

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,

and charitable foundations. It moves about by courier, not through banks. Weapons are acquired locally. Communications go out anonymously through Internet chat rooms. The volunteers come from the entire Muslim world. The war is everywhere asymmetrical, with the U.S. and its allies compelled to defend all targets while the terrorists need only succeed once. The United States has begun to take notice that its foes in Iraq are not all Iraqis, just as in Afghanistan they are not all Afghans, but it appears to be incapable of recognizing the root causes of the rage that fuel the worldwide Jihadi movement.

That the Jihadi have been created by the United States is one of the central ironies. The vast outpouring of sympathy for the United States in the wake of Sept. 11 has been converted to pure vitriol by the widely held perception that American self-interest leaves no room for the interests of others, particularly if those others are Muslims. America is seen worldwide as a hypocritical bully that uses the mantra of democracy to advance its own selfish ends. The clash of civilizations sought by the Bush administration's neoconservatives appears to be nearly at hand. Iraq, which was not a terrorist state, has now become one, where Jihadi volunteers are drawn as if by a magnet to confront the Americans. The concept of pre-emptive war seems a formula to overthrow all Arab governments domino style. The invasion and occupation of Iraq does not sit well around the Islamic world, while saber rattling against Syria and Iran suggests that the U.S.'s agenda is to turn the Middle East into a client state for itself and for Israel.

Israel remains at the heart of the problem. Its treatment of the Palestinians is nightly fare on television throughout the Muslim world, fueling frustration and creating a perfect environment for the recruitment of new adherents to

holy war. The "street" knows that Israel acts with impunity only through license from the United States.

Meanwhile, the CIA fights the last war. Stung by a series of scandals, the Agency became risk adverse in the 1990s. Overseas, unilateral intelligence operations became fewer while reliance on friendly foreign liaison services for usable information became the norm. Officers served in embassies that were like fortified bunkers, with few going out to test the local waters. When Sept. 11 occurred, it was catastrophic, and the CIA shared in the blame because its bureaucratic lassitude led to its failure to hire and promote the types of officers who could have penetrated terrorist organizations. Problems continue. Aggressive programs to hire native speakers of Arabic and other crucial languages are in place, but they are ham-

pered by rigid security requirements that are a breeze for blue-eyed Christians from Kansas but hell on those coming from cultures that must be peeled like an onion.

Most of all, the United States will not be able to win against the Jihadis until it removes the fuel that feeds the fire. Decisive renunciation of the universally vilified concept of pre-emptive war would be a good beginning. Justice for the Palestinians would do much to restore the impression that the United States can act internationally in an enlightened fashion. So would expeditious withdrawal from Iraq combined with a turnover to local rule, dispelling the notion that America is an imperial power.

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The Coming Crescent Revolution

The House of Saud and the future of Islam

By Richard Cummings

THE EVENTS OF 9/11, the war in Afghanistan, and then the war and occupation of Iraq has set the stage for a revolution that could dramatically alter the course of history. Whether it succeeds or not, the revolution in Saudi Arabia has begun in earnest. Its object is to overthrow the House of Saud, which has ruled in Arabia for over a century. If successful, it would have drastic consequences for America, with the price of oil increasing

dramatically, as promised by Osama bin Laden, threatening the economic recovery on which Bush has staked his presidency. It would also transform the Middle East and the rest of the Islamic world in precisely the opposite way envisioned by Paul Wolfowitz in his rationale for the invasion of Iraq and its concomitant regime change. And while conventional wisdom blames the Wahabi brand of extreme fundamentalist