

The SWISH Report (4)

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Introduction

May we first thank you for giving us this opportunity to produce this report. We were surprised and pleased when the International Security Policy Group at 10 Downing Street contracted us to produce a report for them four months ago, as we thought this was an innovative attempt to obtain a wider view of the progress of what you still call your "global war on terror".

As you will recall, our previous consultancies in this field were for a somewhat different group, the Strategic Planning Cell of al-Qaida, and we are pleased that you and your British colleagues have recognised that, as consultants, we will work with anyone.

We are further gratified that you are aware of our earlier conclusions, yet are still willing to consider our advice and recommendations even though they were, in some respects, highly critical of United States policy. We understand that you do not wish us to hold back in our analysis and would prefer an informed yet succinct report.

openDemocracy has published three earlier reports from the South Waziristan Institute of Strategic Hermeneutics (SWISH), two on the prospects for al-Qaida and one on British government policy:

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

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

**The SWISH Report (3)
(May 2005 [0])**

Our understanding is that the Strategic Advisory Group (SAG) in the state department is a new development that seeks answers to what is becoming recognised in some state department circles as a wide-ranging predicament for the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan, and potentially in Iran. We further understand that the SAG members are made up of experienced state department staffers rather than political appointees.

These considerations make our task much easier; if our analysis was aimed at Bush administration appointees within the state department or the leadership in the Pentagon, the White House or the naval observatory, it would either be ignored or require so much modification as to make it inconsequential.

Context

Perhaps we might start by briefly summarising our earlier reports. In our first consultancy for al-Qaida in July 2004 [0], we concluded that the movement was doing rather well, but this was mainly because of a combination of general incompetence and a number of specific errors on the part of the United States and its coalition partners rather than effective strategies on its own part. We therefore counselled al-Qaida against excessive optimism, while accepting that the US occupation of Iraq was a singular advantage for it.

We also took the view that it would work well for al-Qaida if President Bush was re-elected in November 2004, since it was more likely that his administration would press ahead forcefully with its global war on terror. The high levels of casualties in Iraq and Afghanistan, the many thousands of detentions without trial, and the continuing US support for what al-Qaida deems to be deeply corrupt and elitist regimes in the middle east as well as the state of Israel, would all aid recruitment to its cause.

Our second report, in January 2005 [0], developed our earlier analysis and highlighted three features that made it likely that the United States would maintain its existing policies, however beneficial to the al-Qaida movement. These were:

- the political combination of Christian Zionism and neo-conservatism, guaranteeing an enduring pro-Israel policy as well as a more configured crusade against terrorism (we use the word "crusade" advisedly)
- the fundamental importance of US dominance of the oil security of the Persian Gulf
- the global trend towards greater socio-economic divisions producing marginalised majorities likely to incubate radical and extreme social movements

In our third report, for the United Kingdom government in May 2005 [0], our task was to advise on:

- minimising the problems raised by the war on terror
- reviewing the government's Iraq policy
- recommending the best ways for Britain to play a wider international role, partly in order to enable the current leadership to gain a more positive place in history than has so far been achieved

We understand that our primary terms of reference for you are how best to extract the United States from its current untenable position in Iraq, and from its problems with the wider war on terror.

A question of direction

It is not our task to say why your country embarked on its particular course after the atrocities of 11 September 2001, but we have to say that this course has been misguided in just about every respect.

It was foolish to think that terminating the Taliban regime would cripple the al-Qaida movement, since the very act of termination would incite wider support for the cause. Al-Qaida never was a narrowly defined hierarchical organisation but always much more of a movement, franchise or loose consortium.

Treating the 9/11 attacks as incidents of mass criminality that should have elicited strenuous international policing operations would have done much to avoid the inflaming of opposition created by the methods used in Afghanistan and, especially, the mass detention of suspects for indefinite periods.

It is true that you did not make the mistake of placing large numbers of ground forces in Afghanistan, since this was exactly what al-Qaida would have wanted. Instead, you rearmed the Northern Alliance and rebalanced the Afghan civil war against the Taliban. However, you then made two critical errors.

First, you and your coalition partners refused to resource a programme of systematic peacebuilding in Afghanistan. This allowed paramilitaries and warlords to gain dominance, including substantial Taliban elements that are now tying down some 20,000 combat troops, mostly American, in a bitter counter-insurgency campaign.

Second, and an even worse error, you engaged in regime termination in Iraq, resulting in a far greater insurgency, and one that is not capable of being controlled. By occupying Iraq you did what the al-Qaida Strategic Planning Cell could only have hoped for in its wildest dreams – you gave it 150,000 targets. Moreover, you gave it what is starting to become an exceedingly valuable combat training zone for paramilitaries that will, on current trends, be available to it for a decade or more.

What we find quite extraordinary is the manner in which the full extent of your predicament in Iraq is still not appreciated by your political leadership. We appreciate that you, as career officers in the state department, will be more aware of what has happened, but it is worth restating in blunt terms that Iraq is the best thing to happen to the wider *jihadist* movement in two decades.

