

Asymmetric Audacity: The Threat of Fear and Fearlessness

Terrorists "follow no rules, they have no fear of law, no ethics or morality, they are on zero loss, they are either not afraid of death or ready to die anyway; death is not a deterrent," said one commentator in the wake of the November 2008 Mumbai attacks.¹

Such fearlessness has become an overwhelmingly common trait amongst asymmetric threat actors worldwide. And there is no shortage of examples in the current threat environment.

In a two week period this month, over 150 people were killed in several coordinated suicide attacks by the Taliban in Pakistan.² The worst of the violence has been in Lahore, Pakistan's second largest city and the country's cultural center, which had long been spared until this year. The Pakistani Taliban vowed to follow up with even more attacks as Pakistan's military prepares for major offensive against the Taliban in their South Waziristan stronghold along the Afghan border.

In the Philippines, two U.S. soldiers and a Filipino marine were killed by a roadside bomb believed to have been planted by al-Qaida-linked militants, Abu Sayyaf. The U.S. has been working with Filipino troops to battle the extremist group. The September 29th attack was, "the first time at least in any recent history that I can recall that any particular device of this nature was used against U.S. forces," said Pentagon spokesman Bryan Whitman.³

As terror groups have become more emboldened in their attacks, groups have looked for new recruits in the very regions they target - the U.S. and Europe. Terror groups, like Al Qaeda, have targeted young Muslims in immigrant communities as well as Western converts. "In recent years, over two hundred men and women born or raised in the West have participated in, or provided support for Islamic terrorist plots and attacks."⁴ While the problem has been more prevalent in the UK, "home grown" terrorists are also in the rise in the U.S. For example, as many as 20 young Somali men from Minnesota were recruited for terrorist activity in their war-ravaged homeland over the past two years. "At least three have died in Somalia and three others have pleaded guilty in the U.S. to terror-related charges."⁵

The east African country is a particular concern. The chief of British intelligence (MI5), Jonathan Evans, in January warned that Somalia could become a terrorist safe haven just as Afghanistan was in 2001 before the removal of the Taliban. "It has gone up in the last few years

¹ Dr. Vishnu Kanhere, "Information Systems, The New Horizon for Terrorism," *CSI Communication*, February 2009, <http://www.csi-india.org/information-systems-new-horizon-terrorism>.

² "Pakistan Rocked by Fresh Attacks," *BBCNews*, October 15, 2009, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/8308166.stm.

³ "Two U.S. soldiers killed by bomb in Philippines," *Reuters*, September 29, 2009, <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/MAN489084.htm>.

⁴ David Gartenstein Ross and Laura Grossman, "Homegrown Terrorists in the U.S. and U.K.; An Empirical Examination of the Radicalization Process," April 2009, http://www.defenddemocracy.org/downloads/HomegrownTerrorists_USandUK.pdf.

⁵ Amy Forliti, "Somalia president condemns Minn. terror recruiting," *Dayton Daily News*, October 4, 2009, <http://www.daytondailynews.com/news/ohio-news/somalia-president-condemns-minn-terror-recruiting-330836.html>.

and there are now networks that help individuals go and take part or provide support to extremist gangs in Somalia," said Evans.⁶

Off the Somali coast and throughout the Indian Ocean, 2009 has seen a dramatic increase in the number of pirate attacks. "Pirates have successfully hijacked 34 ships worldwide so far this year, mostly off the Somali coast, compared to 49 during all of last year," according to Australia's Inspector of Transport Security. The European Union claimed to have thwarted some 100 other pirate attacks since sending forces to the region in December of 2008.⁷ Nevertheless, the lack of law enforcement around the Gulf of Aden and the estimated \$7 million in ransom and other fees generated by each successful hijack has made piracy a lucrative business. Emboldened pirates, in turn have become increasingly sophisticated in logistics and weaponry, and have widened their areas of attack.

While security threats have increased from asymmetric actors, threats from rogue state actors still loom large. This month, North Korea shot five short range missiles "in what analysts said was an attempt to improve its bargaining position ahead of possible talks with the United States."⁸ The Pentagon called the missile tests "unhelpful and potentially destabilizing."⁹ In May, North Korea conducted an underground nuclear weapon test, and some experts believe the country has already created medium-range nuclear warheads for missiles that could strike South Korea and Japan. Observers believe that North Korea's nuclear and missile programs represent an effort by an ailing Kim Jung Il to assert his own authority before his death.¹⁰

Iran's nuclear ambitions have long been an international security issue, stemming from the country's failure to declare sensitive enrichment and reprocessing activities to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). In September, the U.S. accused Iran of building a secret second uranium enrichment plant. Iran claims it is a pilot plant and their only goal for nuclear power is the generation of electricity. The UN Security Council wants Iran to end uranium enrichment and has approved three rounds of sanctions - including bans on Iran's arms exports and all trade in nuclear material. Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's smug dismissal of accusations, and increased anti-Israel rhetoric, as well as Iran's deadly crackdown of election protests, continues to demonstrate Iran's antipathy and defiance to international pressure.

From pirates to presidents, the rise of asymmetric threats has created many uncertainties. In the post-Cold War asymmetric threat environment, one thing is for certain: asymmetric actors have little or no fear, be it retribution, sanctions, or damage to reputation. And that brazenness may be the biggest threat of all.

⁶Duncan Gardham, "MI5 chief warns of threat from global recession," *Telegraph*, January 7, 2009, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/politics/defence/41444604415-chief-warns-of-threat-from-globalrecession.html>.

⁷Alex Kennedy, "No progress on piracy, Somali chief says," *Guardian*, October 15, 2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/feedarticle/8754933>.

⁸"N. Korea fires 5 short-range missiles, report says," *Associated Press*, October 12, 2009, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=113726039&ft=1&f=1125>.

⁹"U.S. slams North Korea missile tests," *Reuters*, October 14, 2009, <http://af.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idAFTRE59D5AX20091014>.

¹⁰Donald Kirk and Kristen Chick, "How big a threat is North Korea?" *Christian Science Monitor*, May 28, 2009, <http://www.csmonitor.com/2009/0528/p06s01-wosc.html?page=2>.