

This paper is for Government departments and statutory organisations dealing with counter-terrorism. It is intended to help you to respond to any concerns generated in communities as a result of the coverage in the media of the CT issues set out in the media coverage summary. It is not intended to provide detailed briefing about Government policies, and explaining these issues to the media is the role of relevant departmental press offices.

### [Death of Anwar al Awlaki](#)

On 30 September 2011 Anwar al Awlaki was killed in a counter terrorist operation in western Yemen.

### [Who was Anwar al Awlaki?](#)

Anwar al Awlaki was a senior figure in Al Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). He was considered to be the leading English speaking ideologue within the organisation; being an accessible English speaker, with experience of both the Western and Islamic worlds.

Al Awlaki was born in America to Yemeni parents. Despite not having any formal Islamic education, he was an Imam at mosques in San Diego and Virginia. From the late 1990s, al Awlaki spoke at events in the UK and subsequently moved here in 2002. During this period, al Awlaki did not publicly support violent jihad, but he became progressively more extreme in his public output. In 2004, al Awlaki moved to Yemen and over the following years established a role with AQAP. Al Awlaki was involved in a number of terrorist attacks against the UK and the USA. He was linked to incidents such as the killings at Fort Hood; the attempted Times Square and Detroit airline bombings, and the 'printer cartridge' airline plot in 2010. Roshanara Choudhury, who was convicted of attacking the UK MP Stephen Timms, was said to be radicalised by his online material.

### [What does this mean for Al Qa'ida?](#)

Combined with the recent deaths of Usama bin Laden and other Al Qa'ida senior figures in Pakistan, al Awlaki's death deals a heavy blow to Al Qa'ida's international operations effort, and particularly its online propaganda activity.

More generally, it is increasingly clear that Al Qa'ida's ideology and actions have done nothing to improve the lives of those it claims to represent. Al Qa'ida tried and failed to exploit the unrest in Yemen for its own ends and has failed to mobilise support across the world for violent jihad. Indeed, the 'Arab Spring' has amply shown that terrorism is increasingly irrelevant to the real concerns and aspirations of the majority of people in the wider region.

### [How does this affect the threat against the UK?](#)

Al Awlaki's death and that of other Al Qa'ida figures may diminish Al Qa'ida's influence and ability to plan attacks. This does not, however, mean that the threat from terrorism has passed. The possibility that AQAP and other Al Qa'ida affiliates will commit acts of reprisal cannot be ruled out. Both the UK and the international community must remain vigilant and continue to prevent Al Qa'ida from conducting further attacks.

The threat to the UK from terrorism, including those radicalised by people like al Awlaki, remains substantial; that means an attack is a strong possibility. The public should remain alert and report any suspicions to the police.

## Useful links

*Please also see the following links to interesting news items which provide background information on this and other CT issues:*

[BBC - Awlaki's death hits al-Qa'ida's social media strategy](#)

[BBC - Profile: Al Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula](#)

[Al Jazeera - The irrelevance of Anwar Al Awlaki](#)

[Guardian - Anwar al-Awlaki's death is a blow to Al Qaida but his message is still alive](#)

[Guardian - Al-Qaida calls on Ahmadinejad to end 9/11 conspiracy theories](#)

# CT Communications

## Summary of media coverage

### 5<sup>th</sup> October 2011

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This paper is for Government departments and statutory organisations dealing with counter-terrorism. It is intended to inform on key CT issues that have been covered in the domestic, overseas and online media during the week and that may be of concern to communities. It provides background and context to issues covered in the [CT Talking Points](#) (page 1). The CT Talking Points paper gives clear, straightforward answers to issues raised in the media which may be useful to practitioners.

#### Overview

The following information details media and community reaction to the death of Al Awlaki.

#### **UK and International media**

The death of al Awlaki has been extensively covered in the mainstream media. In addition to obituaries and profiles, there have been numerous opinion pieces focusing on two issues: strong feeling from some commentators that al Awlaki should have been brought to trial, and speculation about the impact of the death on Al-Qa'ida's operations and influence. Several commentators express the view that al Awlaki's death will severely inhibit ideological communications. Others suggest that he was not well known across the world and the impact will therefore be minimal. There have also been speculations about the risk of retaliatory attacks on US citizens.

#### **BAME media & online forums**

BAME coverage is less extensive than in the mainstream. The Muslim Matters forum carries a piece which suggests that the attack on al Awlaki was counter-productive, on the grounds that an attack rather than a trial will damage the moral stance of the US. There are eulogies and tributes on several online forums.

#### **Community reaction in the UK**

Early community feedback indicates that the death of al Awlaki has not generated much response as yet.