

# Links Between Organised Crime and al-Qaeda

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## Introduction

Organised criminal networks in Africa, working with political and military elites in regimes under UN embargo or with insurgents, have been largely responsible for supporting both the legal and illegal trade of commodities (such as coltan, diamonds and timber) that have been used to fuel terrorism in Africa. They have also facilitated the barter of goods for arms. The use of organised crime middlemen is rife in conflict zones such as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Liberia and parts of Sierra Leone, and those neighbouring countries that provide support to various factions in the war. This phenomenon has frequently been the catalyst for rebel groups to graduate from guerrilla tactics to conventional warfare.

Terrorist and organised crime networks are not natural partners due to differences in motivation, strategy and activities. Most crime networks do not have any overt political agenda and infiltrate elements of the state only to create the space for their operations and to evade detection. They are wary of the publicity that terrorist groups attract and need to compel their enemy to accede to their demands as they wish to move on the peripheries of society unnoticed by the majority. They may find congruence, however, in certain situations, such as:

- Where rebel groups/terrorists are in control of territory and are able to exploit minerals or other resources such as was the case with the UNITA rebel group in Angola which controlled some of the diamond rich areas.

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- Where states in the region support rebel groups in other countries either for ideological or economic reasons, such as in Liberia where President Charles Taylor supported the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels in Sierra Leone. In these cases, the use of crime middlemen is useful as it may allow the sponsoring state to cloak its activities and allow corrupt elites to benefit from the transaction directly or indirectly.
- Where organised crime networks are the most effective and perhaps the only available source of munitions, resources or other material due to logistical or other constraints such as sanctions regimes imposed on state sponsors of conflict. An organised crime middleman and former Russian army officer, Viktor Bout, who has allegedly delivered weapons to 17 African countries in conflict, was used partly because he owned a fleet of about 60 Antonovs — aircraft that were able to deliver a large variety of munitions.
- Where law enforcement becomes so effective that the organised crime network decides to challenge the political elite and embarks on political violence. This is most clearly illustrated by the Italian mafia and the Columbian FARC. Alternatively, organised crime networks may co-operate with rebel groups as was allegedly the case in Bosnia during the war of 1992-1995, where they smuggled in weapons and fuel for the Bosnian Muslim army.<sup>2</sup> The Albanian mafia allegedly played a similar role in Kosovo in the late 1990s.

Since none of the rebel groups in Africa operates in the international theatre of terrorism, much of the focus of this paper will be on the al-Qaeda network and its links, if any, to organised crime networks. Given its extensive operation in an estimated 70 countries of the world, it might be expected that al-Qaeda would have more interaction with crime networks than with other terrorist groups. Al-Qaeda has in the past preferred to limit its interaction with crime networks to the minimum and to run its own criminal enterprises, when necessary. The organisation's interaction has been largely consistent with its

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<sup>2</sup> Fox R, 'Links Between Organised Crime and Terrorism', *The Conflict, Security and Development Group Bulletin*, issue 14, page 1.

ideology and also reflects its recognition of the need to become self-sufficient in the post-September 11 environment, especially in view of the fact that 165 countries have been involved in efforts to track and freeze its assets and to constrain the level of its possible operations.

### **Al-Qaeda's structure**

Al-Qaeda is now a transnational network that has largely autonomous sub-national elements. Whilst it used to have a ruling council (the Shura), with many leaders on the run or captured, it is becoming increasingly decentralised and "virtual". There is a limited need for command and control in this form of network, even though this is still possible through cyberplanning. Al-Qaeda can sub-contract operations to national groups that sympathise with its ideology. At the same time, it has a core group of about 2 000-3 000 veterans of the Afghanistan war that may assist in sub-national operations but substantial numbers may be concentrated on the more high profile military operations and the logistical and financial networks required to conduct them. This core group is said to have acquired six new leaders, including a financier, Abdullah Ahmed Abdullah, but it seems that he may only be able to operate in Pakistan and Afghanistan. A US official has said, 'There is no central banker for al-Qaeda anymore.' Osama bin Laden, he claims, gave instructions to his members to raise their own money to conduct operations and that approval from military commanders was unnecessary.<sup>3</sup> However, local operatives arrested in Italy had initiated a plan to bomb Strasbourg Cathedral that later enjoyed financial support from al-Qaeda<sup>4</sup>, suggesting that the network co-exists with a more traditional hierarchical structure. They therefore have both what has been called a directed (hierarchical) as well as a transactional network.

