

AMERICA'S MISSION IMPOSSIBLE:

Strategy on the Altar of Ideology

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Summary

By confounding terrorist networks and rogue states in a mission "to rid the world of evil," the U.S. is making a grave strategic blunder that: (1) creates the very alliances against it that it most fears, (2) lets discretionary wars of choice against hostile states profoundly interfere with the war of necessity against transnational terrorist networks, (3) makes nuclear proliferation and the menace of nuclear war a self-fulfilling prophecy, (4) relies overly on massive "top-down" force and fails to concentrate on effective countermeasures against terrorist "swarms," (5) transforms the war on terror into an unsustainable ideological mission that wastes national treasure and lives and undermines faith in the political system, (6) substitutes a false and delusional "Domino Theory of Democracy vs. Terrorism" for an effective geopolitical strategy (much as happened with the "Domino Theory of Communism vs. Democracy" that inspired the Vietnam War), (7) pursues a maladaptive strategy of isolation from Arab, Muslim and allied support. In the last year, this sacrifice of strategy on the altar of ideology has strengthened Jihadists hands and increased incidence of suicide attack. America cannot risk taking its eye off the real prize.

Acknowledgements. Thanks to Robert Axelrod, Noam Chomsky, Gen. Todd Stewart, Herbert Gintis and Lawrence Pintak for suggestions on an earlier draft.

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America's Mission Impossible. "I believe that God has planted in every human heart the desire to live in freedom," declared President Bush in his State of the Union address, "So America is pursuing a forward strategy of freedom in the greater Middle East. America is a nation with a mission." Yet a key "lesson" of the Vietnam War, former Defense Secretary Robert McNamara told Harvard's Kennedy School in 1995, was to err in thinking "we're on a mission. We weren't then and we aren't today. And we shouldn't act unilaterally militarily under any circumstances. We don't have the God-given right to shape every nation to our own image."

Ever since the Enlightenment, the major movements of the modern world – all the big "isms" of recent history - have been on a mission to invent "humanity" by saving it and making it their own. Modernity is the industrial legacy of monotheism, secularized and scientifically applied. Before monotheism and modernity no society ever considered that all people are, or should be, of a kind. To many in our society, the 20th-century demise of colonialism, anarchism, fascism and communism left history's playing field wide open to what Lincoln nobly besought as "the last great hope of mankind," America's ideal of democratic liberalism (though Lincoln, like Jefferson, foresaw that the U.S. would "meanly lose" this hope if advanced by the sword).

But the catastrophic wars and revolutions of the modern era teach us that the more uncompromising the design for historical engineering and the more self-assured the designer, the harder both will fall. The President, in his preamble to the 2002 *National Security Strategy of the U.S.*, seems to reach a contrary conclusion – that these great struggles demonstrate "a single sustainable model of national success... right and true for every person, in every society." Even after 9/11, there is scant recognition that the unforeseen events of history perpetually transform or destroy the best laid plans, which makes it folly and hazardous to believe in the destiny of globalization or a rational outcome to history.

Shortly after George W. Bush took office, his national security team began mulling over use of ground forces to depose Saddam Hussein and transform the Middle East. "Go find me away to do this," former Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill and others report President Bush saying. Their discussions

refurbished ideas first outlined in a “Defense Planning Guidance” memorandum drafted by Paul Wolfowitz in 1992 towards the end of the first Bush Administration. The plan was to jettison the winning Cold-War strategy of “containment” – based on credible threat to retaliate with massive force against aggression – in favor of a preemptive policy to perpetuate U.S. global supremacy by “detering potential competitors from even aspiring to a larger regional or global role.”

A decade later, “preemption” fused with the “war on terror” into the core of a new security doctrine. 9/11 had paved the way.

