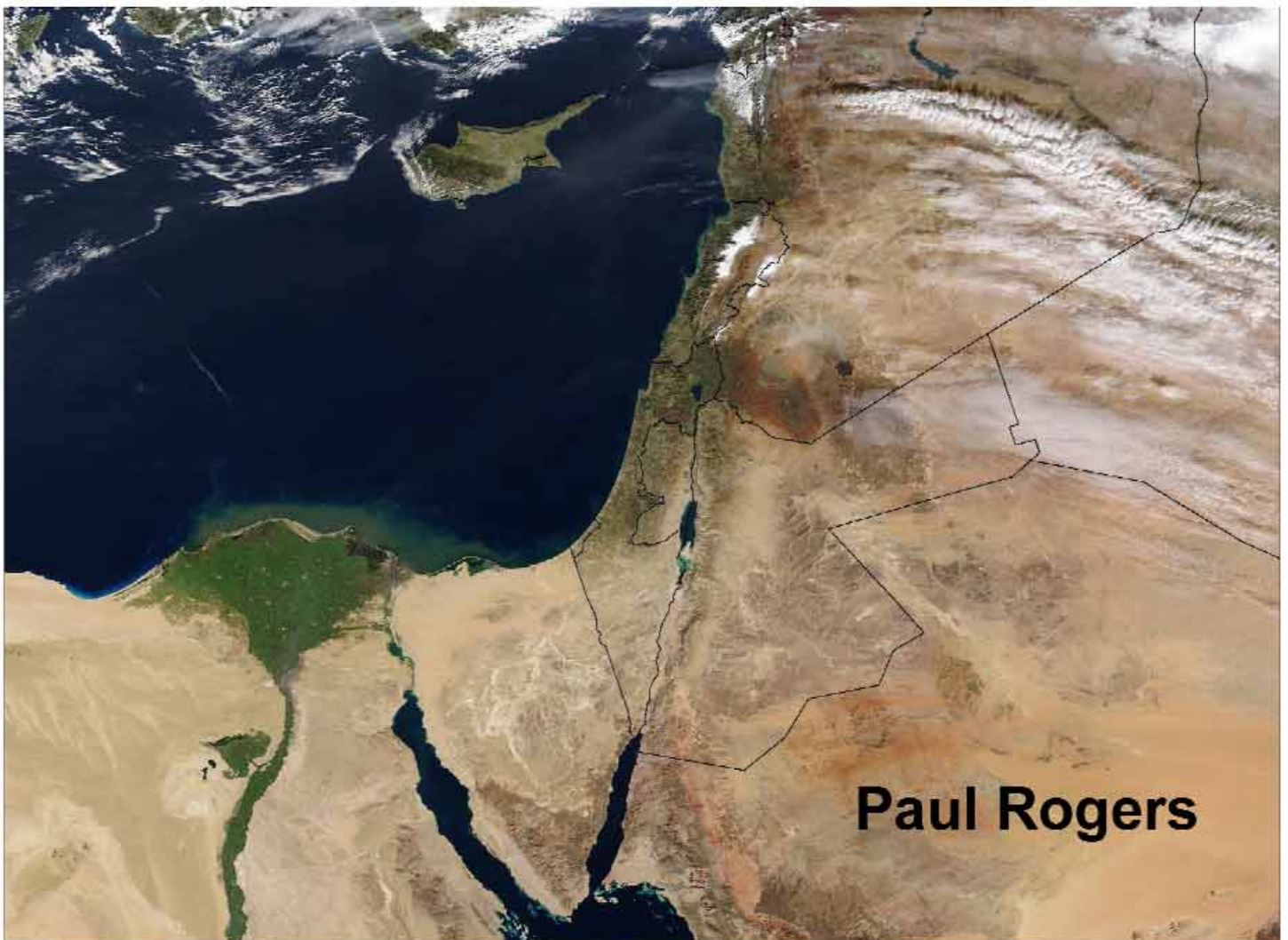


# **Endless War**

**The global war on terror  
and the new Bush Administration**



**BRIEFING PAPER • MARCH 2005**

**OXFORD • RESEARCH • GROUP**

Published by Oxford Research Group 2005

Oxford Research Group  
51 Plantation Road  
Oxford  
OX2 6JE  
United Kingdom

[www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk](http://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk)

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ISBN 0-9511361-8-6

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### **Acknowledgements**

Oxford Research Group (ORG) gratefully acknowledges the support of the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and the Polden-Puckham Charitable Foundation for making the publication of this report possible. Paul Rogers would like to thank Chris Abbott, James Kemp, Karen Abi-Ezzi and John Sloboda for commenting on a draft of this report, and Chris Abbott and James Kemp for its production. Some of the material in this report draws on monthly analyses published on the ORG website and weekly analyses for the Global Security column on [www.opendemocracy.net](http://www.opendemocracy.net).

*Production and Design: James Kemp and Chris Abbott*

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**Paul Rogers**

**Oxford Research Group**

**March 2005**

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## **Executive Summary**

Three and a half years after 11<sup>th</sup> September and two years after the termination of the Saddam Hussein regime, the “global war on terror” has no end in sight. Al-Qaida and its affiliates remain active and effective, with a stronger support base and a higher intensity of attacks than before 11<sup>th</sup> September. The United States is embroiled in a conflict in Iraq that has already cost over 25,000 lives. Even so, the second Bush administration is likely to strengthen its pursuit of a New American Century, with little prospect of changes in policy towards Iraq or al-Qaida and the possibility of an extension of its Middle East policy to a confrontation with Iran.

In Washington, the neoconservative agenda is strengthened by the rise of Christian Zionism, making it less likely that the administration will encourage Israel to accept a fully viable two-state solution to its confrontation with the Palestinians. It may be argued that many aspects of US security policy are counterproductive, but this is likely to have little impact in Washington. Even so, such analysis is necessary, and it is possible that vigorous independent assessments of alternative policies backed up by diplomatic pressure from friendly states may ultimately have a positive impact.