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<sup>3</sup> Schmidt S & D Farah, 'Al-Qaeda's new leaders; six militants emerge from ranks to fill void', *The Washington Post*, 29 October 2002, [www.meadev.nic.in/ind-ter/formed/AlQaedNewLeaders.html](http://www.meadev.nic.in/ind-ter/formed/AlQaedNewLeaders.html)

<sup>4</sup> Ford P, 'Al-Qaeda's veil begins to lift', *The Christian Science Monitor*, 20 December 2001, [www.csmonitor.com](http://www.csmonitor.com)

### **Al-Qaeda and transnational organised crime networks**

In the past, al-Qaeda has allegedly interacted with crime networks in a limited way for very specific reasons; namely, to convert funds into diamonds and gold six weeks after the Tanzanian and Kenyan bombings in 1998 in anticipation that their bank accounts would be frozen, and to obtain nuclear and chemical and biological material. In most cases, they have used crime networks that sympathise with the objectives of al-Qaeda.

In May 2003, the prosecutor for the Special Court on Sierra Leone said that Liberia's Taylor had harboured al-Qaeda members that had come to trade in diamonds from Sierra Leone.<sup>5</sup> Two known al-Qaeda members bought diamonds and tried to buy surface to air missiles in Liberia.

The conduits for al-Qaeda were Aziz Nassour, a Lebanese diamond merchant, his cousin Samih Ossaily and Ibrahim Bah, an Afghan veteran who went on to deal diamonds for Taylor with the rebels in Sierra Leone.<sup>6</sup> In June 2002, Belgian officials arrested Ossaily on weapons-related charges. It is claimed that Nassour employed couriers to exchange \$300,000 for diamonds every week between December 2000 and September 2001. The couriers allegedly took weekly flights from Antwerp on the now-defunct Sabena airline to Abidjan. There, they hired light planes from the Weswua airline to fly to Monrovia in Liberia, and then went on to meet rebel RUF commanders in Sierra Leone. All the men admit to being involved in the diamond business in Sierra Leone and Congo but they deny any ties to al-Qaeda.<sup>7</sup>

Belgian intelligence sources reportedly suggest that Nassour and his family were implicated in the trade of diamonds with UNITA and are suspected to have links with the Amal Shiite militia and Lebanese

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<sup>5</sup> Farah D, 'Liberian is accused of harbouring al-Qaeda', *The Washington Post*, 15 May 2003, [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com)

<sup>6</sup> Farah D, 'Report says Africans harboured al-Qaeda', *The Washington Post*, 29 December 2002. The al-Qaeda operatives named were Ahmed Khalfan Ghailani and Fazul Abdullah Diam.

<sup>7</sup> 'Bin Laden's \$20m African "Blood Diamond" deals', *Observer*, 20 October 2002, [www.globalpolicy.org](http://www.globalpolicy.org)

leader Nabih Berri.<sup>8</sup> Nassour has an extensive history in the former Zaire, and according to diamond dealers in Antwerp and Central Africa, more recently in Rwanda and eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. During this period, diamond merchants claim that new buyers were paying 15% to 30% more for the gems.<sup>9</sup> It is alleged that al-Qaeda also shipped consignments of gold from Pakistan to Sudan.<sup>10</sup>

Al-Qaeda has also allegedly approached Russian organised crime networks to obtain nuclear and chemical and biological substances. This is not al-Qaeda's usual *modus operandi* and may reflect their determination to use this form of warfare at considerable risk to their operation.<sup>11</sup> Cadres have been found in Europe with ricin, a poison derived from the castor bean, and certain unknown substances.