The *National Security Strategy* frames America’s new global mission in words President Bush first used at Washington’s National Cathedral three days after 9/11: “our responsibility to history is... to rid the world of evil.” As Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld explained in September 2002, the “nexus” of evil included terrorist networks and rogue states like Iraq that were seeking weapons of mass destruction. With Operation Iraqi Freedom set to go, the President reminded the nation that: “September 11th changed the strategic thinking.... It used to be that we could think that you could contain a person like Saddam Hussein, that oceans would protect us from his type of terror. September the 11th should say to the American people that we’re now a battlefield, that weapons of mass destruction in the hands of a terrorist organization could be deployed here at home.”

Exorcising the world’s evil – or even all forms of terrorism - is as much an impossible mission as forever ending injustice (or earthquakes). More serious, this confounding of terrorist networks with rogue states in a global war on evil is a grave strategic blunder. In a recent report published by the U.S. Army War College, Jeffrey Record, Professor of Strategic Studies, notes: “Of particular concern has been the conflation of al-Qaeda and Saddam Hussein’s Iraq as a single, undifferentiated terrorist threat. This was a strategic error of the first order because it ignored critical differences between the two in character, threat level and susceptibility to U.S. deterrence and military action.” Consider:

By confounding different terrorist organizations and hostile states for the sake of ideological simplicity that readily translates into short-term political gain, the U.S. risks creating the very alliances against it that it most fears in the long term. There is no monolithic threat from evil. Although the Jihadist

network presents a distinct global peril, other terrorist networks and hostile states pose very different problems that are often unconnected with one another or with U.S. national security. Their fights may have fundamentally local or regional causes and ramifications. The suicide quads of Sri Lanka's Tamil Tigers or Turkey's PKK have no apparent quarrel with the U.S. They also have no significant ties with one another or with the Jihadist network, much less with European terrorists of the Spanish ETA, Italian Red Brigades or renegade factions of the IRA. North Korea has few relations with major terrorist networks, or with other so-called rogue states.

This confound has already led to a diversionary war of choice in Iraq that has profoundly interfered with successfully pursuing a war of necessity against Jihadist terror. To-date, no direct ties have been traced linking Saddam to Bin Laden, and not a single functional WMD has been found. Nevertheless, despite numerous revelations by U.S. intelligence and military that belie Administration claims, the White House intones in its year-end report, "*Fact Sheet: 2003*," that the invasion of Iraq produced "clear evidence of Saddam's illegal weapons program" and re-confirmed his "ties to terrorist organizations."

The President's own Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board concluded that the White House was so anxious "to grab onto something affirmative" about Saddam's attempts to acquire weapon-grade uranium that it ignored repeated warnings from the intelligence community about how dubious the evidence was. According to Sir Richard Dearlove, chief of British intelligence (M16), Prime Minister Tony Blair's assertion in September 2002 that Iraq could deploy WMD as a strategic threat to the UK and the world "within 45 minutes of a decision" was a "misinterpretation" of intelligence that merely suggested Iraq could employ mustard gas in battlefield artillery shells (essentially a World War I capability). Brian Jones, who was responsible for intelligence on WMD for Britain's Defence Intelligence Staff until January 2003, concurs that the Prime Minister gave people "a false expectation" that Saddam had such weapons. In late November 2003, veteran CIA analyst Stuart Cohen, who was in charge of putting together the 2002 intelligence estimate, posted something of a disclaimer in an article on the agency's website: "Any reader would have had to read only as far as the second paragraph of the Key Judgments to know that as we said: 'We lacked specific information of Iraq's WMD program.'" "I don't think they

existed,” said U.S. chief weapons inspector David Kay in January 2004 after his team spent many months and more than half a billion dollars searching for evidence of chemical, biological or nuclear weapons.

Al-Qaeda attacked the U.S., killing thousands of civilians, drastically disrupting the nation’s security in matters of transportation and public gatherings, and causing hundred of billions of dollars in commercial losses. Al-Qaeda also credibly threatens to attack the U.S. with non-conventional weapons. Iraq never attacked the U.S., never threatened attack, and did not use or brandish non-conventional weapons against the U.S. even after being invaded.

