

# How to Lose the War on Terror

A CIA bin Laden expert's lament

*One of the striking things about the Iraq War is the extent to which American foreign-affairs professionals—intelligence analysts, diplomats, and high-ranking military officers—recognize it is a tragically misguided venture. Among the most recent to speak out is the CIA officer formerly charged with analyzing Osama bin Laden. Known only as “Anonymous,” he is the author of the new book Imperial Hubris—a scathing look at the way the United States has conducted the War on Terror thus far. TAC editors Philip Giraldi (a CIA veteran with extensive Mideast experience), Kara Hopkins, and Scott McConnell recently visited with the author. Here are excerpts of the conversation.*

**TAC:** You've said that Iraq was the best Christmas present that Osama bin Laden could have possibly received ...

**ANON:** Have you seen the movie “Christmas Story,” where the boy wants a Red Rider air gun and his mom says no? Then at the end of Christmas day, when he has opened all his presents, he gets the gun and he thinks, “My God, I really got it. I never thought I'd get it.” Iraq was Osama's Red Rider BB gun. It was something he always wanted, but something he never expected.

Iraq is the second holiest place in Islam. He's now got the Americans in the two holiest places in Islam, the Arabian Peninsula and Iraq, and he has the Israelis in Jerusalem. All three sanctities are now occupied by infidels, a great reality for him. He also saw the Islamic clerical community, from liberal to the most Wahhabist, issue fatwas that were more vitriolic and more demanding than the fatwas that were issued against the Soviets

when they came into Afghanistan. They basically validated all of the theological arguments bin Laden has been making since 1996, that it is incumbent on all Muslims to fight the Americans because they were invading Islamic territory. Until we did that in Iraq, he really had a difficult time making that argument stick, but now there is no question.

It's also perceived widely in the Muslim world that we attacked Iraq to move along what, at least in Muslims' minds, is the Israelis' goal of a greater Israel from the Nile to the Euphrates. While we're beating the hell out of the Iraqis, Sharon and the Israelis are beating the hell out of the Palestinians every day. So we have an overwhelming media flow into the Muslim world of infidels killing Muslims. It's a one-sided view, but it's their perception. And unless you deal with what they think, you're never going to understand what we're up against.

**TAC:** I was interested in your analysis of terrorism versus insurgency ...

**ANON:** I worked on the war against the Soviets in Afghanistan and watched the organizational structure and the ability of the Afghan insurgent groups to absorb tremendous punishment and survive, and then I worked for the next period of my career on terrorism, where the groups were much smaller. Their leadership is more concentrated, and if you hurt them to a significant degree, they cease to be as much of a threat. They are lethal nuisances, not national-security risks. Al-Qaeda is not a terrorist group but an insurgency with an extraordinary ability to replicate at the leadership level. When Mr. Johnson was executed in Saudi Arabia, the Saudi authorities killed four al-Qaeda fighters,

one of them named Mukrin. Within four hours, al-Qaeda's media enterprise had issued a statement acknowledging the death of Mukrin, appointing his successor, and providing a brief résumé.

**TAC:** You suggest that al-Qaeda would be delighted to have George Bush stay in the White House because nothing could be better for their international objectives. How do you see this playing out in terms of—this is totally hypothetical—a potential terrorist incident, somewhat like the bombing in Spain?

**ANON:** I said that al-Qaeda itself has said that it could not wish for a better government than the one that is now governing the U.S. because, on the policies of issue to Muslims, al-Qaeda believes this government is wrong on every one and thus allows their insurgency to grow larger to incite other groups to attack Americans.

**TAC:** One of your principal points is that this is a much broader war against Islam. How do you deflect critics who would suggest that Islam is, in fact, a lot more complicated? Countries like Malaysia don't really fit the Islamist or the fundamentalist profile ...

**ANON:** I don't know if we have to say we are at war with Islam, but I think it defies reality to say that a growing part of Islam is not at war against us. I am at a loss to understand how this far along into the bin Laden problem we can still be saying that this war has nothing to do with religion. It has everything to do with religion in terms of the motivation bin Laden, his followers, sympathizers, and Muslims generally feel to fight us.

Bin Laden's genius has been to focus the Muslim world on specific U.S. policies. He's not, as the Ayatollah did, rant-

ing about women who wear knee-length dresses. He's not against Budweiser or democracy. The shibboleth that he opposes our freedoms is completely false, and it leads us into a situation where we will never perceive the threat.