### **Al-Qaeda funding**

In the past, most al-Qaeda operatives, particularly those involved in military operations, have been adept at blending in by obtaining asylum or residency status in targeted countries, marrying local women in their operational base giving the impression that they are there to stay, and avoiding any direct links with criminal activity. At the time of the September 11 attack on the World Trade Centre, the financial and document forgery network of al-Qaeda was largely based in Spain and Belgium whilst the operational cells were in France and the US. Members of each cell did not know the others.<sup>12</sup> These cells have since dissolved and moved elsewhere.

Due to increased regulation and oversight of banking in the post-September 11 environment and the loss of Afghanistan as a safe haven, al-Qaeda will be compelled to seek other sources of revenue.

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<sup>8</sup> Lalleman A, 'UNO pins the Lebanese one on Antwerp', *Observatoire de Afrique Centrale*, Volume 5, number 43, 21-27 October 2002.

<sup>9</sup> Farah D, *op cit.*; See also 'For a few dollars more', *Global Witness*, April 2003. [www.globalwitness.org](http://www.globalwitness.org)

<sup>10</sup> Staff writers, 'Al-Qaeda: Back in Business', *Sunday Herald*, 8 September 2002. [www.sundayherald.com](http://www.sundayherald.com)

<sup>11</sup> Kniazkov M, 'US certifies theft of Russian nuclear material has occurred', *Space Daily*, 23 February 2002. [www.spacedaily.com](http://www.spacedaily.com)

<sup>12</sup> Krebs VE, 'Mapping networks of terror cells', 25 March 2002, [www.orgnet.com](http://www.orgnet.com)

The sum of \$112 million in funds linked to al-Qaeda and other groups sympathetic to it, has been frozen.<sup>13</sup> In the past, al-Qaeda depended heavily on reverse money laundering, that is, channelling funds from clean sources such as Islamic charities and legitimate businesses to its military council. Operatives that carried out the Kenya and Tanzanian bombing of US embassies were running charities as well as businesses such as a tanzanite company, although undoubtedly some of the funds went to legitimate sources.<sup>14</sup>

Bank accounts of 17 Islamic charities, individuals and companies suspected of links to al-Qaeda have been frozen or are under scrutiny by authorities.<sup>15</sup> The head of the Benevolence International foundation in the US, an Islamic charity, has been charged with running a criminal enterprise that supported al-Qaeda.<sup>16</sup> He pleaded guilty to diverting funds to help Chechens and Bosnian Muslims. His arrest indicates that the US has adopted a very broad approach as to what constitutes terrorist funding.<sup>17</sup>

Most of al-Qaeda's financial activities have allegedly been transferred to Africa, the Middle East and Asia as these areas are regarded as having weaker institutions and financial regulatory measures in practice.<sup>18</sup> Some of these charities and businesses are being allowed to operate normally in the hope that they will lead investigators to members or supporters of the al-Qaeda network, but this strategy is not likely to bear fruit as the organisation is known for its ability to mutate in response to intelligence and law enforcement initiatives to disrupt or eliminate its logistical and support cells. The use of the informal *hawala* system — where brokers issue loans and pay off one another's

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<sup>13</sup> 'Terrorist Finances', CDI Primer, US Center for Defence Information, 25 October 2002, [www.Cdi.org/terrorism/finance\\_primer-pr.cfm](http://www.Cdi.org/terrorism/finance_primer-pr.cfm)

<sup>14</sup> Hubbard M, 'Bankrolling bin Laden', *Financial Times*, 28 November 2001. [www.specials.ft.com/attackonterrorism/FT3FJ5RJMUC.html](http://www.specials.ft.com/attackonterrorism/FT3FJ5RJMUC.html)

<sup>15</sup> Goodstein L, 'Muslims hesitating on gifts as US scrutinises charities', *The New York Times*, 17 April 2003. [www.muslimnews.co.uk](http://www.muslimnews.co.uk)

<sup>16</sup> Gerth J & J Miller, 'Saudis called slow to help stem terror finances', *The Muslim News*, 1 December 2002, [www.webstar.co.uk](http://www.webstar.co.uk)

<sup>17</sup> Staff reporter, 'Terrorist finance', *The Economist*, 13 March 2003. [www.muslimnews.co.uk](http://www.muslimnews.co.uk)

<sup>18</sup> *Sunday Herald* op cit.

debt using unwritten credit arrangements — can still be used by al-Qaeda, despite many countries' efforts at regulating it. There is some evidence to suggest that the organisation could also be laundering money through foreign exchange in countries where there is a black market in US dollars.