The U.S. has expended many times more manpower and money dealing with Iraq than with Al-Qaeda and its home-grown regional allies. And while many top Al-Qaeda leaders are now in custody, the London-based International Institute of Strategic Studies finds that the Iraq war has increased recruitment to Al-Qaeda and has “perversely impelled an already decentralized and evasive transnational terrorist network to become more ‘virtual’ and protean and, therefore, harder to identify and neutralize.” War and occupation have also diverted resources that might have thwarted Al-Qaeda and the Taliban from healing and regrouping in Pakistan and Afghanistan (which, according to the IIS, remains second only to the Congo as the deadliest place on earth for armed conflict).

Increased nuclear proliferation and menace of nuclear war may be a self-fulfilling prophecy that accompanies attempts to implement a coercive strategy of preemption. Although transnational and sub-national terrorist networks cannot likely be deterred or defeated through traditional means of international isolation or military action, all so-called rogue states continue to be successfully contained through conventional deterrence. Terrorist networks cannot be defeated unless they are destroyed; hostile states can be defeated without being destroyed. This is because states, unlike terrorist networks, have a geographically circumscribed infrastructure that can be readily targeted and disabled by overwhelming application of military technology and force.

After the Soviet Union’s collapse, there was never any hint that Iraq, Iran, North Korea or any other nation remotely imagined mounting a first strike against the U.S. The reason is obvious: the U.S. has the proven power and will to annihilate any state that supported a conventional or non-conventional attack

against the homeland. In fact, there is substantial indication that recent attempts by North Korea and Iran to step up their nuclear programs follow directly from fear of the U.S. preemptively acting against them – a fear stoked by the invasion of Iraq, a fellow charter member of President Bush’s “Axis of Evil.” As Jack Pritchard, who handled North Korea issues on the National Security Council of the Clinton and Bush administrations, said recently on PBS *News Hour with Jim Lehrer*: “They [North Koreans] watched the development in Iraq. They said for time they were concerned about the U.S. preemptive strike policy. They didn’t want to be next.... So they needed to come out and say you really can’t attack us. We have this deterrent capability.”

Even key “partners in the war on terror” may be hedging bets. Following U.S. media and congressional denunciations of Saudi Arabia as an untrustworthy ally because most of the 9/11 attackers were Saudi, that country began considering acquisition of nuclear weapons as a deterrent. There is also now substantial evidence that the founder of Pakistan’s nuclear program, Abdul Qadeer Khan, was passing nuclear weapons technology to Iran and Lybia (another official “rogue state”). As Pakistan’s former top army commander, Mizra Aslem Beg, told the *New York Times*, he and others have looked favorably upon efforts by Muslim countries to obtain nuclear weapons because of “discrimination and duplicity” on the part of the U.S. and “the Jewish lobby” that “gives heartburn to the Muslim world.” Transfers by Pakistani officials of nuclear technology to North Korea (at least through 2002) further indicate that America’s “partner” in the region was doing precisely what Iraq was supposed to be doing that called for war.

The U.S. does not have the means to unilaterally prevent states intent on devoting significant resources to acquire nuclear weapons from getting them. Rather than ridicule or reject international arms controls and inspections for Iran or other countries, the U.S. should support these cooperative efforts to limit nuclear proliferation – the only efforts that have ever worked. The U.S. failed to prevent development of nuclear weapons in Russia, China, India, Pakistan and North Korea. Yet, a combination of U.S. deterrence and mutual deterrence by these other nations effectively restrains any one of them from using nuclear weapons against any other.

The U.S. is failing to concentrate on effective countermeasures against Jihadi networks – there already are effective deterrence measures against rogue states. Jihadis appear to obey a devotional logic immune to compromise or games of classical deterrence. The payoff is that a few smart and patient men, with little more than bare hands, can defy an atomic power, kill thousands, terrify millions and cause hundreds of billions of dollars in losses (more than 100 billion in New York City alone). Just as with international and civil wars tracked over the last two centuries, political scientist Robert Axelrod shows that most casualties and cascading effects of terrorist acts are caused by a few, increasingly clustered and massive operations planned over months and years. This striking trend (a straight line on a log-log scale), indicates that we must be most vigilant in preparing for large-scale, unanticipated actions with potentially massive political, economic and social effects.

