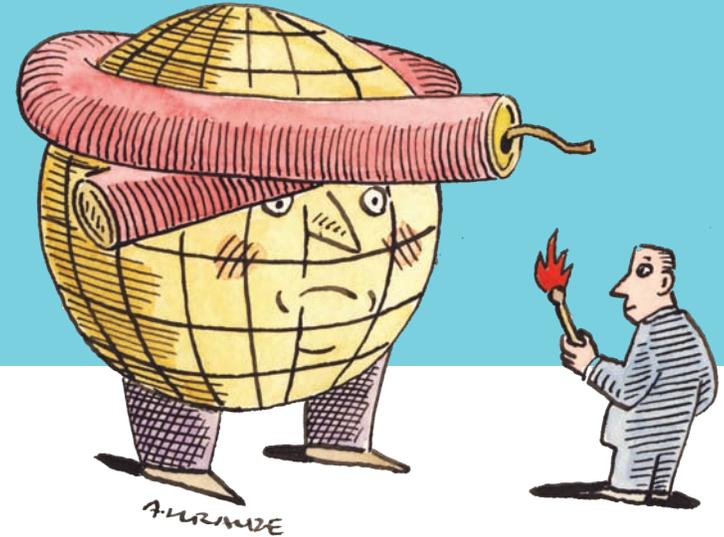


Frequent claims of foiled plots; tighter monitoring of suspects and stronger global terror laws. On the flip side, a new safe haven emerging for terrorists in Pakistan; stories of terror cells springing up throughout North Africa; numerous recruits from Europe's leading universities willing to sign up to the cause.

Are Al Qaeda and its affiliates, responsible for the horrific attacks in New York, London and Madrid, finding it hard to be the force they once were, or should we be bracing ourselves for the next outrage? Pocket Issue weighs up the hard facts.

'For everyone who longs to be well-informed but lacks the time (or attention span)! Alex Clark, The Observer

Pocket Issue Al Qaeda



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# Al Qaeda the current threat

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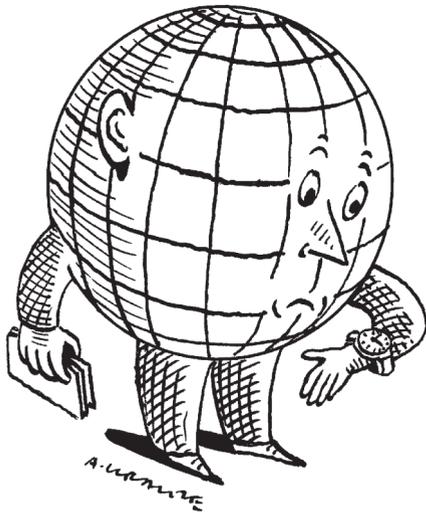


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# One minute guide

The issues in the blink of an eye



## One minute guide

Al Qaeda has masterminded a number of the worst peacetime atrocities seen in the Western world. But does Al Qaeda still pose a threat or have events in Afghanistan and Iraq forced it into retreat?

**Al Qaeda.** Al Qaeda is an Islamist terrorist organisation founded and led by Osama bin Laden. On the 11th September 2001 (9/11) it launched attacks on New York and Washington that killed over 2750 civilians.

**Root causes?** The burning frustrations of many youngsters in the Middle East, and the grievances of some Muslim youth in Europe, have been exploited by Al Qaeda. But these factors alone do not explain the emergence of Al Qaeda terrorism.

**The key factor.** Al Qaeda has convinced a small number of Muslims in the Islamic world and the West that it is their religious duty to fight Holy War (Jihad) against powers “conspiring” against Islam.

**Al Qaeda's aims?** Al Qaeda wants to create an Islamic Caliphate (super-state) across the Muslim world that removes secular regimes and restores Islam to global dominance.

**Why does Al Qaeda target the West?** The US and its allies are seen as the key obstacle to the realisation of this aim. Al Qaeda believes that the US and its allies are engaged in a worldwide plot to stop Islam overtaking the West as a world power.

**Which Western countries are on Al Qaeda's “hit list”?** The US, UK and Israel are Al Qaeda's primary targets. The terrorist network has also singled out other Western countries involved in Iraq. But countries which strongly opposed the Iraq war, such as

France and Germany, have also been threatened by Al Qaeda, because they are perceived to be allies of the US and secular regimes in the Islamic world.

**Key date: 20th March 2003.** Al Qaeda was an organisation on the ropes in 2002. It had lost its Afghan training camps, and much of its leadership had been captured or killed. The invasion of Iraq on 20th March 2003, deeply unpopular in the Muslim world, allowed Al Qaeda to re-invent itself as a broader movement.

**The current threat.** Al Qaeda currently poses a significant threat to the West, particularly Europe. Although Al Qaeda and its affiliates probably have more recruits than at the time of 9/11, stronger counter-terrorism measures mean that it is harder now for the organisation to hit targets in the West.

**Western recruits.** The reason that Al Qaeda has continued to threaten the West, despite a more stringent security environment, is because it has been able to recruit a significant number of Muslims living in the West. Al Qaeda has taken advantage of the fact that a small but significant minority of European Muslims have bought into its worldview.

**Key figure.** Osama Bin Laden, whose continued survival is hugely important to Al Qaeda. If Bin Laden is captured or killed, Al Qaeda would lose their key inspiration and unifying figure.

**Training.** Al Qaeda plots are a greater threat to the West than plots spontaneously launched by radicalised Muslims living in the West, because Al Qaeda can provide terrorist recruits with the bomb-making training necessary to launch successful attacks. Most of Al Qaeda's camps are in Pakistan.

**A wave of violence.** Al Qaeda and its affiliates launched more

attacks in 2007 than in any other year. Most of these attacks have occurred in Muslim countries. Al Qaeda-linked terrorists have only successfully launched two major attacks in the West since 9/11.

**Backlash.** The fact that Al Qaeda has killed so many Muslims since 9/11, including more than 10,000 in Iraq, has created a backlash against it in the Muslim world. Even fellow jihadists are starting to criticise the organisation, something that may undermine its recruiting efforts in the future.

## Espresso

The coffee is being passed around and the conversation turns to Al Qaeda and its threat. Here are a list of things you should (or shouldn't) say if you want to keep your place at the table.

### Pass the port

Pakistan is the problem. Al Qaeda has a safe haven in the north-west of the country from which it can rebuild its threat.

The 2001 Afghanistan invasion placed Al Qaeda on the back foot. The 2003 Iraq war provided them with a new momentum.

The UK probably has the worst levels of Islamic radicalisation in the Western world. We'll continue to be under threat until the extremists are rooted out.

Al Qaeda has had more success targeting other Muslims than Westerners in recent years.

### Pass my coat

Al Qaeda is finished. We are more at risk from home-grown terrorists downloading bomb-making tips from the web.

There were clear links between Saddam's Iraq and Al Qaeda.

Al Qaeda has no hope of getting hold of weapons of mass destruction.

Muslim clerics have been silent when it comes to criticising Al Qaeda.

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