Al-Qaeda currently prefers to use legitimate businesses, such as garnering commission on immigrant remittances and charities, to raise funds where possible, or constitute their own crime enterprises, staffed by logistical support members that are difficult to connect to operational cells. A further means of funding is to raise donations from sympathisers and to use couriers to illegally transfer the money without using the banking system. Criminal activities allow al-Qaeda to establish and maintain self-sufficient and sustainable operational cells without the need to use international banking systems. They also do not attract the attention of domestic security services if the amounts deposited in bank accounts can be justified by the person's income. There will still be incentives to use the international banking system, however, if the operatives in question wish to create the impression that they are operating in a country whilst they are in fact elsewhere. For example, an al-Qaeda member in Germany signed documents for the US cells creating the impression that they were in Germany.<sup>19</sup>

The sub-national groups that are webs of influence for al-Qaeda may present a different picture. Some of them, such as the Abu Sayyaf group in the Philippines, control territory and can levy taxes on citizens, in much the same way that the Taliban taxed 10% of the drug trade in Afghanistan.<sup>20</sup> In addition, Abu Sayyaf is known to have been involved in counterfeiting as Filipino domestic workers linked to them were arrested in Hong Kong for trying to launder fake \$100 bills.<sup>21</sup> The Balkan cells of al-Qaeda, tasked with opening the European front

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<sup>19</sup> 'Al-Qaeda: one year on', *Strategic Comments*, The International Institute for Strategic Studies, Volume 9 Issue 3, [www.iiss.org](http://www.iiss.org)

<sup>20</sup> Cooley JK, 'Unholy Wars, Afghanistan, America and International Terrorism', Pluto Press, Second edition, 2000, page 150.

<sup>21</sup> Schloss G, 'Cutting terrorist's cashflow', *South China Morning Post*, 28 September 2001. [www.special.scmp.com](http://www.special.scmp.com)

comprising 6 000 core members and possibly 40 000 sympathisers, allegedly used as logistical support the Albanian mafia (linked to the Kosovo Liberation Army) that is involved in heroin and cocaine trading and other activities. Indian mafia figures, it is claimed, also assisted Pakistani sympathisers with logistics.<sup>22</sup> In Tanzania, sympathisers of al-Qaeda are allegedly buying up tanzanite in the north-east of the country for sale in Dubai<sup>23</sup>, with the result that many companies have stopped the sale and purchase of these gems.<sup>24</sup> There is no evidence that al-Qaeda benefited from the Afghanistan and other drug trade. Osama bin Laden was funding the Taliban rather than the reverse. It seems unlikely that they would be involved, except on an individual basis, in a trade that requires contact with many diverse criminal organisations involved in different stages of the process.<sup>25</sup> However, al-Qaeda can establish tactical ad hoc alliances with their sub-national sympathisers to raise funds.

### **Reverting to criminal activities**

After the Cold War, many terrorist groups had to find alternative sources of funding. The Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA), that had been involved only in protection rackets allegedly graduated to running illicit gambling dens, game arcades and movie piracy. Al-Qaeda too is increasingly turning to crime to fund its operations. Whilst most of its operations are relatively cheap (September 11 cost just under \$500,000<sup>26</sup>), the scope of the operations probably requires more funds than they actually have at this stage. An al-Qaeda suspect

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<sup>22</sup> Nikolovski D, 'Al-Qaeda and Islamic Jihad have 5 000 fighters in Macedonia', *Reality Macedonia*, 17 October 2001, [www.realitymacedonia.org](http://www.realitymacedonia.org); Levitt M, 'The Political Economy of Middle East Terrorism', Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 15 January 2003.