## Introduction

In the aftermath of the attacks in New York and Washington on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001, the United States embarked on a “global war on terror”, initially with the strong support of many other countries. In its first three years this war involved a sustained campaign against the al-Qaida network, the termination of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and the subsequent termination of the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq.

Three and a half years after 11<sup>th</sup> September, and two years after the initial military occupation of Iraq, there are few signs of an early end to this war. The al-Qaida network remains active, having been involved in a far larger number of paramilitary actions than in a similar period prior to 11<sup>th</sup> September, and its core elements are largely at liberty, aided by enduring support in parts of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Osama bin Laden himself remains at large and is able to deliver detailed statements on al-Qaida strategy and tactics. In Iraq, an anticipated early withdrawal of occupation forces has proved a chimera, and an insurgency is persisting that is tying down some 200,000 US troops in Iraq itself and neighbouring countries. The US defence budget is rising rapidly and is even beginning to approach the levels reached at the height of the Cold War.

There is little prospect of any early end to the American global war on terror but nor is there any prospect of a change in US policy. George W. Bush was re-elected with a clear majority last November, the Republican Party has control of both Houses of Congress, and there is a clear feeling of vindication in Washington. Experienced independent analysts in the United States may be persistently critical of the effects of current policies, but there is little or no sign that their views will be taken into consideration. Indeed, neoconservatives in the United States believe that last autumn’s electoral successes mean that the *Project for a New American Century* is very much on course and that the first three years of President Bush’s second term represent the clearest opportunity to further this great idea.

This is in marked contrast to opinions across much of Europe, where threats of possible military action against Iran and Syria are viewed with deep misgivings. There is even more concern in much of

the majority world, with a rise in anti-Americanism that further fuels support for radical movements.

The aim of this briefing is to review the factors that lie behind current US policies in the war on terror, make an assessment of the results of the first three and a half years of this war, suggest the likely impact of current US policies over the next three years and suggest some tentative alternatives. In particular, it will focus on the aims of the al-Qaida network and seek to assess the extent to which current US policies may actually be aiding the further development of the network and its wide-ranging group of affiliates.

## The US Political Context

Although neoconservatism has been a feature of US politics for several decades, it came to the fore in the late 1990s during Bill Clinton’s second term. While it ranges across many areas of policy, it has developed a particular resonance in relation to US foreign and security policy, itself rooted in a belief in an historic role for the United States in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Much of this was encapsulated in the *Project for a New American Century*, founded in 1997 and supported by Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld and many others who were to become key people in the Bush administration after November 2000.<sup>1</sup>

At the root of the neoconservative outlook is the belief that there is only one viable economic system, a belief supported powerfully by the collapse of most centrally-planned economies after 1989. That system is the globalised free market developed along the lines of the domestic US economy. Moreover, the United States has a pivotal and historic mission to be a civilising force in world affairs, promoting free-market values to ensure a world economy and polity that is broadly in the US image.<sup>2</sup>

This sense of mission came to the fore immediately prior to George W. Bush’s election victory in 2000 and is deep-seated in significant parts of the US political and electoral system. Major elements of it have substantial religious overtones and these speak to some of the more evangelical elements of American Christianity, a religious orientation with well over 100 million adherents.

To some extent, neoconservatism has elements of a faith-based system, so strong are the views of many of its adherents. In particular, it is not possible to accept that there is any legitimate alternative, and the war on terror is essentially being fought against forces that represent a fundamental threat to the vision of an American Century.

Prior to 11<sup>th</sup> September, the new vigour of US foreign and security policy was particularly evident in a belief that multilateral cooperation was only appropriate when it was directly in American interests. Indeed, there were many examples where it was deemed highly inappropriate. Even in the closing years of the Clinton presidency, Congress made it unacceptable to attempt ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, there was antagonism in Republican circles to proposals for an International Criminal Court, and even efforts to ban anti-personnel land mines and control some forms of arms transfer were thought to be limiting to the United States.

After George W. Bush came to power in 2001, the extent of opposition to multilateralism increased rapidly, including withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and the Kyoto Protocols, opposition to the strengthening of the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention and a refusal to participate in talks on limiting the weaponisation of space. Coupled with vigorous policies on trade issues, this amounted to a substantial change of attitude on the part of the Bush administration and represented a very different outlook for those who had anticipated a consensus administration, given the narrowness of its electoral victory in November 2000.

The approach was summarised succinctly by Charles Krauthammer shortly before the 11<sup>th</sup> September attacks:

*“Multipolarity, yes, when there is no alternative. But not when there is. Not when we have the unique imbalance of power that we enjoy today – and that has given the international system a stability and essential tranquillity that it had not known for at least a century.”*

The international environment is far more likely to enjoy peace under a single hegemon. Moreover, we are not just any hegemon. We run a uniquely benign imperium.<sup>3</sup>

### **Neoconservatism and Christian Zionism**

In parallel with the rise of neoconservatism, a particular stream within American evangelical Christian churches has acquired a considerable political significance, especially in relation to the post 11<sup>th</sup> September environment. This is Christian Zionism or dispensationalism, a movement that is rigorous in supporting Israel as a Jewish state with Jerusalem as its epicentre. Christian Zionism has only acquired real political significance in the past decade and its current importance stems from three factors. One is the voting power of a significant proportion of evangelical Christians, the second is its intrinsic support for the survival of the State of Israel and the third is the manner in which it links with neoconservatism.

There are some variations within dispensation theology but the essence of it is that God has given a dispensation to the Jews to prepare the way for the Second Coming. There is to be the literal fulfilment of Old Testament promises to biblical Israel in the sense that the “end of days” will involve a millennium of earthly rule centred on Jerusalem. As such, the State of Israel is a fundamental part of God’s plan and it is essential for it to survive and thrive.

