

The SWISH Report (8)

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A report, *Policy Recommendations for the incoming Prime Minister*, from the South Waziristan Institute of Strategic Hermeneutics (SWISH) for the International Security Working Group of the Transition Team, 11 Downing Street, London.

Introduction

May we first thank you for inviting us to deliver this report. As you will be aware, most of our recent consultancies on the progress of the war on terror have been for the Strategic Planning Cell of the al-Qaida movement ([July 2004](#) [0]; [January 2005](#) [0]; and [February](#) [0], [September](#) [0] and [December](#) [0]); but we are, after all, merely consultants and are therefore more than happy to work for a range of clients. Indeed, we have also undertaken work for a planning group within the United States state department ([September 2005](#) [0]) and prepared a report for the International Security Policy Group that serves your departing next-door neighbour ([May 2006](#) [0]).

This is the eighth report **openDemocracy** has published from the South Waziristan Institute of Strategic Hermeneutics (SWISH). Five have advised al-Qaida, one the British government of Tony Blair, and one the United States state department:

["The SWISH Report](#) [0]"
(14 July 2004) – to al-Qaida:

"The immediate requirement...is therefore to aid, in any way within the framework of your core values, the survival of the Bush administration."

["The SWISH Report \(2\)](#) [0]" (13 January 2005) - to al-Qaida:

"You are... in the early stages of a decades-long confrontation, and early 'success' should not in any way cause you to underestimate the problems that lie ahead."

["The SWISH Report \(3\)](#) [0]" (19 May 2005) – to the British government:

"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."

["The SWISH Report \(4\)](#) [0]" (1 September 2005) – to the United States state department:

"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."

"The SWISH Report (5) [0]" (2 February 2006) – to al-Qaida:

"The greatest risk to your movement is that the opinions of some of the sharper analysts on both sides of the Atlantic begin to transcend those of the political and religious fundamentalists that currently dominate the scene. If that were to happen, then you could be in serious trouble within two or three years."

"The SWISH Report (6) [0]" (7 September 2006) – to al-Qaida:

"(The) influence of your movement and your leader is considerable, but you are not in control of your own strategy; rather, you form just one part of a wider process that is as diffuse and unpredictable as it is potent. You could point to the United States failure to control its global war on terror and you would be correct to do so. You could then claim that it is your own movement that is setting the pace - but you would be wrong. The truly revealing development of recent months is that we have reached a point, five years after 9/11 where no one, but no one, is in control."

"The SWISH Report (7) [0]" (7 December 2006) – to al-Qaida:

"In Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as across the wider middle east, it is the power and influence of the United States that is in crisis. Your movement may not be entirely coherent and the overall circumstances may be more complex than a few months ago, but it probably has greater potential for enhancement and further development than at any time in the past five years."

We believe that you have contrived to have access to that last report and will be aware that our terms of reference were concerned with offering advice on minimising the consequences of the war on terror. This was in the context of ensuring that your neighbour [1] achieved his rightful place in history, but also that he embedded policies in place in such a manner that his successor could not gain credit. You will also know that our recommendations were almost entirely ignored; there have been no substantive changes in policy, with the result that his place in history is distinctly tarnished.

We do, however, regard this outcome as potentially beneficial to the incoming prime minister, making it possible for him to embrace new policies, especially as the main opposition party is seeking to become so Blairite that any unexpected moves in new directions would seriously discomfort the Conservative opposition leader David Cameron and his colleagues.

You have asked us to look briefly at Iraq, Afghanistan and the al-Qaida movement, and also to comment on British security policy in relation to longer-term trends. This we are pleased to do, noting that you wish us to retain our usual blunt style of analysis.

Iraq

Iraq is a disaster and British forces have failed in their sector of the country, having been set an impossible task. It is true that there has been a "handing over" of some less populated provinces by the British army, but central Iraqi government control is virtually absent. Moreover, it is Basra that is the key centre and this is out of control, being subject to competition by rival militias with British forces serving mainly to present targets of opportunity. We should add that there is real anger and bitterness within the British armed forces, especially the army, at the current state of affairs and the manner in which their political masters have persistently ignored accurate assessments of the army's current predicament.

More generally in Iraq, the so-called "surge" is already faltering and will join a long line of "new" strategies and tactics instituted over the past four years, all of which have failed. Much of Iraq is now subject to a complex set of interconnecting insurgencies, sectarian divisions and sheer criminality that has resulted in well over 100,000 civilian deaths and 4 million refugees. The United States cannot and will not defeat the insurgency but is likely to stay in Iraq, in some form, for many years to come, given the immense strategic significance of the Persian Gulf region's energy resources.