<sup>23</sup> Block R, 'Underground trade: much-smuggled gem called tanzanite helps Bin Laden'; *Wall Street Journal*, 16 November 2001, [www.azstarnet.com/attack/indepth/wjs-undergroundtrade.html](http://www.azstarnet.com/attack/indepth/wjs-undergroundtrade.html)

<sup>24</sup> Weldon R, 'Zale drops tanzanite', *Professional Jeweller Daily News*, 15 January 2002, [www.Professionaljeweller.com/archives/news/2002/011502story.html](http://www.Professionaljeweller.com/archives/news/2002/011502story.html)

<sup>25</sup> Makarenko T, 'Crime, terror and the Central Asian drug trade', *Harvard Asia Quarterly*, Summer 2002, [www.fas.harvard.edu/](http://www.fas.harvard.edu/)

<sup>26</sup> Griffith P, Speigel P & H Williamson, 'How the hijackers went unnoticed', *Financial Times*, FT.com, 29 November 2001, [www.specials.ft.com](http://www.specials.ft.com)

arrested in the US, Ahmed Rezzam, claims that he was given only US\$12,000 to conduct an operation that involved the bombing of the Los Angeles airport on the turn of the century. He used \$4,000 to buy the chemicals necessary to make the bomb (all freely available to anyone) and rented the car that was to be used in the operation. When he complained that he did not have sufficient funds, he claims that he was told to resume petty crime. He robbed hotels and failed in an attempt to rob a currency exchange.<sup>27</sup>

A training manual found on a computer of an al-Qaeda operative in Manchester, England, provides instructions on the art of counterfeiting and forgeries. Arrested al-Qaeda members claim that this formed part of the training in Afghanistan. Counterfeiting is an attractive option for al-Qaeda as it serves the dual purpose of raising funds for its operations as well as waging economic warfare against perceived enemies such as the US, undermining public confidence in the dollar's use as an international medium of exchange or in the country's economy. It is estimated that counterfeit US currency in circulation is between \$70 million and \$170 million at any given time. The alleged counterfeiting of US dollars and their distribution through mainly drug money laundering networks by rogue states such as formerly Iraq, Iran and Syria and groups such as Hezbollah and Chechen rebels has compelled the US to introduce a newly designed currency by late 2003 that will be changed every 7 to 10 years.<sup>28</sup> A suspect, Faruk Aksu, allegedly linked to several terror groups, was arrested in Turkey with \$3.2 million fake US dollars obtained from Iraq that matched the paper used by the US and incorporated all the security features of the real US dollar. This may still not be sufficient to deter a sophisticated organised crime or terrorist group from flooding the market with false bills. Recently, in the Netherlands a crime network was arrested in possession of 'super dollars' that it had manufactured using a Xerox

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<sup>27</sup> 'Chance find that averted airport bombing', *Financial Times*, 28 November 2002.

<sup>28</sup> Jasperson MC, (USIA staff writer), 'Iran, Syria accused of counterfeiting US dollars', 1 July 1992, [www.fas.org/news/iran/1992/920701-233652.htm](http://www.fas.org/news/iran/1992/920701-233652.htm); 'Police stop illegal counterfeit dollars manufacturing operation in Chechnya', *Pravda*, 21 January 2003, [www.english.pravda.ru](http://www.english.pravda.ru)

DocuColour digital press. It had produced \$300 million fake dollars in two weeks.<sup>29</sup>

However, smaller scale counterfeiting crime appears to be the favoured fundraising tool of the independent al-Qaeda cells operating in the West and perhaps elsewhere, particularly for the so-called 'sleeper cells' that provide the safe houses, weapons and false documents. The military operatives that do not form part of the al-Qaeda core group may depend on petty crime to survive.

