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Head of U.N. Al Qaeda Monitoring Unit Outlines Vulnerabilities of Al Qaeda and Taliban;...

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Head of U.N. Al Qaeda Monitoring Unit Outlines Vulnerabilities of Al Qaeda and Taliban; Offers Counter-Terror Measures in New Analysis
Penn Institute for Strategic Threat Analysis and Response Hosts Richard Barrett

NEW YORK, Aug. 25 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- Richard Barrett, the highest ranking U.N. official responsible for monitoring the activities of Al Qaeda, said the group continues to degrade seven years after September 11, 2001, hampered by fragmented leadership, widely tarnished credibility, a struggle for relevance, and a chronic inability to live up to its propaganda.

Barrett, a former British intelligence officer who heads the United Nations Al Qaeda and Taliban Monitoring Team, presented his status report in Seven Years After 9/11: Al-Qaida's Strengths and Vulnerabilities, last week at the University of Pennsylvania Club here sponsored by the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (www.icsr.info). Penn's Institute for Strategic Threat Analysis & Response (ISTAR), directed by Professor Harvey Rubin, is one of four founding members of ICSR and the only U.S. member. Barrett's report represents his personal views and are not necessarily shared by the United Nations.

"We need to play to the weaknesses not the strengths of Al Qaeda," he told the Penn Club audience that included ICSR members and supporters, diplomats and journalists. Barrett characterized Al Qaeda as a "parasitical organization that latches onto events around world and through them gives itself strength."

Noting Al Qaeda's inability to live up to its ominous, internet-delivered pronouncements, he offered, "Perhaps their greatest strength is their propaganda machine." He added that the leadership has been forced to fixate on security, live a precarious existence along the grueling Afghan-Pakistan border, trusting very few and forced to rely on a tenuous communication's system of couriers.

Barrett, who reports directly to the Security Council, said Osama Bin Laden's mythical status, fueled by Western media, is greatly over-rated. This, he added, works to Al Qaeda's advantage because it "exaggerates the threat" and the constant caution demonstrated by governments worldwide increases public anxiety.

While Barrett said Osama Bin Laden is now largely "a face on a T-shirt," the group's leadership cannot be taken lightly, stating, "They are limited but clearly both determined and resilient."

As for the future, Barrett says anti-terror forces must keep Al Qaeda on the defensive and limit its connections to the outside world. "The best way to prevent this is to keep the leaders concerned about their own security and to keep them pinned down in the remote areas of the Afghan/Pakistan border and allow them to suffer the fate of all other outsiders who have attempted to establish themselves in the region."

Dr. Rubin, who introduced Barrett as one of the world's most respected voices on countering terrorism, lauded the new study as "a remarkably timely tool for all those in the field and an eye-opening essay for the world community."

www.istar.upenn.edu
SOURCE Penn's Institute for Strategic Threat Analysis & Response (ISTAR)

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