Christian Zionism took firm root in US in the interwar years and a particular boost came with the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, with many dispensationalists seeing this as the beginnings of a fulfilment of biblical prophecies. Yet another boost came when Israel took control of Jerusalem in the Six Day War in 1967, and a third came with the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980, not least because Jimmy Carter, though from an evangelical tradition, had been seen to be too conciliatory towards Palestinian aspirations.

The Clinton years were more difficult for dispensationalists, partly because they came soon after some of the preacher scandals of the late 1980s, but also because Clinton was more at home

with the more secular elements of the Israeli political system, not least with the Labour Party. Even so, during his Presidency, the main Israel lobbies in Washington, particularly the *American Israel Public Affairs Committee* (AIPAC), sought to build close links with the Christian Zionists.<sup>4</sup> In part, organisations such as AIPAC recognised the increasing demographic and political power of the Christian Zionists, but they were doubly important because of the deep divisions among American Jewish communities that resulted in a decrease in support for Israel from a traditional source of influence.

During the first George W. Bush administration there was a remarkable coming together of the movement and of neoconservatism, especially in terms of support for Israel. As the leading evangelical preacher Jerry Falwell put it “The Bible Belt is Israel’s safety net in the United States.” According to Donald Wagner, a historian of Christian Zionism:

*“By 2000, a shift had taken place in the Republican Party. It began embracing the doctrines of neoconservative ideologues who advocated US unilateralism and favored military solutions over diplomacy. The more aggressive approach was put into action after 11<sup>th</sup> September, and to no one’s surprise, Israel’s war against the Palestinians and its other enemies was soon linked to the US ‘war on terrorism’.”*<sup>5</sup>

There are now a number of groups that connect evangelical Christian churches in the United States with support for the State of Israel, with many of them making specific reference to Jerusalem. *Stand for Israel*, for example, talks of the need “to mobilise Christians and people of faith to support the State of Israel”, and declaring on its home page that “Anti-Israel = Anti-Zionism = Anti-Semitism”.<sup>6</sup>

Christian Zionists may not be particularly significant in the major conservative think tanks in Washington, nor even in the administration itself. Instead, what they do is to provide an electoral pressure that enhances support for a Republican administration with marked neoconservative leanings.

Perhaps what is most interesting is that the growth in Christian Zionism in recent years forms one part

of the wider increase in the conservative Evangelism movement, the fastest growing sector within American Christian churches. According to Wagner, estimates of the number of evangelicals range from 100 to 130 million, the latter being close to half the total population of the United States.

By no means all are Christian Zionists, perhaps 20-25% would be described as fundamentalist. Indeed, many evangelical Christians have grave misgivings about aspects of Republican policies. At the same time, larger numbers may be inclined to support Israel because of dispensationalist sympathies, and evangelical Christians seem particularly disposed to vote, and to be more likely to support the Republican Party. The overall effect of this is that both Israel and US neoconservatives have a particular electoral support from an unexpected and growing source. Moreover, many adherents seriously believe that we may be approaching the end of the world, that salvation can only come through a Christian message linked fundamentally to the success of the State of Israel, and that Islam is necessarily a false faith.

In any other era, Christian Zionism and its links with neoconservative thinking would be interesting but not particularly significant in guiding the policies of the United States. What is relevant here is that there has been a confluence of neoconservatism, the vigorous pursuit of a war on terror that is seen to be primarily against Islamic groups and the Christian Zionist movement with its electoral strength, support for Israel and anti-Islamic strand. This comes at a time of a particularly hard-line government in Israel that looks to neoconservatives and Christian Zionists as the foundation for its support within the United States. All of these have contributed to the policies of the last three and a half years in terms of the war against al-Qaida, the termination of the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq, and persistent support for the Sharon government in Israel. Indeed, in a real sense, Israel and its confrontation with the Palestinians has been widely seen as an integral part of the global war on terror.



## Responding to 9/11

The US response to the 11<sup>th</sup> September attacks has had three main components, the termination of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, the pursuit of al-Qaida and the occupation of Iraq. The initial three-month war in Afghanistan, from October to December 2001, appeared to be highly successful from an American perspective.

The Taliban regime was terminated, al-Qaida personnel and facilities were dispersed and the United States was able to establish two large military bases at Bagram and Kandahar, in addition to developing military links with a number of Central

Asian states. During the course of the war, there were many thousands of people killed, including about 3,000 civilians, a similar number to those killed in the 11<sup>th</sup> September attacks. Many more thousands died in refugee camps and as a result of other economic and social disruption caused by the conflict.

Within two months of the termination of the Taliban regime, President Bush was able to designate an “axis of evil” in his January 2002 State of the Union Address – Iraq, Iran and North Korea. His address at West Point three months later elaborated on the new strategy of enhanced pre-emption of presumed threats. Even so, this firm enunciation of policy was already being weakened by persistent problems in Afghanistan and this has resulted in an ongoing low-level insurgency requiring the long-term presence of over ten thousand US combat troops. Moreover, there are severe problems of post-war reconstruction and development in Afghanistan, exacerbated by an opium-fuelled economy and rampant warlordism.<sup>7</sup>

The pursuit of al-Qaida has been world-wide, extending well beyond the immediate region of central Asia. It has involved numerous states that have been in broad alliance with the United States, many of them enacting anti-terrorism legislation that has also served useful purposes against their own political dissidents. In terms of support for al-Qaida, more pertinent has been the use by the United States of imprisonment without trial, the systematic use of torture and the ignoring of the Geneva Conventions.<sup>8</sup> Significantly, these issues have had little political impact within the United

States, certainly not enough to affect the outcome of the 2004 Presidential election. They have, though, had a sustained impact on Islamic communities in many parts of the world, an impact heightened by the events in Iraq since March 2003.