The simplest method of funding an operation is obtaining false identification or assuming another's identity to obtain credit from banks. Al-Qaeda operatives used gym computers or stolen tourist luggage to steal identities for credit. More sophisticated operations have included the manufacture of credit cards, either manually or digitally through a process known as 'skimming'. An al-Qaeda operative in the US recruited a fellow Moroccan, working as a waiter at a restaurant in Arlington, to steal customer's credit cards with a scanning device that could be concealed on a belt, which was then downloaded onto a laptop computer and used in conjunction with off-the-shelf technology to make credit cards.<sup>30</sup> The skimmer can be bought for \$200 from parts ordered over the internet.<sup>31</sup> Al-Qaeda members in Spain also used credit card fraud and robberies to fund operatives in 9 countries.<sup>32</sup> They allegedly stole credit cards, copied them 10 times and shipped them overnight where they were used to buy electronic equipment of fuel that could be resold.<sup>33</sup> They also allegedly shipped computer and optical equipment to operatives in Algeria and Chechnya.<sup>34</sup> Other groups such as the Sri Lankan Tamil

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<sup>29</sup> Kaihla P, 'Forging terror: How rapid advances in scanning, printing, and other technologies have made counterfeiting a potent new weapon of holy war', *Business 2.0*, December 2002 issue, Part 1, page 3, [www.Business2.com/articles/mag/](http://www.Business2.com/articles/mag/)

<sup>30</sup> Lighty T & R Gibson, 'Fraud, ID theft finance terror', *The Chicago Tribune*, 19 June 2003.

<sup>31</sup> Kaihla P op cit.

<sup>32</sup> Barnett A and M Bright, 'Authorities probe cleric's bank account', *The Observer*, 25 November 2001, [www.unansweredquestions.net](http://www.unansweredquestions.net)

<sup>33</sup> Erlanger S & C Hedges, 'Terror cells slip through Europe's grasp', *The New York Times*, 28 December 2001, [www.pullitzer.org/year/2002/explanatory-reporting/works/122801.html](http://www.pullitzer.org/year/2002/explanatory-reporting/works/122801.html)

<sup>34</sup> Lighty T & R Gibson op cit.

Tigers have refined this methodology by planting spy cameras in gas stations owned by supporters and videoing people keying their personal identification numbers into cash registers, implanted with a homemade memory card. Images were transmitted to a VCR in the attendant's car, which were then downloaded onto blank data cards. The network not only used those cards but also inflated people's balances by depositing forged cheques and then used these cards to buy casino chips that they turned back into cash.<sup>35</sup> Experts fear that counterfeiting may be facilitated by a homemade device called a 'CC grabber' that intercepts credit card data on the internet when businesses request bank authorisation.

Other products that are easy to counterfeit and that have been used by terrorist groups include t-shirts, videos, computer software and music. The music industry estimates that it loses \$4,2 billion to piracy each year worldwide.<sup>36</sup>

Al-Qaeda is believed to own at least 15 vessels that it is able to use to transport operatives, bombs, money or commodities.<sup>37</sup> It is likely it has individual supporters that may also have access to vessels and other forms of transportation such as trucks. Operatives have been apprehended at an Italian port and off the coast of Somalia after stowing away in commercial sea containers and with seamen's certificates that did not require them to have a visa. This is difficult to regulate with an average of only 2% of containers being searched worldwide, except in countries such as the US. There were 72 million containers passing through world ports in 2001 and every transaction involved up to 25 parties.<sup>38</sup> It is difficult to stop this without halting trade and crippling economies.

In Africa, with its lack of resources and porous borders, trafficking in

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<sup>35</sup> Kaihla P op cit.

<sup>36</sup> Mazer RA, 'From T-shirts to terrorism', *Washingtonpost.com*, 30 September 2001. [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com)

<sup>37</sup> 'Transnational threats update', vol 1, no 4, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, December 2002, [www.csis.org/tnt](http://www.csis.org/tnt)

<sup>38</sup> Staff reporter, 'Container trade, when trade and security clash', *The Economist*, 4 April 2002.