Neither Iran nor Saudi Arabia wants an expanding civil war on its borders, and there are good reasons to think that a rapid but managed US withdrawal would not lead to out-and-out chaos. However, such a withdrawal will not happen and you must act on that basis. One huge implication of this, as we have repeatedly said to other clients, is that Iraq is presenting the wider al-Qaida movement with an unparalleled opportunity to train new generations of *jihadi* paramilitaries. These will be of immense value for the movement's potentially decades-long campaign to introduce what it believes will be genuine Islamist governance across the region, leading ultimately to a new caliphate that will be even more significant and enduring than the Abbasids.

US policy in Iraq is therefore an utter disaster and you must dissociate Her Majesty's Government (HMG) from it. We would recommend a full military withdrawal from Iraq before the end of the current calendar year. You may well choose to "spin" this in terms of armed-forces overstretch and the need to maintain a presence in Afghanistan (see below), rather than in any way representing it as a break with Washington. You must recognise, though, that you will come under very heavy pressure from the Bush administration to maintain some forces in southeast Iraq.

They will privately accept that you cease your operations in Basra, which is in any case a lost cause, but they will insist that you retain 2,000-3,000 troops for the guarding of supply routes from the Gulf towards Baghdad. This has been an important if subsidiary British function over the past four years but is one that could easily be done by US forces. However, Washington will want you to retain this for political reasons, simply because this will allow the Bush administration to claim that a coalition still exists.

You must resist this pressure. There is every reason for HMG to be fulsome in its support for civil aid to Iraq, wherever this is practicable. Indeed the change in policy can be represented very positively in light of this. The central issue remains that you simply must recognise the realities of present day Iraq and the folly in persisting with this aspect of the special relationship. We fully recognise that the incoming prime minister is a fully paid-up Atlanticist, but he will be doing his American friends and Britain no favours if he takes any other route.

Afghanistan

Afghanistan is much more problematic in terms of what you can do, and our advice is therefore more nuanced. The current failures, including the renaissance of the Taliban and other militias, are largely due to the abject failure of European states to deliver sufficient assistance to the Afghans in 2001-03, especially in terms of the major stabilisation force that was required immediately after the termination of the old regime.

With the Bush administration already fixated on Iraq at that time and with Europe conspicuously failing to help a desperately fractured and impoverished country, the end result was a security vacuum across much of the south and southeast of Afghanistan, with the more recent insertion of a large Nato force happening far too late and consequently coming up against revitalised paramilitaries.

What has made matters far worse is that the United States has continued to fight a bitter counterinsurgency war in the southeast of the country, in parallel with Nato's stabilisation efforts (which also includes US personnel). In the process, US forces have relied inordinately on air power, with innumerable strikes against presumed militia targets that have killed hundreds of innocent civilians.

We note that Britain has not been immune from the use of such air power, but on a much more irregular basis. Moreover, our singularly well-informed sources just across the border from here do tell us that a number of British army units have set out to engage with local communities in a manner that appears anathema to the US military in the country. Some other Nato contingents are working in a similar manner and this is setting up considerable tensions within the alliance.

You are going to have to make a difficult and very considered judgment as to whether your forces should remain in the country. Given current US attitudes, and the remote chance of these changing, it is probably the case that your objectives in Afghanistan will fail. Withdrawal may therefore be the soundest option. We would accept, though, that a change in the White House in 2008 might allow for a change in policy in Afghanistan, even if geo-strategic considerations make that highly unlikely in Iraq. You may therefore feel that a reduced British military presence could serve a political purpose, at least for the next eighteen months.

If you do take that view, we would impress on you the need to provide more aid for the country, including a determined effort to get to grips with opium-linked poppy cultivation, however difficult that may be. You must recognise that further development assistance must be determinedly gendered and pro-poor. The current concentration of large 4x4s belonging to the many aid groups in and around Kabul is not inspiring confidence among most Afghans.

Al-Qaida

The dispersed al-Qaida movement continues to reorganise and increase its support, not least among Muslim communities in Western Europe. It is hugely aided by the in-depth coverage of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan on the Arab satellite TV news channels, and by a welter of DVD, video and web-based propaganda outlets. It is also greatly aided by the assured freedom of movement for its own people and for its Taliban associates in much of western Pakistan, not least here in South Waziristan.

In your own country your current administration has poured huge resources into expanding its counter-terrorism activities, greatly strengthening MI5 and MI6 and establishing major counter-terrorism hubs in the regions. Even so, MI5 acknowledges it is seeking to track at least 2,000 militants in more than thirty networks and groups. Our London office informs us that the security and police forces in Britain do not believe they have control over the perceived threat and expect more attacks.