Termination of the Saddam Hussein regime was said to be necessary because of the regime’s production of weapons of mass destruction and its support of al-Qaida. Neither claim had any substance, but regime termination still went ahead. In the wake of this, the Bush administration expected a rapid and peaceful transition to a secular regime. This client state would be sympathetic to the United States, would embrace free market

economics, would welcome US oil interests and would ensure that the US had extended long-term influence in one of the world’s most important oil-bearing countries. More generally, it would enhance US power in the region, render Saudi Arabia less significant and, perhaps most important, demonstrate the sheer power of the United States to that other regional member of the “axis of evil”, Iran.

The establishment of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) was expected to preside over a caucus system that would bring the right kind of government to power and it would certainly take immediate steps to institute a free market low-tax economy likely to prove highly attractive to foreign investors. As far as economic management was concerned, the CPA certainly moved with great speed, but its oversight of the political evolution of Iraq was a very different matter. Within a few months of the end of the old regime, the insurgency was developing with unexpected speed and by the end of 2003 the United States was facing a highly unstable environment, especially in the main Sunni regions of Central Iraq.

In the early months of the insurgency, most of the blame was put on a few “remnants” of the old regime, groups that were expected to be severely damaged by the deaths of Uday and Qusay Hussein in July 2003 and then by the capture of Saddam Hussein himself at the end of the year. In practice, neither had much impact, and the US authorities put more and more emphasis on two external factors, Islamic paramilitaries linked to al-Qaida

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***Since the start of the Iraq War, at least 18,000 civilians have been killed and many tens of thousands have been injured***

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and interference from Iran. Neither of these was particularly plausible, even if both may have had a minor impact. Instead, the insurgency gathered pace through 2004, with thousands of Iraqis dying mainly at the hands of coalition forces, not least during periods of intense violence in Fallujah, Najaf, Mosul and elsewhere.

Since the start of the Iraq War, at least 18,000 civilians have been killed and many tens of thousands have been injured,<sup>9</sup> the insurgency has persisted and the early indications are that the elections of January 2005 will have little impact. The United States and its partners currently maintain over 170,000 troops in Iraq itself, supported by tens of thousands more in neighbouring countries such as Kuwait. The Pentagon is planning to maintain troops numbers at around 130,000 for at least the next two years, and permanent bases continue to be developed. In the first two years of the war, the United States has had 1,500 of its troops killed and 11,000 injured,<sup>10</sup> with at least another 10,000 evacuated because of physical or mental illness.

While US military planners may wish to limit their presence, and certainly want to avoid a substantial presence in urban areas, it is proving excessively difficult to train Iraqi security forces to replace them. Indeed, the training programme is something akin to a disaster, so much so that the Pentagon is no longer giving figures for the numbers of indigenous combat-ready troops available. *The Economist*, which has a track record of caution tempered with realism on this issue, was recently scathing in its assessment:

*“The Iraqi forces are utterly feeble. At present only 5,000 of them are a match for the insurgents; perhaps as many as 12,000 are fairly self-sufficient. Most of the rest are unmotivated, unreliable, ill-trained, ill-equipped, prone to desertion, even ready to switch sides. If the Americans left today, they would be thrashed. Indeed, as things now stand, politically and militarily, the war is unwinnable.”*<sup>11</sup>

Meanwhile, the US predicament in Iraq has been a welcome development for the al-Qaida network, not least in its impact on anti-American sentiments among Islamic communities across the world. The attack on Fallujah, the “city of mosques”, in November 2004 was particularly significant. The

use of massive firepower and overwhelming military forces, causing city-wide destruction, many hundreds of casualties and over 200,000 refugees, has given the attack an iconic status across the Arab world not dissimilar to the impact of the 11<sup>th</sup> September attacks in the United States.

### **The Status of al-Qaida**

It is in this context that it is appropriate to analyse the current status of the al-Qaida network, and to do so in terms of its origins and early development. Although al-Qaida became significant in the 1990s it was rooted in experiences in Afghanistan in the previous decade and owed much to the influence of radical Islamists, not least Sayyed Qutb in Egypt. Much of the early activity was concentrated in western Gulf States, notably Saudi Arabia, and included attacks on US facilities such as the Khobar Towers bomb in 1996 at the Dhahran Air Base that killed 19 and injured 500. Later attacks included the US embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, and there may also have been some links with the first attempt to destroy the World Trade Center in New York back in 1993.

Al-Qaida has been variously described as an idea, a consortium, a network of like-minded groups, a loose affiliation or a structured hierarchical organisation. While some controversy persists, the weight of analysis points markedly away from early post-11<sup>th</sup> September insistence on a clearly structured hierarchical group, and there is also an acceptance that al-Qaida is an evolving and adaptive entity.

Although there have been repeated claims, principally from the Bush administration, that al-Qaida has been thoroughly disrupted and dispersed, substantial evidence suggests otherwise, with clear indications that radical Islamic movements are substantially stronger than prior to 11<sup>th</sup> September.

Since September 2001 al-Qaida-linked actions have included major attacks on western or Israeli targets in Spain, Turkey, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Kenya, Pakistan, Indonesia and Uzbekistan (see box), with evidence of planned major attacks in Italy, France, the western Mediterranean and Singapore. The listed incidents do not include many other attacks in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, nor do they include actions from groups with, at most, weak links with the al-Qaida network, including

## **Al-Qaida Actions Since September 2001**

**2002**

- March** an attack on church worshippers in Islamabad, killing 5 people and injuring 46;
- April** the bombing of a synagogue in Djerba (Tunisia), killing 14 German tourists and 7 local people and injuring 24;
- May** the killing of 11 French naval technicians and 3 Pakistanis in Karachi, injuring 23 people;
- June** a bomb attack on the US consulate in Karachi, killing 11 people and injuring at least 45;
- October** the killing of a US soldier in the Philippines, and frequent bomb attacks there;
- October** a bomb attack on the Limburg tanker off Yemen;
- October** a bomb attack on the Sari nightclub in Bali, killing 202 people including 88 Australians and 38 Indonesians and injuring 300 people;
- November** an attack on a US oil company's helicopter taking off from Sana'a airport in Yemen;
- November** an attempt to shoot down an Israeli tourist jet taking off from Mombasa airport in Kenya;
- November** the bombing of the Paradise Hotel at Kikambala (Kenya), killing 11 people and injuring 50;