illicit commodities is rife. Even if many countries in Africa outside East Africa may not be regarded as potential al-Qaeda targets, they could still be used as staging posts for illicit trafficking. States in conflict and weak states can provide an enabling environment for terrorists. In April 2001, a Durban businessman and his wife were arrested at South Africa's border with Swaziland with \$130 000 in South African currency strapped to their bodies. It transpired that they were on their way to Maputo in Mozambique to an exchange bureau with alleged links to gold dealers in Dubai run by a businessman linked to Islamists in Africa and the Middle East. Maputo alone has 36 exchange bureaus and is regarded as a money-laundering haven. The police are still investigating this case despite the suspect's denial that he has any links with al-Qaeda.<sup>39</sup> South Africa's suitability as a haven for terrorists first received attention when a domestic group bombed the Planet Hollywood restaurant in Cape Town and when it extradited one of the convicted bombers in the Kenyan and Tanzania bombings who had taken refuge there.

### **Conclusion**

The shift of emphasis of law enforcement agencies from traditional organised crime operations to terrorism, with too little attention paid to their links, will hamper initiatives to detect, degrade and prosecute al-Qaeda operatives. At present, many organised crime agencies have had their budgets eroded and personnel depleted by the focus on terrorism. These agencies need to be integrated more closely into the information and analysis cycle of anti-terrorism and intelligence projects so that it is possible to obtain a fuller picture of these networks. It also requires more active assistance from the private sector such as banks.

The operation of transnational crime networks can provide useful lessons for terrorism specialists. Organised crime networks operate globally through myriad front companies, and are able to adapt their

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<sup>39</sup> Block R, 'Islamic terrorists find a new home in South Africa', *Wall Street Journal*, 6 June 2003, [www.africapulse.org](http://www.africapulse.org)

operations to meet any threat from national law enforcement agencies, particularly in weak or failed states. They frequently use different countries for different purposes — as suppliers, depots or banking centres.

Individuals within these networks have extensive links within governments and rebel movements in Africa and elsewhere, which may inadvertently or consciously assist their activities.

In the hierarchical core of the al-Qaeda network, law enforcement agencies may be able to establish critical nodes that have dense connections in the network with the use of technical surveillance. The problem is that there is far too much information coming in that requires analysis and when links are finally unravelled, the *modus operandi* of the group may have changed. In the transactional network of al-Qaeda, human intelligence may be the most effective tool of agencies but it appears that distrust between intelligence agencies around the world may hamper transfer of classified information. The US reportedly has recruited informers and agents of Middle Eastern origin that were trained quickly in a manner similar to the Resistance movement in the Second World War to counter this problem. The financial and logistical support base of al-Qaeda has to be disrupted. Whilst some of the figures in this network that cross both the licit and the illicit boundaries may have been neutralised by the seizure of their assets, this is probably the tip of the iceberg. It may increasingly be possible to hinder the operations of the lower level operatives of Al-Qaeda by attacking their network internally with the spread of misinformation.

The inherent problem with many of these tactics is that it is not easy to balance human rights and justice. This is becoming apparent in the US where racial profiling, 'voluntary' registration of immigrants from certain countries and rumours about suspect charity financiers of al-Qaeda have caused a deep feeling of alienation in the local Muslim community. This is counterproductive to the US's long-term interests. There is also disagreement on which groups should be regarded as terrorists in the international community and subject to sanction.

Some experts in terrorism, pointing to a hundred failed attempts by operatives, claim that al-Qaeda's operations have been disrupted to the extent that they are no longer able to operate effectively in the West. Recent attacks in Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Bali may bear this out. This suggests a need to focus on some of the geographical locations in Africa identified as possible sites of al-Qaeda activity. While international joint operations are being conducted in some of these areas, further capacity building of local agencies and access to basic and advanced equipment will be necessary if any impact is to be made.

Whilst there is no apparent transnational crime network that is analogous to al-Qaeda, they may share one trait. Many terrorist groups have a hierarchy and if the leader is captured, it has frequently led to the groups' decline. However, in the case of criminal organisations, the vacuum is soon filled, as was the case with Pablo Escobar of the Medellin drug cartel in Columbia. If al-Qaeda becomes totally self-sustaining as a crime organisation, it can continue indefinitely without its leadership figures, hence the need to integrate the traditional organised crime/terrorism nexus in its surveillance.