God has ordered us to build nuclear weapons,” proclaimed Fazlur Rahman Khalil of Harkat ul-Mujahideen on the CBS News show *60 Minutes II*. A subsequent suicide attack on India’s Parliament by Jaish-e-Muhammed, a Pakistani offshoot of the Al-Qaeda affiliate that Khalil heads, probably brought nuclear war closer than at any time since the Cuban Missile Crisis. Imagine what these people could do with the non-conventional weapons they actively seek - not from the Evil Axis but from Pakistan, our “partner in the war on terror” and a far more proven haven for nuclear roguery. Physicist Richard Garwin of the Council of Foreign Relations sees suicide terrorists more likely to explode a small nuclear device at ground level, rather than in the air using a missile or plane, because it is easier to deliver. According to Pakistani nuclear physicist Pervez Hoodbhoy, Pakistan possesses small, 600kg small nuclear weapons that could be delivered by pickup truck. If such a device were delivered by truck or train and detonated in a densely populated area, notes Garwin, "more people would be killed by radiation than in the case of the Hiroshima air burst." The Pakistan government’s immediate pardoning of Khan for his nuclear shenanigans and its prior release of dozens of Harkat and Jaish operatives (who had been rounded up in a post-9/11 staging of solidarity with the U.S.) indicate that this “partnership in the war on terror” is more a matter of convenience than of conviction and not a very reassuring hedge against catastrophic terror.

One priority should focus on how best “netwar” may be waged against increasingly high-tech, networked terrorist groups that are seeking WMDs from multiple criminal and other non-state sources in order to pursue what Garwin terms “megaterror.” This will surely involve some sort of “fourth-generation warfare” (4GW) currently being explored in the Pentagon’s “Net Assessment” division (1GW = soldiers pummeling one another as in the Napoleonic wars and U.S. Civil War; 2GW= massive artillery pummeling soldiers as in WWI; 3GW = mobile attack of the kind the Germans pioneered with Blitzkrieg using tanks and planes to pierce and outflank larger but more cumbersome forces; 4GW = small, rapid, mobile forces on land, in water, in the air, and in cyberspace that can “swarm”). Disabling and defending against relatively diffuse, horizontal social networks of control and command may require very different risk assessments and tactics than those used to combat the vertical social hierarchies that direct national armies. Carnegie Mellon’s Kathleen Carley has used multi-agent network analysis to monitor and model changes in Al-Qaeda, such as those following break up of the cell responsible for the suicide bombing of the U.S. Embassy in Tanzania. She found that eliminating leaders who are central actors (having the most ties to other cell members and to other cells) can produce more adaptive responses in the overall network “healing” process than elimination of less central actors. This indicates that targeted assassinations – a favorite Israeli tactic – can be counterproductive, regardless of any civilian reaction.

A key weakness in increasingly virtual networks like Al-Qaeda is lessening of direct ties between family, friends and fighters, which makes trust in such networks harder to sustain and easier to sunder. But the U.S. has yet to take advantage of this emerging weakness in our foe. America remains (like Pakistan and other “partners”) too self-interested and hidebound by its own hard power to secure the trust and cooperation needed for the long slog. Traditional top-heavy and one-sided approaches - such as “strategic” bombardment, sanctions, invasion, occupation and other massive forms of coercion – will not eliminate tactically innovative and elusive terrorist swarms. Moreover, intelligence estimates and recommendations, which continue to be based primarily on models generalizing from past occurrences and frequency of events, actually make us less secure by underestimating the importance of large but rare attacks that are far and away the most damaging. Reliance on past events also blinds us to enemy

innovation (the “Maginot Effect”). As financier George Soros has so profitably sensed in regard to historic changes generally, the more people look to the ripples, the less they are prepared for the tidal wave. This is also how we should face the apocalyptic warfare that Al-Qaeda and company intends.