**2003**

- May** the multiple bombing of western targets in Casablanca, killing 39 people and injuring 60;
- May** the multiple bombing of western compounds in Riyadh, killing 29 people and injuring 200;
- August** the bombing of the Marriott Hotel in Djakarta (Indonesia), killing 13 dead and injuring 149;
- November** the bombing of two synagogues killing 24 people and injuring 255, followed shortly after by the bombing of the UK Consulate and the HSBC Bank building killing 27 and injuring 400;

**2004**

- March** multiple bombings of commuter trains in Madrid killing 200 and injuring over 1,000;
- March** two bomb attacks in the Uzbekistan capital of Tashkent killing 19 people and injuring 26, including many police officers, followed by attacks on the Israeli and US embassies in the capital in July 2004;
- September** 11 people killed and 161 injured in a bomb attack on the Australian Embassy in Djakarta;
- October** the bombing of the Taba Hilton and a camp site at Nueiba in Sinai, Egypt, directed at Israeli tourists, killing 27 people and injuring 122.

numerous attacks in Southern Thailand, bombings on the Moscow subway and the school siege in Beslan. On a much larger scale they do not include numerous attacks in Afghanistan nor the major insurgency in Iraq.

Independent and reputable military analysts report that al-Qaida and its associates are gaining in support in many parts of the world. Moreover, this is coming at a time of increasing anti-Americanism, as demonstrated by the Pew Center's international opinion surveys,<sup>12</sup> especially but not only in states with a substantial Islamic population, and also in Islamic communities in other states including those in Western Europe.

According to a November 2004 assessment from the *International Institute of Strategic Studies* (IISS), the invasion of Iraq has seriously weakened the US capacity to engage in other possible confrontations.<sup>13</sup> While up to 1,000 foreign paramilitaries may have infiltrated into Iraq, this is a small fraction of the potential 18,000 paramilitaries available to al-Qaida. According to the IISS analysis "...the substantially exposed US military deployment in Iraq represents al-Qaida with perhaps its most 'iconic' target outside US territory... Galvanised by Iraq, if compromised by Afghanistan, al-Qaida remains a viable and effective 'network of networks'." Although the termination of the Taliban destroyed its command base and training facilities, it has dispersed effectively, with some activities such as bomb-making still more centralised and therefore "potentially more efficient and sophisticated".

Overall, al-Qaida is a dynamic and evolving phenomenon that is maintaining a high level of activity across many countries. Two regime terminations have failed to curtail its development and one of these, in Iraq, is providing a new focus for the organisation and like-minded groups.

Even so, there is little indication that Washington has an appreciation of the aims and intentions of al-Qaida and its associates. Although some individual analysts in the United States and elsewhere have some understanding of the political aims of al-Qaida, this does not appear to figure in US policy formulation. Instead, al-Qaida is simply seen as a

radical Islamist terrorist entity that is close to being nihilist in its outlook, does not have a political agenda and can only be countered by force. There is no possibility of engagement with any substantive aspect of the organisation and its affiliates.

This fails to recognise that al-Qaida has both short and long-term aims and that these are relatively easy to identify, both from the writings and speeches of leading figures and, more importantly, from their strategies and tactics.

There are five main short-term aims, although not all involve all the affiliates in the network. The most immediate is the removal of foreign, especially US, forces from the Islamic world, with Saudi Arabia being the priority. This is followed by the termination of the House of Saud as the unacceptably corrupt and illegitimate Keeper of the Two Holy Places. The third aim follows on from this and involves the downfall of other elite state structures across the Islamic world but primarily in the Middle East, and their replacement by what will be considered to be "genuine" Islamist regimes.

An underlying theme of statements, web-links and videos coming from al-Qaida sources is this concern with ruling elites. It is at least as significant as the commitment to expel foreign forces from the Islamic world. Moreover, existing rulers are, to an extent, seen as worse than western occupiers in that they have acquiesced in a process of control that actually blocks the development of true Islamic governance.

A fourth requirement is the establishment of an independent Palestine centred on Jerusalem, and a fifth requirement is the liberation of Islamic societies where they are controlled by secular or other non-Islamist forms of governance. This last requirement includes support for separatist movements in Thailand and the Philippines, Chechen rebels in Russia and radical Islamist groups in countries such as Uzbekistan.

The establishment of a Palestinian state has not been a central aim of the al-Qaida group until recently. There are two reasons for this. One is that the educated Palestinian Diaspora in western Gulf States has been singularly successful in areas such as education and public administration, to the extent that indigenous populations, from where al-

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Qaida might draw support, have not been sympathetic to the Palestinians and their cause. Against this, with the advent of particularly hard-line policies by the Israeli government of Ariel Sharon, particularly the destruction in the West Bank in early 2002, the coverage of these activities across the region has made it possible for al-Qaida to embrace this cause, whatever the wishes of the Palestinians themselves.

Beyond these short-term aims lies the longer-term intention to establish some kind of pan-Islamic Caliphate, involving ideas dating back to a mythical golden age at the time of the Abbasid Caliphate, centred on Baghdad in the early years of Islam. Such a governance might be seen as a prelude to wider processes of proselytisation and conversion beyond the Middle East, but it is also probable that these are distant aims to be measured in many decades rather than years.