**TAC:** Unless we believe that bin Laden is rational, we are underestimating him ...

**ANON:** Tremendously. One of the prime examples of our underestimation is the whole discussion of Iraq and al-Qaeda. Bin Laden would not be very likely to deal with the Iraqis, not because he didn't like them, not because he hated Saddam—both of those are true—but because the Iraqis were a third-rate service. They are ham-handed, clumsy. Most

of their terrorist operations result in killing their own people. We have never seen al-Qaeda associate with someone who posed a risk to the security of their organization, operatives, or plan of attack. Al-Qaeda is a first-rate insurgent organization with a first-rate intelligence and counterintelligence service. Bin Laden has shown throughout his career that he deals with equals.

**TAC:** Can you give us a sense of where al-Qaeda is now in terms of popularity and resonance in the Muslim world?

**ANON:** We dealt al-Qaeda some serious blows in terms of its people who are designated to attack the United States,

but they have been succeeded by others who were understudying before those people disappeared.

In terms of popularity, it would be difficult to underestimate the growth in popular support across the Muslim world. Bin Laden has identified six specific U.S. policies that appeal to the anger of Muslims: our unqualified support for Israel; our ability to keep oil prices within a tolerable range for consumers; our support for people who oppress Muslims, i.e., Russia in Chechnya, India in Kashmir, China in Western China; our presence on the Arabian Peninsula; our military presence in Iraq and Afghanistan; and finally our support for Muslim tyrannies from the Atlantic

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to the Indian Ocean. Bin Laden is a formidable enemy because he has recognized what are deemed by many Muslims, even those who don't support his martial activities, as threats to Islam.

**TAC:** You suggest that the situation with al-Qaeda requires two things: an acceptance that this is a war against the major insurgency that encompasses a major part of the earth, and while we are fighting the war, we have to address the policy issues that have made the it happen. If you were the czar today, what would you do to make this happen?

**ANON:** I don't think we can win this war until we have a debate over what has caused it and recognize that it is in our power to win this war over a period of time or to fight this war forever. This is not a choice between war and peace. It is a choice between war and endless war.

People say we are going to do public diplomacy—magazines for Muslims. Well, as long as Al-Jazeera is broadcasting from Gaza and the West Bank live, 24 hours a day, no one is going to listen to the Americans. We are talking to basically ourselves and to the Europeans, who don't like us much anyway.

Certainly, I am not smart enough to formulate foreign policy for the whole

seem to imply a lot of collateral damage, which would undercut political efforts ...

**ANON:** War is what it was when there were cavemen or when Napoleon went into Russia or when we fought World War II. Collateral damage is a natural condition of war, especially when you are fighting an opponent that is uniform-less.

Why do I say we need to be more aggressive? We went into Afghanistan in October 2001, the estimate was 50,000 Taliban fighters under arms and 8-10,000 al-Qaeda. If we give the military intense credit and say they killed 20 percent of that number, 45,000 went home with their guns to fight another day. Why would anyone define that as winning?

It's a politically correct handicap to think that you can have a war but maintain a position where we don't want to kill the enemy, we don't want collateral damage, and we don't want our people to die. That falls in the category of analysis by assertion. You can say it's true, but it's not. It's never been true. Unless we address the policy issue, we have left ourselves with only the military option.

**TAC:** But when you have an insurgency that is organized like a terrorist group, it is dispersed and difficult to find. To destroy that group in a conventional mil-

I am not arguing that we carpet-bomb someplace just for the sake of killing civilians. What I am saying is that if you have an opportunity to hit the enemy, you don't spend a lot of time discussing if the evidence will make it in the Southern District of New York. Intelligence is not evidentiary material. It is information, and when you get to the level where you think you are not going to get any better, you act. That is something we failed utterly on in the '90s.

**TAC:** Do you think we could have pretty much gotten rid of al-Qaeda in Afghanistan at the end of 2001?

**ANON:** I think if we had been prepared to act on the day of the attack or the next couple of days, we would have dealt them a very serious blow. Bin Laden had declared war on us in 1996, but the military had absolutely no response ready. When they did respond, they spent a month destroying 30-year-old Soviet junk. From Sept. 11 until Oct. 7, al-Qaeda and the Taliban dispersed. And then when we did get there, we used surrogates rather than our own soldiers.

**TAC:** How important is getting bin Laden?

**ANON:** Of decreasing importance as the years go by, but bin Laden has a genius: he has the only organization of its kind in the Muslim world. He has Muslims from multiple ethnic groups and they work together with a lot of friction, but they work together effectively. We've watched the Palestinians for 45 years. They are all Palestinians, and they can't go across the street together.