Combating terrorist swarms probably requires our own military’s ability to operate in swarms of small and rapid mobile units, informed by culturally astute street intelligence and connected by wireless networks to powerful radar and satellite images. This sort of “network-centric” warfare is in the planning at the new Pentagon Office of Force Transformation. But hunting down, catching and destroying terrorist networks also requires a new strategic form of “spider webbing” powered by multilateral, interfaith alliances of transnational, national and local groups. Bonded by mutual trust, purpose and dedication, these multi-channel associations (true “coalitions of the willing” not bought or commandeered) could have the broad collective intelligence and resourcefulness needed to keep ahead of the game.

The strategic goal of combating terrorism, hostile nations and evil everywhere in the world is not materially feasible, and attempts to sustain this hopeless endeavor will only waste national treasure and lives, and undermine faith in the political system. “Evil” in almost any sense of the word, including that applied to terrorists and tyrants, has always been with the world and always will be.

In a relative sense, observes Harvard psychologist Steven Pinker, evil and good are asymmetrical aspects of the human condition (like infirmity and health, or death and life) so that the possibilities for harming people will always more numerous and easier to realize than the possibilities for helping them. For individuals as for nations, it is a constant and interminable struggle to make life better.

In an absolute sense, as long as different groups of human beings believe that their different gods and missions are each absolutely right and good, Evil Others will be spawned and thrive. Attempts to impose moral absolutes necessarily breed Evil Others among people who refuse those absolutes.

Even if we could do away with exclusive moral absolutes, as long as people believe themselves to be oppressed by others who are materially much stronger they will resort to “irregular” forms of combat against oppression, including guerilla warfare and terrorism. This does not mean that people should refrain from extending their way of life by peaceful means to increase the pool of cooperators and

common wealth, or should not bear the necessary costs of defeating belligerent states and destroying terrorist organizations. It does mean not seeking out and making more enemies than are already around.

Labeling others “evil” (except for true psychopaths like Hitler) is often a ploy demagogues use to justify ignoring the motives of others and to avoid having their own motives or methods questioned. Let us be clear about who many of us are fighting and why. President Bush told Congress shortly after 9/11 that the suicide attackers and their supporters “hate our freedoms.” But poll after poll show Arab and Muslim opinion strongly favoring America’s forms of elected government, personal liberty, educational opportunity and economic choice (and even art and literature), despite support for Al-Qaeda and “martyr actions.” These people are not so much jealous of America as hostile to a perceived jumble of *realpolitik* and messianic mission that allows preemptive action against those who oppose U.S. interference in the world. A Defense Department Science Board reported (in response to a suicide attack against U.S. military housing at Khobar Towers, Saudi Arabia): “Historical data show a strong correlation between U.S. involvement in international situations and an increase in terrorist attacks against the United States.”

U.S. armies are becoming bogged down and overextended because they are called upon to perform contrary functions for which they are not well-trained: nation-building, policing, and anti-guerilla warfare. Without a major recruitment drive or renewal of a national draft, the U.S. cannot increase or even maintain current troop levels in Iraq to combat a drawn-out insurgency and defend construction of a new civil order (and no guerilla insurgency in history that survived an initial onslaught of overwhelming force ever ended quickly). Unless it withdraws significant forces from Iraq, the U.S. lacks sufficient manpower to wage protracted war in another major theater (North Korea, Iran or anywhere else), much less to insure that terrorism is stopped around the world.

Moreover, spending hundreds of billions of dollars on a dubious nation-building project as the national deficit soars into the trillions and domestic programs are squeezed to reduce the debt constitutes a recipe for economic crisis and social conflict. It is also possible that other countries, such as Saudi Arabia, will refuse to continue financing the U.S. debt, which could lead to economic chaos or war.