Given that al-Qaida is best described as a loose affiliation of groups, a network of networks, it is unwise to see a firm sense of central direction in all of the many activities of the past three and a half years. At the same time, the major emphasis has been on attacking US interests and those of its close allies, as well as Israel and regional ruling elites, especially in Saudi Arabia. The original 11<sup>th</sup> September attacks may well have been directed at a crude and devastating demonstration of capabilities against the centre of US business and the military, but may also have been intended to bring large US troop concentrations into Afghanistan, where a Taliban/al-Qaida combination could have engaged them in guerrilla warfare.

In the event, the US used a combination of air power, special forces and the re-arming of the Northern Alliance – taking sides in the ongoing civil war and thereby ensuring the termination of the Taliban regime. A result of this was the dispersal of al-Qaida and its metamorphosis into a more dispersed system of affiliated groups, benefiting from years of training given to young paramilitaries and from the huge boost to recruitment given by US actions such as the Guantanamo detentions and the heavy use of force in Iraq.

Iraq, indeed, has been of exceptional value to al-Qaida in three quite different ways. One is that it has opened up an entirely new front in the confrontation with the United States, bringing in tens of thousands of paramilitaries who are participating in an insurgency directed against US occupation. Secondly, while most of these insurgents are indigenous to Iraq, a small but significant proportion of them are paramilitaries from neighbouring countries, so that Iraq is providing combat experience in much the same way as the Afghan civil war

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***The US predicament in Iraq will not be readily ended, given the importance of Iraqi oil reserves. The Gulf states as a whole have over 65% of world oil reserves***

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did previously.

Finally, the persistent use of high levels of military force, as in the attack on Fallujah, has been widely publicised across the region and beyond, especially by the new generation of Arab satellite TV news channels. This has resulted in a widespread increase in anti-Americanism, in turn adding to support for al-Qaida and its associates.

The US predicament in Iraq will not be readily ended, given the importance of Iraqi oil reserves. The Gulf states as a whole have over 65% of world oil reserves, with Iraq alone having 11%, about four times as much as the United States itself. Much of the recent history of US involvement in the Gulf, including the establishment of the Rapid Deployment Force at the end of the 1970s and its later development into Central Command, is connected with the strategic importance of Gulf oil reserves.<sup>14</sup> With the United States intending to maintain a military presence in Iraq and the wider region for many years, al-Qaida and other oppositional forces are in the position of having a long-term focus for their activities in a way that far exceeds any guerrilla war in Afghanistan.

Moreover, Iraq is not just any “Arab state”, it will be seen by supporters of al-Qaida as the successor to the most integrated and successful of the Islamic caliphates. From their perspective, they are now witnessing the extraordinary circumstance of the occupation of the former capital of the Abbasid Caliphate, Baghdad, by neo-Christian forces, a “gift” to Islamist paramilitaries that is frankly difficult to exaggerate.

## **Israel, Palestine and the War on Terror**

One of the significant features of the US war on terror has been the manner in which the al-Aqsa intifada and, in particular, the suicide bombings of targets in Israel, have been represented as part of that war, with Israel facing terrorists in a manner that closely relates to the American experience of the 11<sup>th</sup> September attacks. The death toll in the Israel/Palestine confrontation since this intifada started is about 4,000 people with close to 3,000 of them being Palestinians and 1,000 Israelis. Even so, the image across much of the United States is of Israel facing up to terrorism rather than a conflict involving a strong military power attempting to control a relatively weak insurgency.

Prior to the latter part of 2004, the Israeli government's policy was to deny the possibility of dialogue with Yasser Arafat, but the clear-cut election of Mahmoud Abbas as the Palestinian leader has resulted in a more positive attitude in Washington towards a two-state solution. This, coupled with the initial ability of the Palestinian leadership to enforce some control of the more radical paramilitaries, means that there is relatively more pressure on the Sharon government to make concessions in any future negotiating process.

At one level, the Israeli Cabinet's decision on 20<sup>th</sup> February to enforce the withdrawal of several thousand Jewish settlers from Gaza would seem to be a sign of good intent, as would some limited withdrawals of settlements from peripheral areas of the West Bank and some release of Palestinian prisoners. Indeed, if this was to be a preliminary move towards effective negotiations on a two-state solution, the consequences for al-Qaida could be quite serious. The relevance of Palestine to overall al-Qaida strategy may be relatively limited, yet substantive progress on this long-standing issue would certainly remove one of the factors stimulating so much anti-American opinion across the region.

It may be, though, that both the tentative Gaza withdrawal and possible moves towards negotiations have much more to do with internal security problems than the peace process, and further progress will therefore depend more on future offers that relate specifically to potential negotiations on a lasting peace involving a viable Palestinian state.

In Gaza, the level of opposition to Israeli occupation has been so intense that maintaining the security of the Jewish settlers has become steadily more untenable for the Israeli Defence Forces, in spite of the persistent use of considerable military force including targeted assassinations. The 7,000 settlers control a sizeable minority of the land area of Gaza which otherwise has 1.2 million Palestinians, a third of them crowded into refugee camps with no prospect of returning to their original homes in Israel.

If the settlers are indeed withdrawn, what will be crucial will be the future Israeli policy towards Gaza. One possibility is that the territory is enabled to undergo rapid economic development, with the airport reopened, port facilities developed and rapid industrialisation encouraged. Although the pattern of recent years has been for many educated young people to leave Gaza for the wider Middle East and the western world, there is a high level of education among the population remaining, and much potential for rapid development, especially if serious assistance is available from Gulf Arab states, European and American agencies and international financial institutions. Such a process, in concert with developments on the West Bank, could greatly improve the prospects of a viable Palestinian state, but will be impossible without the constructive assistance of Israel.

