

## The SWISH Report (3)

By Paul Rogers,  
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### Introduction

We would first like to take this opportunity to thank you for coming to us for an independent assessment. You might have chosen one of the many consultancies available in Britain, even though they may have a marked tendency to tell you what you want to hear. We therefore welcome this unusual opportunity to give a candid and independent assessment of policy options and we hope that you will accept a certain degree of blunt speaking as we feel you will find this of particular use, given the experience of the recent election campaign. We assume that the particular experience of the campaign is the main reason you are seeking fully independent advice.

**openDemocracy has published two earlier reports from the South Waziristan Institute of Strategic Hermeneutics (SWISH), on the prospects for al-Qaida:**

**“The SWISH Report” ([15 July 2004](#) [0])**

**The SWISH Report (2) ([13 January 2005](#) [0])**

We are especially pleased that you are willing to consult us, given that it was the al-Qaida Strategic Planning Cell which commissioned our two previous contributions to policy discussions in this area. We understand that you will have read these earlier reports ([15 July 2004](#) [0] and [13 January 2005](#) [0]) and you will therefore appreciate that in those consultancies we also tended towards uncompromising analysis. You may recall that our broad conclusions were that the al-Qaida movement was really doing rather well in its confrontation with the United States, but that this was primarily due to the incompetence of their principal opponent rather than any high level of competence on its part.

Indeed, in our first report, delivered four months before the United States presidential election, we went as far as to say that it would be useful to al-Qaida’s long-term strategy if its leader, Osama bin Laden, would allow himself to be detained by the Americans. This would do much to ensure a second term for George W Bush – in our view a highly desirable outcome for the movement. Such a recommendation was, we understand, not entirely appreciated by the al-Qaida leadership yet it was still prepared to accept a further report from us in the wake of the presidential election. We hope that you, too, will be able rise above any irritations with specific recommendations or aspects of our analysis, and that such an attitude may extend to your current leader, Tony Blair, should he have sight of this report.

### Terms of reference

You have asked us to work on the basis of three sets of assumptions, and in doing so, to work to certain terms of reference.

The assumptions are:

- Your leader desires to achieve international recognition that extends well beyond the countries of the Atlantic community and will give him a much stronger “place in history” than currently seems possible
- Such changes in policy have to be achieved within two years and have to be sufficiently embedded so that his successor, even if pursuing similar policies, will do so on the evident basis that your current leader is the architect
- Your leader’s commitment to the war on terror and the occupation of Iraq both stem from a genuine belief that what he did really was right, rather than the view held by many that it has been due primarily to his overarching desire to be close to the United States in general and George W Bush in particular.

We might add that, as consultants, we do not have any problems with these assumptions and are happy to work their framework.

The terms of reference are:

- What policies should Britain best pursue in order to minimise the problems presented by the ongoing war on terror
- Should British policy towards Iraq be reviewed and if so, what might be the conclusions
- Are there ways in which Britain can exercise a leadership role on global development and environment issues?

We will address the first two terms of reference together, as recent developments demonstrate that the issues with which they are concerned are now inextricably mixed. We will then address the third issue separately, even though there are certain key areas of overlap. Before doing so, may we emphasise two things. First, our understanding is that you want us to be forthright, so we will be. Second, our analysis is underpinned by one question: will our recommendations help ensure your leader’s place in history?

### **Iraq and the war on terror**

Our blunt assessment is that the Iraq policy is a disaster, part of a wider problem of the entirely misguided war on terror. By “policy” we mean the policy pursued by the United States but followed in most respects by Britain. We note, though, the deep unease among many sectors of government and the armed forces within the country, whatever the semblance of unity that is normally promoted in public.

In the pursuit of the war on terror over the past three and a half years, at least 30,000 civilians have been killed and many tens of thousands injured, principally in Iraq and Afghanistan. Some 20,000 people are currently detained without trial, again principally in those countries, but in many others as well. Torture is common, especially with the “rendition” policy – transferring detainees to states where torture is routine.