What your current administration has singularly failed to do, in spite of prompting from some key specialists inside and outside government, is to recognise the evolving nature of the al-Qaida movement and to develop policies to counter its further development. We have already identified changes in policy in Iraq, as well as the need for distance from US military policies in Afghanistan, but your incoming administration must regard these essential changes as part of a wider programme of policy change. While we acknowledge that if the al-Qaida movement fails, it will do so largely because of a reaction within Islam, your new administration will have influence. In cooperation with other European states, it could well have an impact on the excessively elitist power structure in key Middle Eastern states, especially Saudi Arabia and Egypt. These marginalise important sectors of their society, greatly adding to support for al-Qaida and other radical movements.

We must also say that while al-Qaida has little direct connection with radical Palestinian groups, the Israel/Palestine conflict is as great a gift to that movement as is the current role of Iraq as a combat-training zone. There is no alternative to your putting hugely greater effort into resolving that conflict, with this requiring sustained pressure on the Israeli government.

The fact that Gaza is effectively an open prison of over a million people, with Israel controlling all access, makes the current internal violence unsurprising. Many Israelis may regard this as proof that Palestinians cannot govern. Across the Middle East, however, there is an almost universal belief that the suffering and violence in Gaza is a direct result of Israel's policies, with the United States and its coalition partners sharing much of the responsibility. We recognise that drawing apart from Washington over its Israel policy will be difficult, but you have no alternative if you are serious about the al-Qaida issue.

Our considered view, with not a little inside knowledge, is that the al-Qaida movement is deeply concerned about the possibility of a western withdrawal from Iraq and a peaceful settlement to the Israel/Palestine conflict. It recognises that these would greatly weaken support for the movement. It is reasonably confident that Washington will not change its policies in the near future, but has concerns that the new administration in London may take a different course. It will be greatly reassured if the new administration holds, instead, to existing policies.

Global issues

You ask us for some outline comments on longer-term security issues which we will now make, while being more than ready to undertake further work should you so desire. Put simply, two issues will dominate the next thirty-to-forty years, much as we told your predecessor colleagues in [May 2006](#) [1].

The first is the widening socio-economic divide worldwide, with some billions of people marginalised as the globalised free market delivers growth without economic emancipation. In addition to the widespread suffering being endured, this has huge potential for destabilisation, as China, India and other governments are finding in terms of deepening social unrest. The second issue is related: the rise of environmental constraints, especially the impact of climate change on the tropical and sub-tropical regions, as well as the near-certainty of increased competition and even overt conflict over resources such as oil.

Your government has had a relatively good record on development assistance and at least pays a little more than lip-service to climate change, but even these aspects of policy have been minimal when set against realities. Put bluntly, HMG must massively increase its commitment to sustainable pro-poor development, fair-trade reform and debt cancellation, and must also embrace carbon-emission targets that involve massive cutbacks in less than fifteen years.

You can start the process before the next election, and one of the significant changes, even since 2006, is that responding to climate change and international poverty are no longer vote-losers. After the election you will need to behave as a radical government both in terms of domestic policy change and international leadership.

We have to say that you are going to have to get to grips with Britain's ridiculous defence posture. The current administration has both committed the country to a very expensive but largely irrelevant nuclear-weapons programme and decided to build two giant aircraft-carriers to give the United Kingdom's armed forces a global expeditionary-warfare capability. This is almost unbelievable; both projects will be entirely inappropriate to the country's economic and political standing and irrelevant in terms of the real security threats now developing. The carrier

programme and the nuclear replacement will have combined lifetime costs of as much as £150 billion, a frankly ridiculous expenditure.

We would recommend postponing the nuclear decision and cancelling the carriers while requiring your ministry of defence to engage with the foreign office and other departments in a thoroughgoing security review, a process never before attempted in Britain. You will not find this remotely easy - your defence lobby is extraordinarily strong, with influence that permeates the whole of Whitehall. Compared with that lobby, your roads and farming lobbies are babes in arms.

Conclusion

Radical changes in your policies in relation to Iraq and Israel are essential, together with a review of policy options for Afghanistan. More generally, you must start the process of reorientating political and security thinking towards the real long-term global challenges. What is interesting is that none of this will cause you substantive electoral problems - indeed the country may well be ahead of the current administration on some of these issues. This gives you an unusual opportunity, both before and after the next election. If you are up to the challenges, the new administration, and its prime minister, may well be assured of a rather more attractive place in history than your soon-to-depart neighbour.

Wana
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