.

Much more could be said to support Mr. Litvinenko's thesis that Ayman al-Zawahiri is a Russian agent, rather than an Islamic fundamentalist. And he is not unique in this regard. In fact, as we show in "[The Real Terror Paymasters](#)" and "[Who's Who in Terrorism](#)," many other important leaders of "Muslim" terrorist organizations possess similar pedigrees, demonstrating that Islamic terrorism is joined at the hip with the international terror network sponsored by the Soviet Union/Russia.



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