

Foreign Secretary William Hague has set out some background which is important to an understanding of the UK's approach to countering terrorism and in cooperating with allies, terrorism source and terrorism victim countries, and with other partner states whose approaches to human rights may not necessarily be compatible with those of the UK.

This has been the subject of much political controversy and legal proceedings. Euan Grant, a UK Defence Forum Research Co-ordinator, listened to Mr. Hague at RUSI making clear that responsibility for exchanging information, or not, with states with questionable human rights records lies with him, and that he is accountable to Parliament and ultimately to the courts.

Not surprisingly, heavy emphasis was given to supporting crisis hit states which are used as havens by terrorists, particularly Yemen and especially Somalia, and the degree of security, capacity building and humanitarian support being provided to these countries.

The relative lack of comment on UK involvement in Mali in these respects logically reflect strategic decisions in London and Paris that France will lead on European assistance in Francophone West Africa and the UK in the Horn of Africa. Obviously the divide will not be total given French interests in Djibouti and Somalia and the fact that unrest in Nigeria is a matter for the entire EU and for Nigeria's neighbours. Paddy Ashdown has predicted that Nigeria may well be the next Jihadist challenge and he is not alone in that view.

What was particularly interesting was the emphasis given by the Foreign Secretary to the importance of good cooperation with the diasporas of the key terrorist source states. Therefore much work will be done with their representatives in the UK and, by implication, in cooperation with UK partners who have similar diasporas. In the case of Somalia and Yemen, this will be particularly relevant in London and in traditional empire trade ports such as Bristol, Cardiff, Liverpool and Newcastle/Tyneside. These four are not traditionally linked with the Pakistani diasporas which have been associated with the majority of Jihadist terrorist linked offences in Britain, although there has of course been the conviction in March 2011 of Rajib Karim, the British Airways' Newcastle admin centre IT worker, on charges of plotting to blow up an airliner.

While not UK born, Karim's wife was – on Tyneside - to where they returned having left the UK for his native Bangladesh. He had established Internet connection with his brother who had travelled to Yemen and with Anwar al Awlaki in early 2010. This was, of course, just after the Detroit bombing attempt of Christmas Day 2009 and not long before the AQAP originating attempt to destroy transatlantic airliners using detonators in computer printers. The significance of diaspora links is shown by Karim's wife being from the North east of England and that he was seeking to obtain a UK passport, presumably using the fathering of a UK born child to a UK citizen mother in support of his application, and that the contact was made with Yemen which has close links with its Tyneside diaspora, of which it is very proud. In late 2008 or early 2009 the national museum in Sana'a had an exhibition dedicated entirely to the history of Tyneside's Yemeni community.

Anwar al Awlaki needs no introduction given his leading role in AQAP in Yemen prior to his death in a US drone strike in 2012 and as he was a US citizen born of Yemeni parents.

Taken together, these two examples graphically highlight the importance of being aware of the nature and scope of diaspora links in building trust and improving intelligence on the nature of threats. These are worldwide opportunities and challenges. The al Awlaki case makes the point

clear in relation to the Yemeni diaspora in the USA.

In relation to the Somali diaspora there and in the UK and other major Horn of Africa diaspora hosting states such as Sweden, the importance of proactive cooperation between law enforcement and security agencies and the wider organs of government and civil society with representatives of the diaspora has been highlighted starkly by Peter Taylor of the BBC in his TV series "Generation Jihad", which was broadcast in the UK in February and March 2010, having been produced the previous year. The series included a detailed description of incidences of radicalisation of members of the Somali community in Minnesota.

There was also an important passage in the Q & A Session at the end. One questioner, recently returned from an official visit to Somalia, warned that cooperation between international capacity building organisations there needed to be improved dramatically.

Anyone who has worked in multidisciplinary and multiorganisational projects in conflict or post conflict countries will reinforce that crucial message.

Footnote :

The UK's Foreign Secretary, Mr. William Hague, spoke at The Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) on 14th February 2013 on countering terrorism overseas. Many professionals from the UK, EU partner states and Commonwealth countries and the United States were present. The text of the speech is available on the RUSI website at www.rusi.org .

RUSI is a leading UK military and security think tank, which complements the work of the Royal Institute of Foreign Affairs (Chatham House) and the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) in the UK and the Committee on Foreign Relations in the US. Chatham House has a more diplomatic and economic focus and IISS a more security and law enforcement emphasis, with RUSI emphasizing the military aspects of national and international security. These views are generalisations and there are significant benefits from regarding the work of all three as contributing to both the big pictures and the details of current and emerging challenges.