The “Domino Theory of Democracy versus Terrorism” that inspires the remaking of Iraq as a light unto Middle East nations is an ideological delusion proffered as historically-driven truth; it is comparable to the equally deluded “Domino Theory of Communism versus Democracy” that helped inspire the Vietnam War. The belief is that Saddam’s removal will enable the U.S. to install a liberal democracy and economy in Iraq, and majorities of people in the region’s other countries will then readily come on board. In this manner, “freedom” will naturally take hold throughout the Middle East and so do away with the conditions that nurture terrorism. And in any event, declared the President last November, “we will stand with these oppressed peoples until the day of their freedom finally arrives.”

President Bush has painted the choice in simplistic terms, proclaiming that: “The Middle East will either become a place of progress and peace, or it will become an exporter of violence that takes more lives in America and in other free nations.”

Leaving aside that there is no prior tradition of parliamentary negotiation or elected power transfer in Iraq or most of the Middle East on which to build (as there was for the rebuilding of Germany and Japan after World War II), or any overriding sense of national identity and purpose to trump or mediate conflicting ethnic claims (as there was in the long and intermittent development of all modern democracies), there is no more reason to believe in the natural spread of democracy over all peoples and nations than there was at the end of World War I (when the U.S., Western Europe and the League of Nations originally proposed a similar scenario for Iraq, the Middle East and the rest of the world).

Surveys by the Pew Research Center and others show that the peoples of the Middle East do yearn for democratic choice. But there is no evidence that they will defend different interests beyond those of their own ethnic group or religion. The current international system of nation states, fixed in the UN charter, was established by Europeans (and derivatives) with firm national identities. The problem in the Middle East is setting up national governments with democratic institutions that override confessional loyalties. There is no indication that U.S. overseers in Iraq have a clue about how to do this.

Democratic freedoms are not natural or inevitable parts of the human condition. They are not universal, timeless or absolute (even freedom of thought and expression has public limits that are

continually being recalibrated through political negotiation). Democracy grows painstakingly through the dedication of an increasingly educated citizenry steeped in a sense of national unity and committed to the defense of differences of interest and opinion. At best, a democratic transformation of the Middle East will take many years, perhaps generations. It may never come about; or if it does, it can still fail (as in France and Mexico in the 1800s, Germany and Spain in the 1930s, or Iran and Guatemala in the 1950s).

The Administration denies a need for the kind of open-ended commitment required to even try to see democratization through, either because U.S. leaders are not really serious about it or because they know that the American people are not prepared to sustain it. When Secretary Rumsfeld warned in a recently leaked memo that it might be a “long, hard slog,” the message was hastily spun away and buried. The risk is that U.S. popular support for democratizing the Middle East will collapse when a fuller picture of the timeframe and costs emerge through the whirling fog of spin and propaganda. A loss of faith in the political system and the military that defends it may ensue. This is what happened with the Vietnam War.

There are other reasons that it is difficult to take seriously official U.S. concerns with democratic choice in other nations, and particularly with democracy in Iraq and the Middle East. The history of U.S. pretensions to champion defense of the “free world” from “terrorism” is not reassuring. According to recently declassified documents released by the National Security Archives in February 2003, before the 1991 Gulf War, the U.S. openly supported Saddam Hussein’s regime, and helped to train and supply his army. President Reagan even sent personal envoy Donald Rumsfeld twice to Baghdad to assure the Iraqi dictator that he should not be concerned with any U.S. public condemnation of Iraq using chemical weapons against Iran or Iraq’s own Kurds (in fact, the U.S. doubled aid to Saddam’s regime during 1983-1988, after learning of the gassings and while they were still going on). During the same years that U.S. ally Saddam Hussein was gassing foes, Nelson Mandela’s African National Congress topped the official U.S. list of “terrorist groups.” (In 1986, Dick Cheney led the Reagan Administration’s successful effort to maintain a veto of a U.S. congressional resolution to recognize the ANC and free the organization’s then-imprisoned leader. “The ANC was then viewed as a terrorist organization,” said Cheney on *ABC* television’s *This Week* in July 2000.)

