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**Abstract:** This is a series of papers that translate and analyze articles, reports, religious decrees, and other documents, written primarily in Arabic by Islamist scholars, clerics, operatives, or intellectuals.

**‘From Madrid to London:  
Al-Qaeda Exports the War in Iraq to Europe’  
By Reuven Paz**

**Introduction**

The bombings in London’s public transportation system on July 7<sup>th</sup> 2005 are too similar to the March 11<sup>th</sup> 2004 Madrid explosions, consisting of 10 explosive devices aboard four commuter trains during rush hour to ignore the possible connection. The nature of the attacks; the lack of the element of martyrdom; the two declarations of responsibility by “Al-Qaeda’s Secret Group in Europe,” and by the “Abu Hafs al-Masri Brigades;” and, above all, the clear link to the Islamist insurgency in Iraq, all—point at a Moroccan/Algerian cell or grouping that is carrying out the global strategy and doctrines of Al-Qaeda. Whereas the orders and the operational planning did not necessarily stem from the Al-Qaeda leadership in Afghanistan, Pakistan or elsewhere, the strategy did.

So far it appears that if Al-Qaeda has a number of North African cells in Europe, which operate much like sub-contractors affiliated with the strategy of global Jihad in Iraq. We can assume that such sub-contracting groups are composed of “not so sleeping” cells on European soil, and not of ‘imported’ groups of Saudi and Egyptian individuals, as in the case of the September 11 attacks.



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### **The Iraqi Connection**

The London blasts should first remind us of the book titled “Iraqi Jihad – Hopes and Risks,” which has been written in September 2003, published in December 2003 on several Jihadi Internet sites. That book, it should be remembered, had hinted at the future bombings in Madrid in March 2004.<sup>1</sup> The unsigned book was published by “The Iraqi Center of Services for the Mujahidin,” an organization whose name reminds of the “Service Bureau” (*Maktab al-Khidamat*), the mother organization of Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan in the late 1980s. The book analyzed the situation in Iraq and in several European countries involved in the war in Iraq and who had sent troops there. It aimed at presenting the war in Iraq as the supreme concern of the entire Muslim nation. Spain, on the eve of general elections in March 2004, was perceived as the weakest link, and ironically the bombings indeed led to the change of the Spanish government. Madrid was chapter one in the story.

The authors of the book also analyzed the Iraqi connection of the United Kingdom. The UK was perceived as a state “with no high priority of interest to sacrifice so many efforts. The UK was a strong industrial state, yet unable to survive a long period of a major crisis, such as the Iraqi one.” The one-sided position of the UK in the alliance with the United States was also regarded as the personal position of its Prime Minister Tony Blair. Nevertheless, the author admitted that the UK’s downsizing of number of its troops in Iraq, as well as its more or less concentrated presence in the relatively quiet southern part of Iraq, assisted the UK in surviving the situation so far.

In the fall of 2003, the conclusion of the authors was that “there was no reason for the UK to withdraw its troops from Iraq.” Therefore, “the only crucial element to encourage such a withdrawal was popular pressure. Such a pressure could result from huge losses on one hand, or the withdrawal of other European states such as Spain or Italy, on the other. In this case, the UK would withdraw immediately, since no British government could confront such popular pressures.”

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<sup>1</sup> See the book—*Iraq al-Jihad – Aamal wa-Akhtar*—in: [http://www.e-prism.org/images/book\\_-\\_Iraq\\_al-Jihad.doc](http://www.e-prism.org/images/book_-_Iraq_al-Jihad.doc) and in: [http://www.metransparent.com/texts/iraq\\_aljihad\\_amal\\_akhtar.htm](http://www.metransparent.com/texts/iraq_aljihad_amal_akhtar.htm) For an analysis of the threat to Spain in this book see PRISM special dispatch no. 1/2 (13 March 2004) in: [http://www.e-prism.org/images/PRISM\\_Special\\_dispatch\\_no\\_1-2.pdf](http://www.e-prism.org/images/PRISM_Special_dispatch_no_1-2.pdf) For a good analysis of the entire book see: <http://www.mil.no/felles/ffi/start/article.jhtml?articleID=71589>



