

War on Terror: Two Years In

It is becoming increasingly obvious that the Bush administration's prosecution of the war on terror has gone wrong, terribly wrong. The toppling of the Taliban

in Afghanistan was necessary—though the government we installed in Kabul is in dire straits. There was no alternative to destroying a regime that sheltered those who plotted the 9/11 attacks.

Iraq was another matter altogether. The Bush administration started this war even though Saddam Hussein had no real connections to Osama bin Laden and nothing to do with the World Trade Center attack. It was a war that had been dreamed of and agitated for in neoconservative think tanks and magazines for years before George W. Bush's election—a grand scheme to transform the Middle East, please Israel, show the Arabs who's boss, and provide an oil-fueled bonanza for American corporations. When Osama bin Laden struck on 9/11, the neocon intellectuals who had established a base of operations within the Pentagon came forth with their plan. "Attack Iraq," they proclaimed, as a well-practiced chorus. The op-ed pages filled with calls for "Iraqi liberation." Soon enough an Office of Special Plans was set up in the Pentagon to push phony "intelligence" about Saddam Hussein's links to Osama bin Laden and his purported weapons of mass destruction. These intelligence findings turned out, unsurprisingly, to be false. But the neocons got their war, which American soldiers fought courageously and effectively—though with only one major ally and against the wishes of the populations and governments of the democratic West that had stood with the United States for the past half century.

The results are now plain. As Harvard professor Jessica Stern succinctly put it

shortly after a truck bomb destroyed the UN offices in Baghdad: "America has taken a country that was not a terrorist threat and turned it into one."

However much the Iraqi people may have welcomed the demise of Saddam Hussein, they detest the foreign occupation of their country, the destruction of their infrastructure, the collapse of law and order in their streets, the loss of jobs. It is simply human nature for Iraqis to care more about the threat of their children being kidnapped on the way to school than the putative benefits an American-style democracy might conceivably bring in the distant future. One Iraqi political party estimates that 37,000 Iraqi civilians were killed in the war, a figure that, if half true, means that many thousands of relatives are interested in revenge. In the postwar chaos, American soldiers, ill-prepared for occupation duty and lacking sufficient manpower to pacify the country, have a choice between cringing in armored vehicles or becoming easy targets for resurgent terrorism. And newly recruited terrorists are reportedly streaming into Iraq from throughout the Arab world. Meanwhile, even as the occupying force in Iraq is stretched thin, the neocons agitate for more wars—against Syria, against Iran.

According to the administration's rhetoric, the war against Iraq was supposed to make Americans safer and to bring about a transformed Middle East. But it has galvanized al-Qaeda recruitment not only in the Arab world but as far away as Southeast Asia. It is hard to imagine how George W. Bush could have presented a

greater gift to Osama bin Laden.

The road map to peace between Israel and the Palestinians—initially a promising development—has stalled and may be terminally ill. The United States may have face the fact that Palestinian Prime Minister Abu Mazen is too weak to control the Palestinian factions and that Ariel Sharon has little real interest in a viable Palestinian state.

The results are an American Middle-East and anti-terror policy in total disarray—costing American taxpayers billions of dollars every month with no end in sight—anti-American sentiment in the Mideast rampant and escalating, and American soldiers as sitting ducks for any Muslim who wants to strike a blow against foreign occupation of Arab land.

To right the errors made by his administration, President Bush will have to clean house in his foreign policy establishment, root out those who pushed for these failed policies, and appoint sensible conservatives in their stead. As more and more Americans are coming to realize, the neoconservative project is a radical one, millenarian in style, based on the absurd belief that once Arab or Muslim regimes are smashed, Arab political culture will be transformed and desirable governments will automatically rise in their place. The roots of such error lie partially in the neocons' Trotskyist origins and a wide-eyed Wilsonian conviction that democracy is a universal panacea, tied together by a belief that the only thing Arabs understand is force. The result is a policy at once brutal and naïvely utopian, profoundly ill suited to the conduct of a great power.

The president has dug the United States into a deep hole. The next months will let the American people know whether he is the man to lead us out of it. ■

The Jihadi War

A reshaped Al-Qaeda is more dangerous than before.

By Philip Giraldi

AMERICA'S WAR AGAINST terrorism is a conflict unlike any other in history. Amorphous and multi-faceted, it spans the globe and engages United States resources on battlefields where victory can never be declared. It is above all an intelligence war, in which detailed information on opponents, their travels, and plans are equivalent to the movement of great armies and fleets in the last century. It is, moreover, a war in which victory is critical to America's survival as a nation and as a dominant economic power. But even after two years of effort, Americans are demonstrably less safe now than before, and a transformed and reinvigorated enemy may well be winning. Knowledgeable sources in the intelligence community continue to believe that another major terrorist attack is imminent.

Within the United States there have been changes in response to the security threat. It is now harder for any Muslim to obtain a visa to enter the country. Once inside the U.S., it is harder to obtain a driver's license or to register in a school or to rent a car. It is more difficult to pass through an airport or to fly on a commercial jet. Apart from that, there is little to show, even after the expenditure of so many billions of dollars. Arrests made of alleged al-Qaeda have been laughable, netting very small fish who desperately agree to plea bargain their guilt to avoid more punitive sentencing. Senior al-Qaeda have apparently eluded the net, as have any terrorist cells genuinely capable of harming

the United States. Whether they have gone underground or escaped the country the FBI does not appear to know.

Overseas, the picture is darker, though there have been some significant arrests of leaders of terrorist groups, notably the Indonesian Riduan Isamuddin, known as Hambali, and the al-Qaeda operations chief Khalid Sheikh Mohammed. But the unrelenting search for leading terrorists may not be the best way to address the terrorist problem. It is axiomatic that in times of peace, most armies are equipped and trained to fight the last war, not the next one. The same is true in matters of intelligence, where the mistakes of the past become the "lessons learned" that shape current doctrines. The Central Intelligence Agency is locked in a struggle with an al-Qaeda that formerly existed rather than

from Afghanistan, but al-Qaeda learned from the disaster and was able to transform itself, becoming in the process largely decentralized and locally self-supporting. Al-Qaeda and other Jihadi groups now operate a terrorist movement without command and control, referred to as "leaderless resistance."

In the war against terrorism, the U.S. continues to wage a conventional military-style campaign. The CIA searches for al-Qaeda leaders, for money trails, and for arms supplies in spite of the decentralization of the Jihadi movement. Recent terrorist attacks in Morocco and the kidnappings of European tourists in Algeria were conceived locally, even though both groups have links to al-Qaeda. The bombing of the French tanker Limburg was organized in Yemen, and the nightclub bombing in

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the evolving worldwide Jihadi movement that now prevails, of which al-Qaeda is only one element. Prior to December 2001, al-Qaeda was a global organization with a leadership, financial, and logistical structure; training camps; and centralized operational planning. It was able to project its power widely and had relationships with like-minded groups in places like Indonesia and the Philippines. The United States destroyed that al-Qaeda when it drove the Taliban

Bali was planned and carried out by Indonesians. Terrorist bombings in Saudi Arabia were organized by al-Qaeda sheltering in nearby Iran, not by Osama bin Laden. Attacks on U.S. forces in Afghanistan originate in neighboring Pakistan, supported by local tribesmen. Bombing attacks in Iraq appear also to be the result of an amalgam of local interests and international Jihadi. To support the terrorist activity, money is raised in mosques, religious schools,