For U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell, even if present knowledge about “the absence of a stockpile [of WMD] changes the political calculus” and casts doubts on last year’s case for war, the choice to go to war in Iraq was “still the right thing to do” because: “Saddam and his regime clearly had the intent – they never lost it – an intent that manifested itself years ago when they actually used such horrible weapons against their enemies in Iran and against their own people.” To most of the world, this reappraisal of history and the reasons for war seem hypocritical and fraudulent. David Kay’s hedge that the U.S. was misled along with “other governments” into believing Iraq possessed large stockpiles of WMD also fails to persuade, noted former National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski on *NPR* shortly after Kay spoke, since it was the U.S. that convinced these “other governments” that Saddam had WMD in the first place. Because of such spinning and evasion U.S. credibility around the globe is at a historical low.

Similarly muddled thinking underlies continued claims that Saddam Hussein and Osama Bin Laden were in cahoots against the U.S. Speaking to the UN Security Council in February 2003, Secretary Powell insisted that intelligence reports indicating that Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, leader of Ansar Al-Islam, underwent medical treatment in Baghdad clearly showed Saddam consorting with Bin Laden. “Ambition and hatred are enough to bring Iraq and Al-Qaeda together,” Powell said. Other reports were conveniently ignored that highlighted a history of rivalry and antagonism between Al-Zarqawi and Bin Laden dating back to the Soviet-Afghan War. In February 2004, a plea for Qaeda reinforcements, supposedly written by Al-Zarqawi, was released to the press. Secretary Powell, apparently under intense pressure from the White House to backpedal from his doubts about the justification for war, insisted that the alleged Zarqawi memo “adds credence” to U.S. pre-war claims about connections between AL-Qaeda and the Iraqi leadership. *New York Times* columnist William Safire chimed in that the memo was “the smoking gun” proving “a ‘clear link’ between Saddam and Bin Laden.”

The leap of logic from such paltry evidence (even if true) is stunning. Saddam (perhaps) aided Al-Zarqawi who now asks support from Al-Qaeda. But that no more shows that Saddam conspired with Bin Laden than the fact that the Bush administration aided Pakistani officials who supported Abdul Khan shows a “clear link’ between the U.S. and Khan’s nuclear roguery. In fact, CIA interrogations of top Al-

Qaeda leaders in U.S. custody reveal Bin Laden having ruled out any cooperation with Saddam Hussein; documents seized during Saddam's capture warn Ba'athists against joining Islamic Jihadists. Try as the U.S. might to put Saddam and Bin Laden in the same bed, they have always refused to couple. It is U.S. action in Iraq that now seems to have cemented the bond between Ansar Al-Islam and Al-Qaeda.

In the lead-up to last year's war, the overwhelming emphasis was on disarmament, deterrence and ties to terrorism. There was talk in President Bush's 2003 State of the Union speech about everyone's God-given right to liberty, but talk of liberty for Iraq became a constant refrain only after claims about weapons and ties to terrorists proved shallow (polls from the Iraq Center for Research and Strategic Studies show few Iraqis believe that the U.S. came to build democracy). In any event, it is a near-formality (with no information value) that whenever the U.S. resorts to force it claims to be doing so in defense of liberty, freedom and democracy – even when helping to overthrow or subvert established democracies, as with several Latin American countries in the recent past.

U.S. posturing before and after the Iraq war has also displayed remarkable contempt for European democracy. In every European country polled, the great majority of the population opposed U.S. war plans. The fact that only the governments of France and Germany actually responded in keeping with the majority will of their people – and of virtually all the peoples of Europe – was derided by the U.S. administration and media as the “Axis of Weasel,” conniving cowards and appeasers of the “old Europe” who were vainly trying to suppress democratic aspirations in new Europe (mostly formerly communist-controlled countries whose populations opposed the war but whose leaders, according to the *Washington Times*, “aimed to please the U.S.” in order to enjoy the benefits of NATO membership). France - which sponsored America's own War of Independence, became the world's second oldest democracy, and alone among the major European nations never fought a war with the U.S - was berated by U.S. media and boycotted by Congress. In contrast, Pakistan – which is ruled by a military junta and continues to harbor more terrorists committed to the destruction of the U.S. than any other country in the world – is wooed with words of thanks and “partnership” and hundreds of millions of dollars in U.S. aid. Spain, too, is now pilloried as a cowardly appeaser, after the Madrid train bombings brought to power a new government

that has vowed to express the popular will by withdrawing troops from occupied Iraq unless the United Nations takes over.