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The book's authors, however, failed to correctly analyze the British position in fall 2003. Moreover, it seems that even after the London bombings, there is not going to be any change in the government's policy with regards to Iraq, nor in the position of the British public. Additionally, two developments took place between fall 2003 and July 2005. The first was the on-going wave of Sunni Jihadi attacks using martyrdom operations against the Shi'is in Southern Iraq. The attacks were an attempt to provoke a Shi'i insurgency and thus, further chaos in Iraq. Clearly, the attacks against the Shi'is were a strategy of the Wahhabi Jihadi Salafism of Al-Qaeda, and probably played a significant role in the establishing of collaboration between Al-Qaeda on one hand, and Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi's Al-Tawhid wal-Jihad, on the other. Those anti-Shi'i attacks may also have played a role in the influx of Arab Jihadi volunteers to Iraq—a majority of them Saudis.<sup>2</sup> It is of note that since the British army is occupying mostly the Shi'i regions of Southern Iraq, a Shi'ite insurgency could lead to major confrontation between them and the British forces. Thus far, too, this strategy has failed. The Iraqi Shi'is did not fall into this trap; their main rebel strongman, Muqtada al-Sadr, was silenced; the mainstream leadership won the general democratic elections and composed a government; and finally, there have been no public signs of Iranian involvement in the Shi'ite regions.

The second development was the general elections in the UK in May 2005. While, Prime Minister Blair was weakened during those elections; he still won a third term. The British presence in Iraq played an important role in the campaign, but the main opposition party, the Conservatives, did not challenge the government in a firm tone.

In an analysis of the bombings in London, published on the evening of July 7 in a Jihadi web site by one of the leading Saudi supporters of Al-Qaeda, the effect of the bombings was anticipated to be in the medium and long run, not the short one.<sup>3</sup> The analyst, is a man calling himself "Barbarosa,"—probably Abu Abd al-Aziz, a Saudi who commanded the brigades of the Arab Jihadi volunteers in Bosnia and returned to Saudi Arabia in the mid-1990s. In the article, "Barbarosa" reveals an important target of the global strategy of Al-Qaeda, namely the attempt to widen the gap between the United States and its European allies, with the aim of isolating the U.S.

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<sup>2</sup> On the Arab volunteers in Iraq and the role of Saudis among them, see PRISM Occasional Papers No. 1/3: "Arab Volunteers Killed in Iraq: an Analysis." See on-line in: [http://www.e-prism.org/images/PRISM\\_no\\_1\\_vol\\_3\\_-\\_Arabs\\_killed\\_in\\_Iraq.pdf](http://www.e-prism.org/images/PRISM_no_1_vol_3_-_Arabs_killed_in_Iraq.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> See on-line in: <http://www.tajdeed.org.uk/forums/showthread.php?s=b41a32c832558708abd304453a06ae15&threadid=36745>



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administration in the war against global terror. The London attacks were meant to bring the issue of the war in Iraq once again to the core of the public debate, even though the elections in the UK were over. The attacks were also designed to shake a situation in the European unity that has become increasingly fragile in recent months, in particular following the referendum on the European constitution in France, which rejected the planed charter. Finally, the attacks were timed to occur in the midst of the meeting of the leaders of the G-8 in the UK itself. Above all, the bombings came to remind the Arab Muslim world, not only the West, that global Jihad has a long-range strategy, where its leaders choose the targets and the timing, according to a clear strategy.

### **The Next Chapter**

According to “Barbarosa,” the next chapter in this story will take place in Italy, and affect Prime Minister Berlusconi, and the forthcoming Italian election campaign.

The link between the bombings on European soil and Iraq, reminds of another interpreter of Al-Qaeda, the one who calls himself “Lewis Atiyyat Allah.”

The day after the bombings in London, the Global Islamist Media Front (GIMF), the main propaganda apparatus of Al-Qaeda on the Internet, published an old article by ‘Lewis,’ titled “Yes Mister Blair, this is an historic war.”<sup>4</sup> The original version was published on 14 April 2004, following a speech by Mr. Blair, and was posted in Jihadi forums several times in the past year—most recently in May 2005, a short while after the UK elections, also by GIMF.

The article appeared following a long silence by ‘Lewis,’ who, between the end of 2001 and May 2003, has emerged as the most prominent interpreter of Al-Qaeda’s strategy, and an admired scholar among the younger generation of Al-Qaeda supporters. Most of his readers are unaware of his real name. ‘Lewis’ has so far managed to remain a mysterious figure. This aura adds to his popular appeal, along with his talented style in Arabic and his ability to plant a lot of optimism in his readers’ minds. ‘Lewis,’ some of whose family members are activists of Al-Qaeda, is a Saudi scholar who lacks a formal Islamic education, and who advocated Jihadi doctrines in the late 1990s. He was wanted by the Saudi authorities following the

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<sup>4</sup> See on-line in: <http://www.al-hesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=12619> as well as in other Jihadi forums. For the original version see on-line in: <http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=2633>



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Riyadh bombings in May 2003, and in September 2003 managed to escape to London, where he joined the Saudi Islamist oppositionist in exile, Dr. Sa'ad al-Faqih. Since his escape from Saudi Arabia in 2003, he published only two large articles; including the one directed at Tony Blair.

