

This paper is for Government departments and statutory organisations dealing with counter-terrorism. It is intended to inform on CT issues that have been covered in the domestic, overseas and online media during the week. It provides background and context to issues covered in the Weekly CT Talking Points but also covers additional issues which have been prominent in the media.

Weekly CT Communications Overview

There has been heavy media coverage of CT related issues in the past week with Libya and the wider Middle East dominating. These have featured during a week in which the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) in general and the budget have dominated the news agenda. The main CT stories have featured as follows:

- The commencement of **airstrikes in Libya** prompted discussion about whether UN backed military intervention in Libya has helped to advance Al-Qa'ida's (AQs) goals.
- **Afghanistan** has featured in domestic and international media with the announcement from President Karzai that Afghan forces will take charge of security in seven areas from July. This featured in a week in which "trophy" photographs of US soldiers posing with the dead bodies of Afghan civilians received widespread criticism.
- Coverage in domestic and Arabic media of the situation in **Yemen** has focused on how its collapse will potentially mark a strategic loss for the US and a victory for AQ-AP.
- The **burning of a Quran** by Pastor Wayne Sapp under the supervision of his father, Pastor Terry Jones in a Florida church received widespread critical coverage in UK BAME, Pakistani and Arabic media.

Weekly CT Communications Analysis

Libyan 'no fly zone'

- UK mainstream media

The commencement of airstrikes has dominated media coverage and has prompted discussion about whether UN backed military intervention in Libya has helped to advance AQ's goals. This was followed by warnings from UK and US sources that: AQ are yet to take advantage but may do so if the military campaign does not end quickly; that Britain's military involvement in Libya could be used as a recruiting tool; and that supporters of Qadhafi may attempt to carry out a terrorist attack in the UK in revenge for military action in Libya.

- UK BAME media

Coverage in UK BAME media has been limited. The Muslim Weekly, Asian Image and Muslim News all covered the airstrikes, duplicating reporting from the Press Association. Notably, the Muslim News reported Libyan claims that "western warplanes" had caused civilian casualties. In harder edged, open source UK Muslim forums there has been some support for the airstrikes but also scepticism that they are being carried out on purely humanitarian grounds. MPACUK said that "we all know the purpose of such intervention is hardly humanitarian" and highlighted Libyan claims of civilian casualties caused by airstrikes. Elsewhere, a post on LondonMuslim.blogspot supported UN backed military action "in the absence of collective regional Arab Muslim support".

➤ Arabic media and forums

Military intervention in Libya has been largely welcomed apart from in Iranian media. Pan-Arab outlets, Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya were supportive of the airstrikes and reported "Qadhafi's use of human shields to protect himself from bombardment". Iranian outlet, Al-Alam's tone was openly critical of the "western war on Libya". The station quoted the Libyan government's spokesman saying that 48 people were killed by the "western coalition's" forces. Libyan media maintained a defiant tone and frequently reported alleged civilian casualties caused by the airstrikes. Most commentators viewed the coalition enforced no-fly-zone as a "crusade" or "imperial, colonial war against Libya".

Discussion on related Arabic forums has focused primarily on the airstrikes with the majority of users in support of the intervention. There is evidence of AQ supporters on Al-Jazeera Talk Forum attempting to undermine these efforts and paint them as actions taken out of fear, or efforts made purely for the sake of the "black gold" of Libya.

➤ International media

There has been widespread coverage of the airstrikes in international media with mixed reporting. Many newspapers are beginning to voice suspicion over the motives behind the air strikes. Commentators in the Middle East, China, Russia and Pakistan variously name oil, the promotion of Israeli interests, and removing Qadhafi from power as the main reasons for the campaign.

Progress in Afghanistan

The announcement by President Hamid Karzai on Tuesday 22nd that Afghan security forces would be taking over control of sections of the country in July received widespread but primarily factual coverage in domestic and overseas media. The move was widely reported as an attempt by Karzai to exert more power over a "struggling nation", prompted many commentators to question whether Afghan forces are ready to take over and created speculation that these regions will once again be the focus of increased Taliban activity.

This announcement came in a week in which "trophy" photographs of US soldiers posing with the dead bodies of Afghan civilians received widespread criticism in domestic and international media. Senior officials within NATO compared the pictures to the images of US soldiers abusing prisoners in Abu Ghraib and UK mainstream media suggested that the photos will undermine trust in humanitarian interventions and increase anti-western sentiment. A US Army apology "for the distress these photos cause" featured widely. The photographs were picked up in the UK BAME media and the harder edged, open source UK Muslim forums later in the week. MPACUK said the photos were an example of "American state sponsored terrorism".

Yemen

➤ UK mainstream media

Coverage of the situation is being reported as a strategic loss for the US and a victory for AQ with the predominant theme being that AQ-AP will take advantage of the divisions in Yemen, turning it into a "sanctuary for international terrorists". US Defence Secretary Robert Gates expressed concern that the instability in Yemen could distract attention from the country's fight against AQ. He said "We are obviously concerned about instability in Yemen. Instability and diversion of attention from dealing with AQAP is certainly my primary concern about the situation".

➤ UK BAME media

Reporting on Yemen has been limited. However, The Muslim News picked up on comments from representatives of the Yemeni community in Scotland who are celebrating the potential exit of President Saleh in Yemen. The Scottish Yemeni community is said to be proud of what the protesters have achieved.

➤ Arabic media

The Arabic media concentrated more on the details around President Saleh's offer to step down and the continuing protests. Al-Jazeera also highlighted that if President Saleh loses power, US strategy towards Yemen will be jeopardised and the "Americans will have to start from scratch".

Quran burning

The burning of a Quran by Pastor Wayne Sapp under the supervision of his father, Pastor Terry Jones in a Florida church received critical coverage in UK BAME, Arabic and Pakistani media. The Associated Press of Pakistan reported that Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari strongly condemned the desecration of the Holy Koran by a "fanatic". Pakistani papers, Dawn and The Daily Times reported that the Punjab Assembly had passed a resolution condemning the burning and labelling it as "an act of terrorism". The assembly said that the burning had been "fully backed by the US and Israel". Muslim groups in the US refused to comment in an attempt to limit media coverage.