If we take an evolutionary perspective on history, which frames success and failure in terms of the growth or decline of traits over populations (and, eventually, in terms of the growth or decline of populations themselves), then current U.S. antiterrorism strategy does not seem adaptive. U.S. procedures to combat terror are often predictable and reactive. Even the “new” security strategy of preemption is preponderantly about maintaining U.S. preponderance (the global status quo) using traditional military means and other Great Power tactics. By contrast, terrorist stratagems are increasingly innovative and proactive.

Moreover, support for the U.S. declines in the world as support for terrorism increases. A White House panel reported in October 2003 that world hostility towards the U.S. “has reached shocking levels” and is growing. In a June 2003 survey, the Pew Research Center found that only 7 % of Saudis had a positive view of the U.S. , and less than 20% of Pakistanis and Turks. 99% of Lebanese, 98% of Palestinians and 83% of Indonesians held unfavorable opinions of the U.S., while majorities in these countries also expressed confidence in Osama Bin Laden to “do the right thing regarding world affairs.” Similar shifts in opinion are occurring among America’s closest allies. An October 2003 poll engaged by the European Union saw America ranked with North Korea as the greatest threat to world peace after Israel. A June 2003 poll by the German Marshall Fund found that the majority of Europeans overall do not support force as a means of imposing international justice (compared with 84% of Americans who do support use of force), and no longer want the USA to maintain a strong global presence (compared to 64% in 2002 who favored a strong U.S. global role). Margaret Tutwiler, the State Department official in charge of diplomacy, lamented in January 2004 that: “it will take many years of hard, focused to work” to restore America’s credibility, even among traditional allies. America may be the world’s “indispensable nation,” as Madeleine Albright first avowed - but later adding, “I never said alone.”

In early September 2003, President Bush declared: “The liberation of Iraq is a crucial advance in the campaign against terror. We’ve removed an ally of al Qaeda, and cut off a source of terrorist funding.

And this much is certain: No terrorist network will gain weapons of mass destruction from the Iraqi regime.” In fact, the Iraq war did not hurt Al-Qaeda or remove an ally. On the contrary, the war arguably helped Al-Qaeda by eliminating Saddam, Bin Laden’s avowed enemy. Iraq did not offer Al-Qaeda WMD, nor did Al-Qaeda seek Iraqi WMD. There are two simple reasons for this: Iraq lost possession of the requisite WMD after the 1991 Gulf War, and the mutual repulsion between Bin Laden and Saddam was too much for even a temporary alliance against the U.S. under the ancient Arab code, “the enemy of my enemy is my friend.”

The “liberation” of Iraq has diverted massive resources that surely could have helped to destroy Al-Qaeda and company and lessen the strategic threat from global terrorism. Last year witnessed more suicide attacks (98) than any year in contemporary history, the overwhelming majority for religious reasons. A plurality (33) occurred in Iraq, now plagued with suicide terror for the first time since the 13th century *hashasheen* (“Assassins”) slaughtered to purify Islam. From February 1 to March 2 this year, ten suicide bombers killed over 400 people in Iraq, more than in any country for any 31-day period since 9/11. The bulk of these attacks also appear to have been religiously motivated. Even a casual glance at media outlets and websites sympathetic to al-Qaeda reveals a proliferating jihadist network that is not deterred by Saddam’s capture, but takes heart from the fall of Iraq’s secularist tyrant.

The big game in the global war on terror is the hydra-headed jihadist fraternity; it stalks patiently as the U.S. precipitously turns elsewhere. America – in trust with old and independent friends - must keep its eye on the prize or it will meanly lose the century’s first great gamble.

Related Articles (S. Atran):

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<http://www.sciencemag.org/cgi/content/full/299/5612/1534>

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