The other possibility is a development of the current situation in which Gaza is akin to a huge open prison with Israel controlling its own extensive land borders with Gaza and the small Egyptian border as well. It has clear control of the limited sea routes and effectively determines the water supplies as well – a crucial commodity for Gaza. The airport remains closed. With near-total control of entry and exit, Israel has almost complete dominance of the Gaza economy, which is currently close to being moribund. In due course, the Israeli authorities may allow more movement of Palestinians into industrial areas close to the border with Gaza, either in Israel or Egypt, but they will be able to continue to maintain rigorous control of all substantive economic activity. The Israeli view is that the extreme control exerted over Gaza is essential to ensure Israel's domestic security, but the paradox is that this very control, and the levels of poverty and marginalisation within Gaza, provide a continual recruitment incentive for Islamic paramilitaries.

If developments in Gaza are likely to give some indication of long-term Israeli intentions, then it is the complex of policies in the West Bank that is even more significant. Over the past 38 years there has been widespread colonisation of many parts of the West Bank by Jewish settlements. The pace of settlement construction has varied with the political climate, but the last ten years has seen a particular expansion, backed up by a quite remarkable level of Israeli security control, made even more tough in the wake of the al-Aqsa intifada which started in September 2000 following Ariel Sharon's incursion into Haram al-Sharif in Jerusalem. There are now over 300,000 settlers in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, in a land area occupied by over 2 million Palestinians.<sup>15</sup>

Prior to the major violence and Israeli incursions into a number of centres of Palestinian population in April 2002, there was already substantive Israeli security control of much of the West Bank, but this has since increased greatly to encompass over 80% of the land area. Moreover, the distribution of settlements, the numerous strategic "settler-only" roads that link them, and more than a hundred road blocks on other main roads mean that Israeli control of the Palestinian population, and indeed the economic and political life of the West Bank is virtually complete.

Again, from an Israeli perspective it is argued that this is all essential for Israel's internal security, not least as the impact of the suicide or martyr bombings of recent years has had a profound effect on Israeli perceptions of vulnerability. Over the past two years the response has reached the level of building the "wall" around much of the West Bank. The barrier does not separate off the West Bank, leaving Palestinian communities to get on with their own lives, since the internal security patrols and almost all the settlements remain, as do the border controls preventing open access to Jordan. What it does do, though, is to give Israelis an impression of security. From a Palestinian perspective it takes into Israel substantial areas of Palestinian land, adding to a further perception of marginalisation. This is heightened by the persistent controls of population movement within the West Bank, particularly the near-impossibility of moving between the north and south of the West Bank across the area dominated by Jerusalem and its immediate environs.

It is relevant that at the 20<sup>th</sup> February Cabinet meeting that agreed to the Gaza withdrawal, the other major decision was to continue with and complete the West Bank barrier. Given that this involves major elements of land acquisition and will also involve long-term movement controls within the West Bank, the "facts on the ground" indicate that a viable economic entity for the Palestinians in the West Bank is not part of current Israeli government policy.

What is required in the next few months is a series of major concessions from Israel. Time is short in that Mahmoud Abbas may have a relatively brief honeymoon period, and much of the prospect for progress rests on whether the Sharon government is genuinely committed to wholesale Israeli withdrawal and the consequent development of a viable Palestinian state. Three factors may militate against this. One is that internal Israeli politics have moved decidedly towards a more hawkish stance. In part this is due to the impact of the bombings, but it also relates to the immigration into Israel of around a million people during the 1990s from the Former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Many of these are utterly determined to achieve security and are firm supporters of the current administration. The second factor is the growth of Christian Zionism in the United States, ensuring substantive support from within the United States for the maintenance of Israeli control of the West Bank and Jerusalem. Finally, there remains the attitude of many Arab elites that the Palestinian cause provides a useful and long-standing diversion for their own populations away from the deep socio-economic divisions that prevail in the region

### **Iran and Syria**

Since the November 2004 Presidential Election, there has been a hope in some political circles in Europe that the second Bush administration would adopt more moderate policies on issues such as detention of suspects and the extensive use of force in Iraq, and would also be genuinely supportive of a viable two-state solution in Israel/Palestine. At the same time, there has been recognition that other areas of US security policy might conflict directly with European opinion. One concerns the increasing rhetoric in Washington over the status of Syria, with some neoconservative elements

demanding regime change, but the more significant area of difference is over Iran.

Part of the opposition to the current regime in Damascus is the belief that much support for the insurgency in Iraq is coming from elements in Syria, with regular movements of insurgents across the border. There is also opposition to Syrian support for Hezbollah in Southern Lebanon. Some neoconservative commentators are calling for US military engagement across the Iraq border into Syria involving air raids on presumed centres of insurgency support.<sup>16</sup>

In the case of Iran, at root is the fundamental American opposition to Iran developing even the theoretical capability to produce nuclear weapons. There is a recognition in Berlin, Paris, London and Washington that Iran has a civil nuclear power programme, and some dispute over whether the International Atomic Energy Agency can continue to verify that it is only a civil programme.

The European view is that diplomacy is the best option, the aim being to allow Iran to develop a relatively small nuclear power programme but without an indigenous capacity for uranium enrichment, given that this can, under certain circumstances, form the basis for enriching uranium to weapons grade. In response to Iran agreeing to this, there would be progressive improvements in trade and other forms of interstate relations.

Even this policy is deeply unpopular within a wide range of political and religious circles in Iran. From an Iranian perspective, the country has been labelled part of an “axis of evil” by the world’s sole superpower that has adopted a clear strategy of pre-empting perceived threats. Furthermore, the United States has already terminated regimes on either side of Iran - the Taliban in Afghanistan and the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq. The US may be facing formidable problems in Iraq, but does have 150,000 troops there and is still building permanent bases. Moreover, it sanctions an Israeli military presence in the Kurdish region of Iraq close to Iran’s western border, and is about to construct a large new military base near Herat in western Afghanistan, close to its eastern border. Finally, the US Navy has almost total control of the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea.

The Iranian perspective goes further than this perception of vulnerability in that there is a failure to accept that countries such as Britain and France can modernise their own nuclear forces and turn a blind eye to Israel’s formidable nuclear forces, while failing to see Iranian arguments for developing their own deterrent.