Although there is some talk of democracy, the war involves support for highly repressive regimes such as that in Uzbekistan. In any case, democracy is now beginning to be recognised as a two-edged sword, as the recent success of Hamas in municipal elections in Palestine demonstrates. In our considered view, a democratic transformation across the middle east would bring in administrations deeply antagonistic to the United States and Israel – far more so than the current elite autocracies. We therefore confidently expect less interest in such transformations in Washington in the coming months and years.

Although the al-Qaida movement has experienced serious losses among its diffused leaderships, it is more active and is gaining more support than in the period prior to the 9/11 atrocities. We would cite just two of the many examples of US actions that have helped. The first is the destruction of Fallujah, now an event as iconic as was Guernica in Spain's civil war. Destroying or severely damaging 20,000 of the 39,000 dwellings in this "city of mosques" including most schools and other public buildings, and killing hundreds of civilians, has had a deep effect on communities across the region.

The second is the supposed desecration of copies of the Koran at Guantánamo, which has produced a sense of outrage that can only be understood if you recognise the wider context of a deep and pervading antagonism to the United States. Furthermore, this antagonism is growing in intensity and is increasingly focused on Iraq. While Washington may still believe that a transition to an "acceptable" government in Iraq is possible, we regard this as highly unlikely.

We note that one of the most worrying developments for the United States in Iraq is the confluence of an internal insurgency that is largely secular with a rising stream of radical Islamic paramilitaries entering the country from outside, many of them prepared for suicide. We expect this trend to continue, with the US predicament in Iraq becoming increasingly precarious as a result.

It may be that you can have some influence on the Bush administration to adopt a substantially different policy but we frankly doubt it. We have to remind you of two features of the current Iraq situation that are fundamental, even if largely downplayed in the western media. The first is that the United States might not want to maintain its current large occupation force but it is continuing to build permanent military bases; thus it envisages a strong military influence in Iraq over a time-span measured in decades not years.

The second is that the primary motivation for such a policy is maintaining influence over the most important single oil-bearing region of the world. We continue to be surprised by the ease with which governments in Washington, London and elsewhere deny the oil motive. For us, and indeed for serious analysts across the entire middle east and south Asia, there is simply no dispute that oil and gas are of enduring significance and we assume that you, too, accept this premise.

In summary, the al-Qaida movement is not under control and the war on terror is not being won. The security situation in Iraq is deteriorating and we expect Iraq to be an even greater focus for violence in the coming months and years.

If we are to suggest policies to counter al-Qaida, we would remind you of part of our first report to that organisation. We said then:

"Consider the consequences for your strategy if your opponents were to take the following actions:

- A determined western effort to ensure security in Afghanistan, limit the power of the warlords and aid civil reconstruction. This would need to hugely transcend what is currently envisaged and would be more akin to repeated requests and demands from experienced United Nations officials, Afghans and independent analysts
- Withdrawal of United States military force from Afghanistan and elsewhere in central Asia coupled with action against the governmental human rights abuses endemic in much of the region
- In Iraq, moves towards a genuine democracy rather than the client regime that has now been installed, coupled with UN oversight of the transition and a rapid decrease in the

US military presence. This would be paralleled by an avoidance of recourse to crude market forces and an acceptance of the need for temporarily centralised development planning

- Real pressure on Israel to concede a peace agreement with a viable Palestinian state
- In parallel with this would be pressure on Arab autocracies to modernise and democratise.

All these, in combination, would present a serious threat to the integrity and viability of the al-Qaida strategy. It is indeed fortunate that none is likely to happen, given the current western political leadership.”

We have to say that there is virtually nothing we would change in offering you advice now. Although that assessment was reached nearly a year ago, events since then in Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Israel/Palestine and, most of all, Iraq, support our view that changes in policy in all these areas would do much to limit the further development of al-Qaida. It is for you to decide on those areas where you might have most influence but we would argue that Afghanistan and Israel/Palestine may be those with some potential for action.