In his article to the British Prime Minister, 'Lewis' is trying to encourage the historical long-range perception of the war between the Islamists and the "infidel" West. The article is not merely a response to Blair, but also a reminder of the deteriorating situation in Iraq and the failure of the Western allies to achieve victory over the insurgents in Falluja. About the same time Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi became the commander of Al-Qaeda in Iraq and the use of kidnapping of hostages, while the beheading, and martyrdom operations became the primary *modus operandi* of the Jihadists, in addition to numerous attacks against Muslims.

'Lewis' anticipated that the next phase in Iraq would be "a resistance that would develop into a culture of Jihad, a prestigious resistance, and a pride of fighting the infidels, until it becomes an historical challenge." From "Lewis'" point of view, Mr. Blair "who is much smarter than his American colleagues" understands the historical dimension of this war. Moreover, the end of this process, despite the astonishment of the entire community of expert commentators, would be in achieving a balance in this asymmetric war. This seems to be the primary target of Al-Qaeda's strategy, not only militarily, but also morally: **The symmetry of the morals lies in the symmetry of suffering.** For this reason this struggle is a very long conflict, which the Mujahidin should also transfer to the enemy's territory. "I wish you could listen to what the returnees from Iraq say. Fighting the enemy became their best pleasures on earth... This notion became like a virus for them."

No explicit threat to the UK is posed in this article, except for the assurance that the Jihadists will be the victorious party at the end of this long historical war. We should, however, ask ourselves why this article was posted by GIMF in May 2005, and in 8 July 2005. The answer might be linked to the British elections in May 2005, and the fact that the Iraqi issue did not really influence the British public opinion.

## **Conclusion**

It is clear that the two horrendous attacks, in Madrid and London, were an attempt to export the war in Iraq to Europe, with the help of Jihadists who live on the continent, are very familiar with its environment, and can act on European soil with relative



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ease. Rather than “sleeper cells” these are groupings, with no formal names, consisting of unsatisfied Islamist elements, who easily advocate Jihadi doctrines and the broader strategy of global Jihad.

On the background of the war in Iraq, an important element to note is that it seems that the leaders of global Jihad, in Iraq or elsewhere, reached the conclusion that their only hope in affecting the behavior of European governments is by making an impact on their publics. Affecting the publics according to the strategy of global Jihad can only occur through major blasts. The Jihadists believe that another attack in Europe—be it in Rome or Warsaw—will have a growing influence on the continent.

The similarity of the two attacks, in Madrid and London, raises the question of the extent to which the European countries can learn the operational lessons of previous attacks, and the level of cooperation between them. The more threatening community—the North African one—is relatively small in the European countries except for France. In the UK, Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy, or Denmark, they constitute smaller communities when compared either to France, to the Pakistani community in the UK, or the Turkish one in Germany. Investigations conducted since September 11 2001, in Italy (primarily in Milan), Spain, Belgium, the Netherlands, and the UK itself, have strongly suggested the dominant role played by North African immigrants in the support for global Jihad and actual involvement in its terrorism campaign. Still, the two successful attacks in these European capitals, which required good logistic support and effective local infrastructure, have not been prevented. Furthermore, unlike the involvement of Saudi Arabians, Egyptians, Syrians, or Jordanians, in global Jihad, in the case of North African immigrants within Europe, socio-political elements are part of the larger picture. The profile of the average Arab Jihadis, who volunteer to fight in Iraq, or in the past in Afghanistan, Bosnia, or Chechnya, appears to be different from the one of the North Africans in Europe. Part of the counter-terrorism effort in Europe should hence, consist of social, cultural, and economic measures.

Like the attacks in Madrid, the bombings in London should be viewed as an export of the war in Iraq to Europe, based on local adherents of global Jihad rather than on volunteers from the heart of the Arab world. Europe should reconsider some of its policies, primarily among them its liberal tendency to grant political asylum, a policy that was hailed especially in the UK, and in particular concerning Islamists.



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The war in Iraq is the second major turning point of global Jihad following the 9/11 attacks. The next phase of the export of the war in Iraq to Europe may be in the form of martyrdom operations, which could be followed by other *modus operandi* currently used by the Jihadi insurgency in Iraq. There is no reason why Jihadists would not blow themselves up in the heart of Europe in the future, or kidnap hostages in order to behead them. From their point of view, the historical dimension of their struggle has a dynamic of its own, and is developing in stages.