

This paper is for Government departments and statutory organisations dealing with counter-terrorism. It is intended to inform you about CT issues that have been covered in the media and to help you to respond to any concerns generated as a result. 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.

Aftermath of the death of Usama Bin Laden

The death of Usama Bin Laden (UBL) has continued to dominate media and online debate this week with a focus on what this means for Al Qa'ida (AQ) and whether Pakistan was aware of his location or of the operation. Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani announced on 9th May that there will be an investigation into the events in Abbottabad.

What has been the response to UBL's death?

National and local Muslim organisations in the UK have issued largely positive statements about the death of UBL. The emphasis has been very much on the numbers killed by AQ, the possibility that killing may now cease and the opportunity for a new relationship between Islam and 'the West'. The manner of UBL's death and burial, the inconsistent US accounts and the failure to put him on trial have attracted some criticism. Various heads of state, including Turkey, Pakistan and Kenya, welcomed the news as a positive development in the global fight against terrorism. There has also been a feeling since the 'Arab Spring' that AQ are increasingly irrelevant. Rachid al Ghanouchi, the Tunisian opposition figure who spent years in exile in the UK, stated: "Osama died in Tunisia before dying in Pakistan."

How has AQ responded?

AQ confirmed his death in a statement that was released on Friday 6th May. AQ pledged to continue its campaign of violent jihad and threatened "revenge attacks" on 'the West'. Their statement concluded with a message for the people of Pakistan "to rise up"; a crude attempt to create unrest in the country. AQ affiliates also issued eulogies for UBL using the opportunity to inflate his role in the 'Arab Spring' despite this being contrary to the fact that AQ have been discredited by popular uprisings across MENA.

On the morning of 13th May, two bombs were detonated at the Shabqadar Frontier Corps base in Charsadda, Pakistan. More than 80 Pakistanis are thought to have died in the attack. The Pakistani Taliban (TTP), which supports AQ, has claimed responsibility and said the attack was the first revenge for the death of UBL.

Foreign Secretary, William Hague, said "[the attacks] prove once again that such extremist groups have no regard for the value of human life. I offer my sincere condolences, in particular to the families of those whose lives were lost and to those who were injured."

The possibility that AQ – or those motivated by them – will attempt to commit other reprisal attacks cannot be ruled out. The overall threat level to the UK from international terrorism remains at 'Severe', which means that an attack is highly likely. The threat level is constantly under review and will be updated as necessary.

Did the Pakistani Government know that UBL was in Abbottabad?

There has been much speculation in the media about Pakistan's position, focusing particularly on why UBL was not discovered earlier. Prime Minister David Cameron has made clear that the UK will ask "searching questions" about the extent of UBL's support network in Pakistan. Pakistan's Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani denounced media accusations of complicity in the sheltering of UBL as "absurd" and announced on 9th May that a senior Pakistani army officer, Lieutenant General Javed Iqbal, would conduct an investigation into how UBL had been able to live undiscovered in Abbottabad for so long.

So, will the UK continue to work with Pakistan on counter-terrorism?

Yes. Prime Minister David Cameron has spoken to both President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani and confirmed that the UK will continue to work with Pakistan to combat terrorism and will honour aid promises to the country. It is important that we help Pakistan with its work to tackle social injustice and inequality and to improve educational opportunities, as this helps create stable communities, resilient to radicalisation.

On 4th May Andrew Mitchell the International Development Secretary said: "British aid to Pakistan is not just aid from Britain but also aid for Britain. It is in Britain's interest to tackle the root causes of extremism such as poverty, inequality and lack of education."

7/7 Inquests

What were the 7/7 inquests?

An inquest is a process for investigating the factual circumstances of a death. The 7/7 inquests looked at the deaths of all 52 members of the public from the London bombings on 7th July 2005. Lady Justice Hallett is a judge of the Court of Appeal and was chosen to act as Coroner for the inquests. The verdicts were handed down on 6th May. The Coroner also published a report.

Was it independent?

Yes. The inquests were independent of both local and central government. Coroners are independent judicial officers who act on behalf of the Crown to investigate violent or unnatural deaths, or sudden deaths of an unknown cause. They are appointed and paid by the local authority for their district, although they are not local authority employees.

What was the outcome?

The Coroner found that the deaths of the 52 victims could not have been prevented, and that they were unlawfully killed. In her concluding remarks she said that "the evidence I have heard does not justify the conclusion that any failings on the part of any organisation or individual caused or contributed to any of the deaths." The Coroner also made 9 recommendations, of which 7 relate to the emergency services and 2 to the processes of the Security Service.

What happens next?

The Government will now carefully consider the Coroner's recommendations which relate to Security Service and Emergency Services processes, including records, training, emergency communication procedures, first aid on the underground, the triage process and the resources of the London Air Ambulance. Any organisation which receives a report has 56 days to respond to the Coroner.

The Home Secretary said in a statement: "This process has been vitally important. We now have a better picture of what happened in the lead up to that terrible day and on the day itself. I and my Government colleagues will now carefully consider the Coroner's report and recommendations."

Other News

Please also see the following interesting news items from the past week, commenting more generally on the nature of terrorism and terrorist organisations, which you may want to circulate more widely:

Alistair Burt, Foreign Office Minister for the Middle East and Africa has said in Al Arabiya: "...Britain will use its weight and influence in the European Union, the United Nations, the G8 and the International Financial Institutions to call for a transformative new relationship with the countries of the Middle East and North Africa." [Al Arabiya, 12/05/2011](http://AlArabiya.com/12/05/2011)