

## **Terror alert 'politically motivated'**

A US terror alert issued this week about al-Qaida plots to attack targets in western Europe was politically motivated and not based on credible new information, senior Pakistani diplomats and European intelligence officials have told the Guardian.

The non-specific US warning, which despite its vagueness led Britain, France and other countries to raise their overseas terror alert levels, was an attempt to justify a recent escalation in US drone and helicopter attacks inside Pakistan that have "set the country on fire", said Wajid Shamsul Hasan, the high commissioner to Britain.

Hasan, a veteran diplomat who is close to Pakistan's president, suggested the Obama administration was playing politics with the terror threat before next month's midterm congressional elections, in which the Republicans are expected to make big gains.

He also claimed President Obama was reacting to pressure to demonstrate that his Afghan war strategy and this year's troop surge, which are unpopular with the American public, were necessary.

*Guardian, 8/10/10*

## **US apologises to Pakistan, as tankers burn**

Since Islamabad ordered the closure of the Torkham border crossing in retaliation for a missile strike that killed two Pakistani soldiers, dozens of fuel tankers have been set ablaze across the country. In some of the attacks, militants rode up on motorcycles to clusters of poorly guarded tankers and firebombed the vehicles, filling the sky with massive plumes of fire and black smoke.

In the last seven days, militants have carried out seven attacks on tankers and trucks bearing supplies for North Atlantic Treaty Organization forces, destroying or damaging more than 90 vehicles and killing at least six people.

U.S. Ambassador Anne Patterson apologized to Pakistan on Wednesday for the Sept. 30 NATO helicopter incursion that led to the soldiers' deaths, prompting analysts to predict the Islamabad government may soon reopen the crossing.

NATO acknowledged that its helicopters strayed into Pakistani airspace and fired on a border post, apparently after mistaking warning shots for hostile fire from insurgents.

"We extend our deepest apology to Pakistan and the families of the Frontier Scouts who were killed and

injured," Patterson said in a statement. "Pakistan's brave security forces are our allies in a war that threatens both Pakistan and the U.S."

*Los Angeles Times, 6/10/10*

## **White House report slams Pakistan**

A new White House assessment steps up criticism of Pakistan's campaign against militants, stating bluntly that its government and military have been unwilling to take action against al Qaeda and like-minded terrorists.

The aggressive language of the report—which also criticizes the leadership of President Asif Ali Zardari—could further strain difficult relations with a key ally and undercut support in Congress for providing billions of dollars in aid to Islamabad.

The report, viewed by The Wall Street Journal, also raises questions about the U.S.-led coalition's progress battling the Taliban and improving governance in Afghanistan two months before the White House will review its war strategy.

The administration and Pentagon have until now tried to keep their harshest criticisms of Pakistan private to avoid a public rift, but the report shows growing U.S. frustration, officials said.

*Wall Street Journal, 6/10/10*

## **Troops' tour records 'wiped' in UK**

Computer records containing details of troops' activities on operations may be wiped when they return to the UK, the Ministry of Defence has admitted.

The news came out as part of the inquiry into the death of Iraqi hotel worker Baha Mousa. The inquiry into the September 2003 death of Mousa is investigating whether accurate records are kept of troops' movements and orders while prisoners are in detention.

In a statement to the inquiry, MoD departmental records officer Katherine De Bourcier said there was a "significant" risk that data on troops returning from tours overseas could be lost or deleted and would not conform to normal records management procedures.

Phil Shiner, from Public Interest Lawyers, said: "This is absolutely reckless. For them to wipe them all just smacks of cover-up. I cannot believe that there is some benign explanation for bringing computers home and then purging them. It's a bit like chucking them off a cross-Channel ferry."

*Defence Management Journal, 4/10/10*

### ***Iraq stalemate worries US military***

Iraq officially broke the dubious world record Friday for going the longest stretch of time without a new government.

As the US military warily eyed the approach of this particular milestone in the wake of the country's parliamentary elections in March, top US commanders issued increasingly dire warnings this week about what the impasse portends for US troops on the ground.

The commander of US forces in Baghdad, Brig. Gen. Rob Baker, told reporters that he has seen an uptick in violence aimed at Iraqi and US troops, including rocket attacks coming from the infamous militia stronghold of Sadr City. He wondered aloud about the impact this violence might have on, for example, the inclination of local Iraqis to help out security forces by phoning in to a tip line used to track insurgent activity.

Top Pentagon leadership has weighed in as well. "I'm increasingly concerned about [Iraq's] inability to stand up to this government," Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Adm. Mike Mullen said Wednesday during a Monitor breakfast in Washington. "The politics there are, from my perspective, too slow."

"The longer that lasts, the more I and others worry about what does the future hold," he added.

*Christian Science Monitor, 1/10/10*

### ***'What about the electricity?'***

As the U.S. military prepares to leave Iraq, Iraqis are still asking: What about the electricity?

In 2003, they heard President George W. Bush's promise: "We will help them to restore basic services, such as electricity."

Seven years later, the state's inability to provide reliable power to homes remains one of the most striking signs of the dysfunction that persists here and a nagging source of frustration for ordinary Iraqis.

In the absence of dependable central power, generators - from small gasoline-powered models for individual homes to diesel-driven giants that fuel a neighbourhood - churn around the clock in Baghdad and across the country. The hum is everywhere, a constant auditory reminder of Iraq's problems and an unfulfilled American promise.

The power shortages have resulted from corruption, failed development policies, insurgent attacks on installations and a government paralyzed by sectarian political infighting.

*Washington Post, 3/10/10*

### ***Afghanistan bans mercenary firms***

Afghanistan has formally banned eight foreign private security firms, including the controversial company formerly called Blackwater, a spokesman for President Hamid Karzai said on Sunday.

The Afghan government announced in August that it was giving security firms working in Afghanistan four months to cease operations, potentially hitting hard efforts by NATO-led troops fighting a nine-year insurgency in the country.

There are fears the measure could create huge problems for the military and other international entities that depend on the estimated 40,000 employees of private security contractors.

The August presidential decree ordered the 52 private security contractors operating in the country, both Afghan and international, to cease operations by January 1, 2011.

Karzai had accused the security companies of running an "economic mafia" based around "corruption contracts" favoured by the international community.

He has said the firms duplicate the work of the Afghan security forces and divert much-needed resources, while Afghans criticise the private guards as overbearing and abusive, particularly on the country's roads.

*AFP, 3/10/10*

### ***British Embassy staff attacked in Yemen***

Several people were injured in a pair of attacks Wednesday on another dangerous day for foreigners in the Arabian Peninsula nation of Yemen.

Arab media reported that a shell or missile struck a vehicle carrying five British Embassy staff as it headed toward the embassy in Sana, Yemen's capital, Wednesday morning.

Separately, employees of the Austrian energy giant OMV were shot by a security guard at the company's office near Sana.

No one claimed responsibility in either attack, but the incidents coincided with worries about the growth of Al Qaeda in the impoverished and overpopulated country on the southern edge of the Arabian Peninsula.

British Foreign Minister William Hague called the attack on the diplomats a "shameful" act that will "redouble Britain's determination to work with the government of Yemen," which has been accused of exacerbating the country's problems with its corruption, incompetence and dishonesty.

*Los Angeles Times, 7/10/10*