

# Government: Al-Qaeda terrorist threat still significant

WASHINGTON (AP) — Government counterterrorism experts say the threat of an attack by al-Qaeda remains a significant concern, perhaps even this year, although the nation safely passed the benchmark of the Nov. 2 election.

The Homeland Security Department this week lowered the terror alert for the financial sector in New York, Washington and northern New Jersey that was in place for three months. But authorities still caution the possibility of an attack is just as high as it was a month ago.

"The whole notion taking a deep breath and saying, 'Wow, we got past this and now we are OK for a while' is a... very dangerous train of

thought," Homeland Security Deputy Secretary James Loy told reporters in a conference call Wednesday.

Since April, U.S. authorities have warned of an increased risk of attack to disrupt democracy, often pointing to the now-passed elections. But they remain concerned about the upcoming holidays, the Jan. 20 presidential inauguration and beyond. Loy said the time period does not have a termination date.

He said a relaxed posture for financial institutions — from code orange, or heightened, to code yellow, or elevated — came because government and private-sector officials had run drills, improved security and taken

other measures to "harden" the potential targets. The passing of the election, too, was on the minds of authorities.

Now, counterterrorism officials are analyzing why al-Qaeda may not have attacked and what may be ahead.

Among other efforts, experts in and out of government have been combing through two tapes released by al-Qaeda in the two weeks before the election — first by a man calling himself "Azzam the American" and another by Osama bin Laden, leader of the terrorist group.

In a recent analysis, Ben Venzke, president of the private IntelCenter and a consultant to government

counterterrorism agencies, said two bin Laden videos directly addressing Americans — in October of 2002 and 2003 — were followed between one and 53 days by attacks. Bin Laden's most recent message turned up Oct. 29; Venzke said he didn't know why the videos come annually in October.

None of the attacks was in the continental United States. Al-Qaeda attacked a French oil tanker off the coast of Yemen and a Saudi housing complex in Riyadh after the 2002 and 2003 videos, respectively.

However, Venzke said he was particularly concerned about an attack directly against U.S. interests now because the new tapes repre-

sent "the most significant effort by al-Qaeda to address the American people in the last couple years."

For instance, Venzke noted, for the first time the initial release of a bin Laden video comes with English subtitles.

Similarly, a 75-minute video in English from "Azzam the American" is also directed at Americans. It was given to a U.S. network, ABC, on Oct. 22.

If "Azzam" has been involved in al-Qaeda videos before, the shrouded speaker has not used that name. He may be a 26-year-old Californian that the FBI is urgently seeking, Adam Gadahn.

"You are talking about a

group that really, really thinks about this stuff. The question is why that shift in focus," Venzke said.

Mike Scheuer, a 22-year CIA veteran and former head of the CIA's bin Laden unit, noted in a recent interview that Muslim clerics criticized bin Laden for not sufficiently warning the U.S. before the 9/11 attacks.

With these messages, "he said I am talking directly to you," said Scheuer, who resigned effective Friday to speak more freely about problems he sees with the U.S. fight against terrorism.

Scheuer said he couldn't predict if an attack would come in the window suggested by Venzke.

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## Reid

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that Democrats will work harder to appeal to rural voters in states like his own.

Reid said Bush's pick for second-term secretary of state, National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, "should be confirmed fairly easily," barring the unexpected.

On another of Bush's high-profile Cabinet appointments, Reid said Senate Democrats will seek certain memos that Attorney General-designate Alberto Gonzales wrote as White House legal counsel.

Gonzales drew criticism from human rights groups after the terror attacks in 2001 when he wrote a memo in which Bush claimed the right to waive anti-torture law and international treaties that provide protections to prisoners of war.

Reid has spent the past six years as Daschle's second-in-command and told reporters he is not an "untested vessel."

He takes over as Democrats struggle to adjust to the Nov. 2 elections in which Republicans held the White House and tightened their grip

in both houses of Congress.

Sen. Ben Nelson of Nebraska, who delivered one of the nominating speeches on Reid's behalf in the private caucus, told reporters he had said the Nevada lawmaker "will lead this caucus into a new era and oppose where necessary, compromise where possible and avoid the obstructionist label."

Reid's speaking style often includes criticism wrapped in the language of compromise, and his remarks about Bush and Senate Republicans fit the mold.

"We start this new Con-

gress... with the opportunities to do good things. We are going to try and work with the president," Reid said.

"He said four years ago he wanted to be a uniter.... That didn't work too well the first four years. We hope it works the second four years, because we want to work together."