From this movement's perspective, the world's leading neo-Christian force, working closely with its Zionist associate, has taken control of a leading Arab state. Moreover, Iraq is not just any Arab state, it is the former seat of the only sustained Islamic caliphate in history – the Abbasids. The resonance of such a development far transcends any losses that the al-Qaida movement may have suffered elsewhere.

Furthermore, even at this early stage in the Iraq war, a large force of very well-equipped troops from the world's most powerful state is proving quite incapable of curbing an insurgency that is now close to evolving into a fully-fledged civil war.

Could we also add a wider issue, the implications of which your leadership appears entirely unaware? This is the pursuit of a democratic transition across the middle east. We take this at face value, assuming that it is a genuine policy. If so, it appears to have escaped the attention of your leadership and its attendant ideologues that the very last thing you should be seeking in the middle east is democracy. The reason is simple – under a democratic polity, the United States will have little or no place in the middle east, and your influence in this profoundly important region will diminish as that of China and Europe grows.

Your opponents

We will not delve into the complexities of the Iraqi insurgency at present, except to say that the various elements of opposition have avoided coalescing into a closely-knit leadership that could be identified and terminated, have developed tactics at a faster rate than they can be countered by the US military, and are steadily embracing paramilitary recruits from other countries. Instead, we will return to the wider issue of al-Qaida, using this as a term of convenience to cover an amorphous and rapidly evolving entity that continues to grow in impact.

We do not ourselves believe that al-Qaida's ultimate aims – expulsion of western forces from the middle east, destruction of Israel, termination of elite and corrupt regimes and the establishment of a glorious new caliphate – can or will be achieved. At the same time, these

aims are very real for its tens of thousands of adherents and millions of supporters, even if they are to be achieved in a timespan measured in decades not years.

Your country is therefore facing a long-term predicament to the extent that it would be eminently wise to seek a means to disengage from Iraq as soon as possible. We recognise that your problem is that you simply cannot do this, as it would be a foreign policy disaster of quite extraordinary magnitude, entailing your loss of influence in the world's most important geopolitical region.

We are fully aware of several significant background factors:

- that your concern with Gulf oil security dates back at least to 1973
- that your Joint Rapid Deployment Task Force (JRDTF) was established in 1979 precisely because of your fears of Soviet intervention
- that the JRDTF's expansion into US central command in 1984 was a recognition of the growing significance of Gulf oil
- that your military planners are only too well aware of Gulf oil's steadily increasing importance

We recognise too that what is at stake is not a matter of short-term profitability for transnational oil corporations, and that Iraq's oil reserves in themselves are significant but not dominant. These, however, are side issues.

What is crucial is that every industrialised and industrialising region of the world is becoming steadily more dependent on Gulf oil. Whoever controls the Gulf over the next thirty years will have a dominant influence over the world economy. Your planners in that resource security unit deep in the bowels of the Pentagon know this only too well, as does your vice-president and some other key figures in the administration.

Thus you cannot leave Iraq, yet your presence is of increasing assistance to the insurgents and al-Qaida and their associates. Moreover, the unique combination of Christian Zionism and neo-conservatism that is such a powerful force in Washington is likely to endure beyond the next presidential election in 2008, even if a Democrat resides in the White House.

You may not think it relevant to this discussion, but we have to point out that your predicament is partly caused by your dependency on oil and gas, and this dependency, along with that of other countries, is fuelling the highly dangerous phenomenon of climate change, with its many potentially catastrophic results – some of which may be apparent in the disaster that has consumed the city of New Orleans.

In short, there are two separate reasons for your country to move away from its current energy dependencies: the unsustainable requirement to secure the Persian Gulf under your own influence, and the need to control climate change.

Recommendations

In the ordinary way, this would be the point at which a consultancy would make recommendations. We will readily do so, but only for form's sake – there is no possibility of their being implemented in the short term. They are:

- withdraw from Iraq
- aid genuine post-conflict development in Afghanistan
- insist that Israel facilitates the creation of a viable Palestinian state

- promote anti-elite reforms among your closest middle east allies, including Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan
- rapidly reduce your dependency on fossil fuels

You are welcome to communicate these conclusions to your political masters (and mistress), but we rather fear for your pensions if you do so.

Our prognosis is that none of these changes can or will be made in the next five years or so. We further expect that Iraq will remain mired in conflict, that the al-Qaida movement will continue to evolve and that it will, in due course, succeed in undertaking further attacks that may cost you cities rather than tower blocks, and that your government will react with added force.

We estimate that it will take five to ten years for more effective policies to develop, and that state department professionals who advocate such policies at the present time will find themselves in difficult personal circumstances.

We therefore conclude by making a personal recommendation to you as members of the Strategic Advisory Group of the United States state department – keep your heads down but your intellects active, serve out your time and then join one of the think-tanks or action groups which will, in around five years' time, be much more influential than they are now.

The very fact that you have even entertained the idea of commissioning the South Waziristan Institute of Strategic Hermeneutics to do this work shows that you are far ahead of the administration that you serve. In due course you will be in a position to add greatly to the search for creative policy alternatives that your country so badly needs. We regret to say that such a time has not yet come.

Wana
South Waziristan
1 September 2005

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