In relation to Iraq, we see no end in sight for the insurgency and we anticipate that its further development, and the very hard United States response, will enhance and encourage opposition to the US and its coalition partners. We do not see any change in US policy within the next year and we therefore conclude that it would be in your best interests to withdraw your military forces. You can cite “overstretch” if you wish, but you should pursue this option with some urgency. Moreover, under no circumstances should you support any US military action directed against Iran.

## **Global security**

Your third requirement is for us to propose longer-term policies that will have an enduring effect on global development and environment issues. The context here is straightforward: the Millennium Development Goals are not going to be reached, the gap between the richest fifth of the global population and the rest is widening, yet improved education and communications are leading to a wider self-perception of marginalisation. This results in bitterness and frustration and aids the evolution of radical and extreme social movements.

Of all the environmental issues, climate change is by far the most important. It is the first major human-induced effect on the global ecosystem and, unless checked, will have profound effects on tropical landmasses and their populations, leading to a deeply unstable world.

Your government has espoused as causes both global poverty and global climate change, and claims in each a degree of international leadership. In practice it needs to do much more to be able to substantiate such claims.

On global poverty, closing the wealth-poverty divide requires a far greater commitment to fair trade and to debt cancellation, coupled with a rapid improvement in the quality and quantity of development assistance. Given the surprising degree of electoral support for such ideas, your government could easily increase the development assistance budget to 1% of GNP, well ahead of the UN target, within the lifespan of this parliament, even though this would require a substantial upgrading and expansion of relevant departments. If such a move was announced along with a far more concerted effort at debt cancellation and trade reform, then Britain could claim a degree of international leadership and could certainly be far more effective in agenda-setting. What it is doing so far is frankly inadequate.

On global climate change, the picture is even less satisfactory. Britain's earlier claims to be meeting its modest carbon emission targets came mainly from the "dash for gas", using natural gas for electricity generation, rather than any serious move towards energy conservation or the use of renewable sources. What we find quite astounding is that, having failed to do what is required, there is now a strong probability of a move to a new generation of nuclear power stations as the answer to carbon emissions.

This completely ignores the exorbitant costs of decommissioning and waste disposal, currently estimated at over £46 billion for the early cluster of nuclear reactors alone. Even more worrying is the prospect that Britain will show a lead that many other countries may follow. In light of the inextricable links in the nuclear fuel cycle between nuclear power and nuclear weapons, we would contend that this will make it wholly impossible to restrain nuclear-weapons proliferation.

We remain astonished at the pervasive influence of the nuclear-power lobby, just as we find it extraordinary that the British government commits such limited resources to research renewable energy systems. The potential of photovoltaics like the quantum well solar cell, and other renewable energy systems, is such that we would argue most strongly for a very substantial increase in research and development funding in this area. If this was accompanied by sustained fiscal measures to encourage both energy conservation and the increased use of renewable sources, Britain would then be in a very strong position to set the wider international agenda.

We can cite many possible areas of action. In the Aberdeen area, Britain has one of the world's leading centres for offshore engineering, and extraordinary potential for the utilisation of wave power, yet the government commits virtually no funding to wave-power research and development. The pioneering work on photovoltaics is systematically underfunded despite the existence of centres of international excellence at several British universities.

The country already has potential for small-unit wind-energy generation at a household scale, yet there is virtually no governmental commitment to what could be a remarkable and world-leading transformation. If you are serious about renewable energy technologies then these are just a few of the many areas where government action can have an influence.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, we believe that disengagement from Iraq, more emphasis on post-conflict reconstruction in Afghanistan, and vigorous diplomacy in support of a two-state Israel/Palestine solution offer you the best short-term hope of avoiding further damage to your government's credibility in relation to the United States-led war on terror.

In the longer term, the rapid initiation of a massively refocused international development effort, coupled with a genuine and sustained response to climate change, might just rescue the reputation of your leader. We strongly doubt that anything else will do so.

Wana  
South Waziristan  
19 May 2005

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