Such thinking cuts no ice in the United States or Israel, where Iran is regarded as a far more significant threat than Saddam Hussein’s Iraq ever was, and where there are deep suspicions of an oil-rich country even wanting to consider a civil nuclear power programme. The problem is that the Washington outlook goes

further and is in fundamental disagreement with the Europeans. What is opposed is any Iranian involvement in a substantive nuclear power programme on the grounds that it provides Iran with technical competences that could be applied to the development of nuclear weapons. Elements of the neoconservative agenda extend to the desire for regime change in Tehran, but the minimum requirement is for Iran to give up its nuclear power programme in an irreversible and fully verifiable manner.

Whether or not Iran has any nuclear weapons ambitions, it is highly unlikely that the Tehran government will halt its civil nuclear power programme, although it may well be prepared for closer IAEA inspection than is required by current agreements or, indeed, is required of any other state. It follows that there is real scope for a confrontation, even allowing for the problems currently faced by the United States in Iraq.

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***Britain and France can modernise their own nuclear forces and turn a blind eye to Israel’s formidable nuclear forces, while failing to see Iranian arguments for developing their own deterrent***

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## **Prospects and Alternatives**

Four months after the re-election of George W. Bush, there are few signs of any major changes in the conduct of the global war on terror. US forces will be maintained in Iraq at a high level and vigorous counter-insurgency operations will continue. Detention without trial will remain a feature of the war and harsh interrogation measures amounting to torture will continue. While there is some possibility of progress in the Israel/Palestine confrontation, it is far from clear that the Sharon government is in a position to make major concessions, and the neoconservative/Christian Zionist axis in the United States will offer strong opposition. Action against the “axis of evil” may extend to Syria and Iran.

On the basis of recent trends, the al-Qaida network will remain active and there is a prospect of further major attacks, extending even to those of the intensity of Madrid or 11<sup>th</sup> September. If a 11<sup>th</sup> September-level attack were to happen in the United States or against US interests elsewhere, the result would almost certainly be a further intensification of the war on terror rather than any reconsideration of current policies.

For al-Qaida, therefore, confrontation with the United States is unlikely to diminish and it is gaining substantially from the US involvement in Iraq. From its own perspective, the fear must be that US policies might change in a number of directions:

- **A strong and sustained commitment to a just and viable two-state settlement of the Israel/Palestine confrontation;**
- **Progressive withdrawal from Iraq and the recognition that a client state should not be sought there;**
- **Sustained aid for the post-war reconstruction and development of Afghanistan;**
- **Observance of the Geneva Conventions on detainees; and**
- **A progressive cessation of support for elite autocracies across the Arab world.**

On current trends, none of these is likely, and it follows that the global war on terror will continue, with many of the aspects of current US strategy actually serving to strengthen support for al-Qaida and its affiliates. Given that the neoconservative agenda for a New American Century depends on progress towards its aims in the first three years of the second Bush administration, we should actually expect an intensification of policy options against al-Qaida and the “axis of evil”. Independent analysis may suggest that this will be self-defeating, but that will make little difference. At some stage, effective policy alternatives may be recognised as necessary, but this will depend partly on the development of such options and a continual process of critical analysis of the inherent problems of current approaches.

In this respect, there is substantial scope for seeking to influence the second Bush administration, not least by elements of international civil society and through diplomatic efforts of states that otherwise have good relations with Washington. There can therefore be some prospect of progress, but it will only be possible if it is based on the recognition that the second Bush administration has substantial elements that seek to consolidate the concept of a New American Century.

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## Notes

1. Details available at [www.newamericancentury.org](http://www.newamericancentury.org).
2. See an earlier briefing in this series for a more detailed discussion of the neoconservative orientation: Paul Rogers and Scilla Elworthy, "The United States, Europe and the Majority World after 11 September", *Oxford Research Group Briefing Paper*, October 2001, available at: [www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/briefings/sept11.htm](http://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/briefings/sept11.htm).
3. Charles Krauthammer, "The Bush Doctrine: ABM, Kyoto and the New American Unilateralism", *The Weekly Standard*, 4<sup>th</sup> June 2001.
4. Details available at [www.aiopac.org](http://www.aiopac.org).
5. Donald Wagner, "A Heavenly Match: Bush and the Christian Zionists." [www.informationclearinghouse.info/article4960.htm](http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article4960.htm) This is the last of five articles about the development of Christian Zionism and provides links to the other four in the series.
6. See [www.standforisrael.org](http://www.standforisrael.org).
7. Details of current opium production in Afghanistan are available in: "World Drugs Report 2004", *UN Office on Drugs and Crime*, Vienna, 2004.
8. The most comprehensive account is in: Mark Danner, "Torture and Truth: America, Abu Ghraib and the War on Terror." *Granta*, 2005.
9. Civilian casualties estimates are from [www.iraqbodycount.net](http://www.iraqbodycount.net), and use a careful and conservative methodology based on press reports and therefore involving direct counts. Other studies, using sampling methods, give much higher figures.
10. Information on coalition casualties is available at: [www.icasualties.org/oif](http://www.icasualties.org/oif).
11. *The Economist*, 29<sup>th</sup> January 2005.
12. See, in particular, the Pew Center's Global Attitudes Project, details available at: [www.people-press.org/pgap](http://www.people-press.org/pgap).
13. "The Military Balance, 2004-2005", *The International Institute for Strategic Studies*, London, 2004.
14. A detailed discussion of oil and US security is: Michael Clare, "Blood and Oil", *Hamish Hamilton*, 2004.
15. For information on settlement activity from an Israeli source, see *The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories*, [www.btselem.org](http://www.btselem.org).
16. William Kristol, "Getting Serious About Syria", *The Weekly Standard*, Washington DC, 20<sup>th</sup> December 2004.

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ISBN 0-9511361-8-6



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