

America that seeks to reshape the region through an unsophisticated mixture of bombs and ballots, devoid of local contextual understanding, alliance-building or redressing of grievances, ultimately undermines both itself and Israel.”

The paradox of the war against terrorism has been placed in sharp focus in the course of ongoing battles in Lebanon and the Gaza Strip. Focusing efforts on Hezbollah and Hamas, the U.S. is being drained of political capital that it sorely needs in the fight against real enemies elsewhere in the region and around the world. The Arabs and Muslims know that Hezbollah and Hamas are not the enemies of the U.S., and their elevation to primary U.S. targets does nothing to ameliorate regional disapproval of the war against terrorism.

Moreover, in terms of making operational headway in the war against al-Qaeda, going after Hezbollah and Hamas militarily is exactly the wrong thing to do. The specific struggles of these two movements did not begin with them but was inherited from previous generations of nationalist and leftist combatants. Destroying or weakening Hezbollah and Hamas without addressing the underlying grievances—occupation, prisoners, refugees—would merely cause the baton to be passed on to the next generation of fighters: the al-Qaeda-affiliated Salafists that are already waiting in the wings. If the Salafists were to proliferate in Lebanon and Palestine, they would be on Israel’s borders and become direct participants in the Arab-Israeli conflict for the first time. Given the U.S. role as primary patron of Israel, al-Qaeda and its allies would thus have gained access to the mother lode of political ammunition with which to justify their global struggle. ■

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The United States might be helping cover up Israeli war crimes in Lebanon.

U.S. Ambassador John Bolton’s blocking of a UN Security Council Resolution that would have condemned Israel’s July 25 killing of four unarmed United Nations observers occurred in spite of the fact that the U.S. government had information that suggested strongly that the killing was both premeditated and deliberate. The National Security Agency (NSA) had intercepted the series of telephone calls made by the observers to the Israeli military liaison confirming that their well-marked position was manned and asking that it not be fired upon. It also had intercepted Israeli communications noting the UN request but ordering that the firing should continue in spite of the fact that there were no Hezbollah nearby and the UN post posed no danger to Israeli troops. The air and artillery attack lasted six hours, until one shell demolished the bunker, killing everyone inside, and the Israelis kept firing as medical personnel struggled to reach the victims. In a confidential briefing to Congress on July 26, an NSA spokesman initially denied that there was any information on the incident but then recanted and admitted that the agency had something, but it was not “definitive.” An infuriated UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, relying on his own office’s report detailing the UN’s 13 separate attempts to convince the Israelis to cease fire, called the killing “apparently deliberate,” a view that was clearly not shared by Bolton, who refused to accept any statement that was in any way critical of Israel. Israel subsequently refused a United Nations request for an independent or joint investigation into the matter. Sources in Washington believe that the killing of the observers might have been carried out to facilitate the obliteration of the nearby village of Khiam by artillery and air strikes. The largely Shi’ite village was a Hezbollah stronghold, but there were also numerous civilians still in the area, many of whom were being killed by the indiscriminate fire. The UN observation post was on high ground overlooking the village and was possibly deliberately targeted so there would be no credible witnesses to the carnage taking place in Khiam.



A little-noticed United Nations report produced last month describes an apparent Iranian attempt to illicitly obtain Uranium-238 supplies from mines in the Congo.

According to the report, a clandestine shipment of the illegally mined ore was intercepted last October by alert customs agents in Tanzania. Ironically, the mines in the Congo, now known as the Lubumbashi mines, were the source of the uranium that was used to create the first two American atomic bombs that were dropped on Japan. The ore that was intercepted was on trucks heading for the port of Dar es Salaam on the Indian Ocean. The uranium was concealed in drums of coltan, a mineral that is used in the manufacture of chips in mobile phones. It was invoiced through to China but was on a ship that was stopping in Bandar Abbas, which appears to have been the actual destination.

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Slow Learners

Five years into the war on terror, Washington is no wiser.