Without bin Laden, al-Qaeda initially will lose some of its cohesiveness because of his very genuine credentials as a leader, but al-Qaeda is now a very mature organization. It is into its second generation of leadership, and the second generation seems to be more professional and businesslike. They're quieter. ■

## IT IS A CHOICE BETWEEN WAR AND ENDLESS WAR.

country, but we must have this kind of a debate. We pursued policies for 30 years which have led us to 9/11 and which will lead us to further 9/11s, and unless we decide that we are willing to wage this war aggressively with the military, but also complement it with genuine political movement, we are in a position where we are going to be defeated time and again.

**TAC:** I don't understand how the aggressive military part complements the political strategy. Aggressive action would

itary sense goes into decimation of whole groups of people as a way to get at the terrorists.

**ANON:** It is a very complex problem, but I have never understood my oath of office to "preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution" and care just as much about foreigners as Americans. If I had to choose between the president attacking somebody and killing some civilians to protect my children and not doing it, I think I would support the president.

# The Imperial Personality

Abu Ghraib was not just a privates' party.

By Justin Raimondo

"I'M NOT GOING to go down alone for this." So said Col. Thomas Pappas, commander of the 205th Military Intelligence Brigade, when one of the detainees at Abu Ghraib prison died while being interrogated. The implicit threat—that if put on trial for staging the Abu Ghraib horror show he'd point to the real authors and directors in the Pentagon and perhaps higher—is very real.

So far, only seven lowly reservists face court-martial proceedings. The report of Gen. Antonio Teguba, however, named Pappas and three others as "either directly or indirectly responsible for the abuses at Abu Ghraib." But the actions of military intelligence officers such as Pappas are subject to a separate and ongoing investigation, which has been delayed by the replacement of Maj. Gen. George Fay with a more senior general as chief investigator. Lt. Gen. Anthony R. Jones, deputy commander of the Army Training and Doctrine Command, is taking over from here on out, much to the chagrin of Sen. John Warner, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, who protests that this will impede the congressional investigation. "Congress must be given the tools, the reports with which to do its proper oversight," said the Virginia Republican at a recent Senate hearing, at which he practically demanded of Paul Wolfowitz that the Pentagon provide his committee with an interim report.

The Wolf grinned and said he'd get back to him.

But bits and pieces of the story are coming out anyway as legal proceedings against the accused get underway. At the trial of Sabrina Harman, a 26-year-old Army Reservist, Capt. Donald Reese, commander of the 327th Military Police Company, testified that Col. Pappas personally ordered harsh tactics in "softening up" detainees for interrogation.

A photo of Harman, grinning obscenely next to a dead body, is one of many published around the world. She is charged with an indecent act, assault, and desecration of a corpse.

According to Reese's testimony, Pappas and his fellow officers, including CIA, were determined to cover up the death and hatched a plan to get the body out of Abu Ghraib and ditch it "in Baghdad somewhere." The top intelligence officer at the prison, Lt. Col. Steven L. Jordan, gave the order to "get some ice out of the chow hall," and the deed was done.

Jordan isn't going down alone, either. According to *USA Today*, he testified that he was being pressured by the White House, the Pentagon, and the CIA to "pull the intelligence out of" the prisoners. So concerned was the White House about the Abu Ghraib interrogations that the prison merited a visit from an aide to National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice. As the casualty rate in Iraq skyrocketed, the administration was increasingly focused on getting better intelligence on the resistance, and Jordan says he was reminded "many, many, many times" of the need to crack the detainees.

Rice aide Fran Townsend denies all: she says she spent a total of two hours at Abu Ghraib last November, when many of the known abuses were taking place, but saw or heard nothing unusual. She also denies ever discussing interrogation methods with Jordan and characterizes his testimony as "ridiculous." Her sole purpose in journeying to Abu Ghraib, she claims, was to "learn" about the insurgency and to make sure information gleaned from detainees was properly shared among the various intelligence agencies.

But, according to Jordan, Townsend was just the go-between, an emissary from on high: he testified that Pappas, his immediate supervisor at the prison, said on at least two occasions "that some of the [intelligence] reporting was getting read by Rumsfeld, folks out at Langley, some very senior folks." According to Jordan, Pappas dated the intense push for actionable intelligence from "the very beginning," well before the interrogations descended into an orgy of sadistic perversion in the fall of 2003. Jordan also testified that Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, then the commander of U.S. forces in Iraq, was a major source of the pressure: "I know Gen. Sanchez was in our knickers to get more information from detainees."

Jordan's testimony immediately threw the investigation by the military authorities into a quandary: the two-star General Fay couldn't investigate Sanchez, who wears three. General Jones has had his three stars a bit longer than Sanchez, but