

## Let Bin Laden stay free, says CIA man

Contributed by Tony Allen-Mills (Times Online)  
Sunday, 17 July 2005

January 09, 2005

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Tony Allen-Mills

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,2089-1431539,00.html>

THE world may be better off if Osama Bin Laden remains at large, according to the Central Intelligence Agency's recently departed executive director.

If the world's most wanted terrorist is captured or killed, a power struggle among his Al-Qaeda subordinates may trigger a wave of terror attacks, said AB

"Buzzy" Krongard, who stepped down six weeks ago as the CIA's third most senior executive.

"You can make the argument that we're better off with him (at large)," Krongard said. "Because if something happens to Bin Laden, you might find a lot of people vying for his position and demonstrating how macho they are by unleashing a stream of terror."

Krongard, a former investment banker who joined the CIA in 1998, said Bin Laden's role among Islamic militants was changing.

"He's turning into more of a charismatic leader than a terrorist mastermind," he said. "Some of his lieutenants are the ones to worry about."

Krongard, 68, said he viewed Bin Laden "not as a chief executive but more like a venture capitalist".

He added: "Let's say you and I want to blow up Trafalgar Square. So we go to Bin Laden. And he'll say, 'Well, here's some money and some passports and if you need weapons, see this guy'.

"I don't see him keeping his fingers on everything because the lines of communications are just too difficult."

Several US officials have privately admitted that it may be better to keep Bin Laden pinned down on the border of Afghanistan and Pakistan rather than make him a martyr or put him on trial. But Krongard is the most senior figure to acknowledge publicly that his capture might prove counter-productive.

Krongard also acknowledged that the CIA was still having trouble planting spies in Islamic militant ranks. "There are hundreds and hundreds of (Al-Qaeda) cells — it's like a living, moving bit of protoplasm," he said.

"In order to penetrate you not only have to be language-proficient, you also have to commit acts that exceed criminality. It's very hard."

His comments came as it emerged that new laws to combat the Al-Qaeda threat in Britain and keep the Belmarsh terror suspects in jail will be unveiled next month.

The draft terrorism bill will propose that "acts preparatory to terrorism" become a criminal offence to catch those who provide accommodation, finance, identity papers and other support. The bill will prove controversial because it could be applied retrospectively against many of the 11 foreign terror suspects being detained in Belmarsh, south London, and Broadmoor secure hospital.

Charles Clarke, the home secretary, is also planning to announce a civil punishment for those suspected of "associating" with terrorist suspects, but where there is insufficient proof to press charges.

Additional reporting: David Leppard