By **Scott McConnell**

Several weeks ago, *New York Times* columnist David Brooks, citing as authority an unnamed administration source, tried to put the threat from al-Qaeda into perspective. Compared to the dangers posed by Iran and the surprisingly resilient Hezbollah, Brooks likened bin Laden's group to Europe's early 20th-century anarchists, who wrote furious pamphlets and carried out an occasional assassination. As a threat they hardly compared to the Nazi and Soviet states that arrived later in the century.

What an analogy! Brooks relegated the terrorist network that killed 3,000 Americans to the quaint and musty anti-quarium, shelved alongside romantic grouplets that hatched wild plots against Europe's noblemen. For Brooks, America's real struggle is against "terrorist" Iran and "terrorist" Hezbollah, not al-Qaeda types with no mass support. Brooks and his administration source seemed to be laying out a 2006 version of neoconservative talking points, an upgrade on the thinking that prompted the Bush administration to abort its pursuit of Osama bin Laden in Tora Bora in 2002 and launch a war of "aggression" (in Milton Friedman's apt term) against Iraq, a country that had nothing to do with bin Laden and posed no threat to the United States. In 2006, as in 2002, the threat from real terrorists would be minimized, and the real "terrorist" danger would be deemed to be Mideast states and movements that threatened Israel.

Britain's arrest of 24 Muslims with links to al-Qaeda intent on committing a spectacular mass slaughter in the skies

ought to put into perspective who America's "terrorist" enemies are and who they are not. It is a good point from which to measure what the Washington establishment has learned in the past five years—and what it stubbornly refuses to. During that period, while the United States has failed to kill or capture Osama bin Laden, it has been actively responsible for the destruction of urban life in Baghdad and in recent weeks green-lighted Israel's wrecking of much of Beirut and the rest of Lebanon. Tehran and Damascus, the capitals of two nations that co-operated importantly with Washington in rolling up al-Qaeda cells in the aftermath of bin Laden's attack, now sit at the top of the neoconservative list of "terrorists" the administration is being pressed to target.

One might have thought that the administration's failure to bring bin Laden to justice, and the disaster Bush's policies have wreaked on Iraq and on America's reputation, would have prompted a serious re-evaluation about American Mideast policy. But such rethinking, while evident in the stirrings within the Democratic Party, has barely made a dent. Instead, the administration and its backers, imbued with a double-or-nothing spirit, seek to redeem its failure in Iraq by labeling an even wider swathe of Muslims and Arab Christians as "terrorists." Taking neoconservative rhetoric one step further, the fever swamps of Christian Zionism now push for the killing of tens of millions of Muslims, a task that could only be carried out with nuclear weapons. In terms of a

strategy toward the Muslim world, America is more prone to lash out in ignorance than it was in the fall of 2001.

Washington's response to the crises in Gaza and Lebanon was revealing. The summer war did not begin with Hezbollah's kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers in July, nor with a Palestinian group's capture of an Israeli soldier two weeks earlier. Its roots lie in the slow-motion asphyxiation of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, a long-term goal of the Israeli (and neoconservative) Right, abetted by George W. Bush's uninterest. The administration has acceded to Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's plan for an Israeli-dictated "solution" to the Palestinian issue. After Palestinians voted for Hamas—in part a reaction to the lack of any progress toward a negotiated settlement—the Israelis and the Bush administration immediately tried to starve out the newly elected government. Israel stepped up its arrests and "targeted killings" of those it defined as "militants" or "terrorists."

Olmert's "solution" was that the Palestinians should accept as their "state" a series of isolated cantons, with an Israeli security barrier severing Arab towns from Jerusalem, the cantons cut off from one another by Israeli-controlled roads and walled off from the rest of the Middle East by Israeli military bases and checkpoints. This obviously would be rejected by the Palestinians, their fellow Arabs, and the rest of the world. But the Bush administration did nothing to contradict Olmert's notion.