Reid's comment about judicial nominations alluded to pressure by some GOP conservatives for a change in Senate procedures that would strip Democrats of their abil-

ity to filibuster appointments. The filibuster is an unlimited extension of debate to kill a proposal and requires 60 votes to stop.

Democrats have blocked votes on 10 of Bush's nominees over the past four years while confirming 203, which Reid said represents good odds for the president. A change would be short-sighted, Reid said, since Republicans may one day find themselves in the minority and eager to block appointments by a Democratic presi-

dent.

He conceded, however, there was little Democrats could do to prevent Republicans from acting if they choose to.

Apart from Reid, Sen. Dick Durbin of Illinois was elected second-ranking party leader.

In the House, Republicans awarded Rep. Tom DeLay of Texas a new term as majority leader, and Rep. Roy Blunt of Missouri was re-elected whip, the third-ranking position.

## Curry

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would back-peddle on affirmative action. That was a serious miscalculation.

Quietly, usually adhering to the overly cautious advice of their attorneys, major universities are eliminating or watering down programs that have successfully targeted deserving and qualified Blacks. Many of these programs have been either eliminated or opened up to women and other racial or ethnic groups, thus reducing the number of Black students who would be able to directly benefit from special financial assistance.

All of our lives we've been taught the value of a college education, financial as well as personal. Education is the ticket to success and a good job, we were told repeatedly. And College Board figures confirm that lesson.

The average high school graduate earns an average of \$30,800 annually. The college graduate earns approximately \$19,000 more per year — \$49,900 — while with those with a master's degree earn \$59,500. Over a lifetime, the person who has only graduated from high school will earn \$1.4 million. Over a lifetime, a college graduate will earn \$2.5 million or almost twice as much as the high school grad.

A family's income usually determines its quality of life. If we are to advance as far

as our God-given talent takes us, then access to higher education can't be the exclusive purview of the wealthy and well-connected.

As we continue to engage in this epic battle for the soul of America, we must not be lulled into believing that the fight over affirmative action ended with the Supreme Court ruling upholding the UM Law School case. In fact, both President George W. Bush and Terry Pell, president of the conservative Center for Individual Rights, the group that brought both suits against the University of Michigan, favor what they call race-neutral programs. But many studies, including one conducted by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, show that race-neutral programs are less effective than affirmative action.

We must be mindful that while the United States Supreme Court declared that it's lawful to operate race- and gender-conscious affirmative action programs, its ruling did not require universities or employers to operate affirmative action programs. Thus, we still have a fight on our hands to make sure that our institutions don't destroy what a conservative Supreme Court narrowly and reluctantly upheld.

George E. Curry is editor-in-chief of the NNPA News Service.

## Fletcher

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ing to references about so-called security moms, i.e., those (mainly) married women with children who would normally be concerned about the sorry state of the economy, but after 9/11 are mainly concerned about the potential threat of another terrorist attack. While I believe that everyone in the USA fears, to one degree or another, further terrorist attacks, there is an important question that the established media failed to ask: are those who supported President Bush based on the issue of security suggesting that our security can and should come at the cost of insecurity for the rest of the world?

This way of posing the question may seem a bit provocative, but stop for a minute and think about it. Since 9/11, the Bush administration has carried out foreign policies in the name of increasing our security that in actuality increased our insecurity by increasing the insecurity of many countries. In my previous columns I have spoken to this concern. When the Bush administration provided sanctuary to anti-Castro Cuban terrorists or anti-Aristide thugs, it was saying that certain forms of terrorism are acceptable. But they were also saying that this, and other activities such as the invasion of Iraq, could be done in the name of the people of the USA.

When one puts this all together, the

disbelief that seems to have swept most of the world in the aftermath of the re-election of President Bush becomes quite understandable. Given the contempt with which this Administration has held governments that differ with its positions—even governments of nations that are longtime allies of the USA—the global public assumed that President Bush would be ousted on November 2nd.

In retrospect, 59 million people may have believed that they were voting in favor of values, but one must question which values when they are prepared to accept violations of international law. Fifty-nine 59 million people may have believed that they were voting for security, but one must question what security when we see that 100,000 Iraqi civilians have been killed as a result of the US invasion. Do those 100,000 dead help us become more secure or do they further inflame an inferno?

My 59 million people made a series of choices in order to comfort themselves in this world of chaos and discomfort. Yet with these choices, taken for whatever reasons, come consequences, consequences we may be living with for some time to come.

Bill Fletcher Jr. is president of TransAfrica Forum, a Washington, D.C.-based non-profit educational and organizing center.