Iraq: Jihadist Perspectives on a U.S. Withdrawal

Description

This post stuck to the top for a whileâ€¦newer posts will follow until I remove the â€œstick.â€• â€”-

They say it clearly. We canâ€™t grasp it as a country, much less as the Western World. Scary, telling, insightful, yet some have known this all along. Bolding in the quoted article below is mine for emphasis. Read and be educated.

> Iraq: Jihadist Perspectives on a U.S. Withdrawal
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> By Fred Burton
> www.stratfor.com
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> Last week, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a nonbinding resolution to express disapproval of the presidentâ€™s plan to send more troops to Iraq. Republicans in the Senate prevented a similar resolution from coming to the floor for a vote the next day. The congressional actions come during a period of vigorous debate about U.S. involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan â€” a debate that is being heavily fueled as presidential hopefuls from both parties begin to position themselves for the 2008 election.
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> Naturally, this internal debate and media coverage have focused on the American perspective â€” and, more specifically, on public opinion polls. But often missing in that discussion is the fact that Afghanistan and Iraq were not entered into as self-contained discrete wars, but as fronts in the wider U.S.-jihadist war. Therefore, though the Bush administrationâ€™s troop strategy, the positioning of the Democrats and the anti-war statements of potential presidential contenders are by no measure unimportant, the intense focus on these issues means that another important perspective on the war â€” that of the jihadists â€” frequently goes unmentioned.
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> Al Qaeda leaders and the jihadist movement in general always have taken a long view of the war, and discussion of a U.S. withdrawal from either Iraq or Afghanistan has long been anticipated. In planning the 9/11 attacks, **al Qaeda leaders clearly expected that the United States, once drawn into a war, eventually would weaken and lose heart.** A study of al Qaedaâ€™s philosophy, mindset and planning â€” conveyed through the words and actions of its leadership â€” is a reminder of just how the current U.S. political debate fits into the jihadist timeline and strategy.
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> **It also is an indicator that a U.S. withdrawal from Muslim lands is not al Qaedaâ€™s ultimate requirement for ending attacks against the United States or American interests abroad.**

Perceptions of American Resolve

Long before the U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, Osama bin Laden clearly stated that, in the jihadistsâ€™ opinion, the United States was not prepared to fight a war of attrition.

Prior to 9/11, bin Ladenâ€™s public statements conveyed his dim view of the U.S. militaryâ€™s capabilities and resolve, as well as of the willingness of the U.S. government (and to a larger extent, the American people) to take casualties in a sustained war. In a 1997 interview with Peter Arnett, bin Laden said, â€œWe learned from those who fought [in Somalia] that they were surprised to see the low spiritual morale of the American fighters in comparison with the experience they had with the Russian fighters. The Americans ran away from those fighters who fought and killed them, while the latter were still there. If the U.S. still thinks and brags that it still has this kind of power even after all these successive defeats in Vietnam, Beirut, Aden, and Somalia, then let them go back to those who are awaiting its return.â€•

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It is widely believed that the U.S. withdrawal from Lebanon, following the 1983 Marine barracks bombing, and from Somalia in 1993 were important precedents in driving the 1996 bombing of the Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia. The jihadists believed that if they killed enough Americans, U.S. forces would leave Saudi Arabia.

Bin Ladenâ€™s opinion of U.S. resolve was not shaken by the â€œshock and aweâ€• campaign that was unleashed in Afghanistan and, later, Iraq. In a February 2003 message, he said, â€œWe can conclude that America is a superpower, with enormous military strength and vast economic power, but that all this is built on foundations of straw. So it is possible to target those foundations and focus on their weakest points which, even if you strike only one-tenth of them, then the whole edifice will totter and sway, and relinquish its unjust leadership of the world.â€•

Bin Laden and other jihadist strategists often have stressed that the U.S. economy is one of the foundations to be attacked. However, another significant â€” and in their view, vulnerable â€” target is morale. In an October 2002 statement, marking the first anniversary of the Afghanistan invasion, bin Laden discussed the importance of â€œthe media people and writers who have remarkable impact and a big role in directing the battle, and breaking the enemyâ€™s morale, and heightening the Ummahâ€™s morale.â€•

He also noted that the Americans had failed to achieve their objectives in Afghanistan, saying, â€œThe invading American forces in Afghanistan have now started to sink in the Afghani mud, with all of their equipment and personnel. The weird irony of the matter is that the Crusader forces, which came to protect the governing system in Kabul from the attacks of the mujahideen, have now come to need the protection of the regimeâ€™s forces, having been dealt continuous blows by the mujahideen, so who protects who? The international and American forces had come to ensure the security [but] have become the biggest burden to security!!â€•

Orders given by Mullah Omar and his tactical commanders to Taliban fighters in Afghanistan also reflect this mindset. They are told not to go toe-to-toe with coalition forces in battle, but rather to increase the costs of doing battle in order to hasten the withdrawal of Western forces.

An al Qaeda military strategist and propagandist, Abu Ubeid al-Qurashi, expounded on this concept in an article titled â€œFourth-Generation Wars,â€• carried by the organizationâ€™s biweekly Internet magazine, Al Ansar, in February 2002:

â€œFourth-generation warfare, the experts said, is a new type of war in which fighting will be mostly scattered. The battle will not be limited to destroying military targets and regular forces, but will include societies, and will seek to destroy popular support for the fighters within the enemyâ€™s society. In these wars, the experts stated in their article, â€˜television news may become a more powerful operational weapon than armored divisions.â€™ They also noted that â€˜the distinction between war and peace will be blurred to the vanishing point.'â€•

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Al-Qurashi went on to extol jihadist successes in fourth-generation warfare, in settings ranging from Afghanistan to Somalia. He also noted that, like the Soviet Union, the United States was not well-suited to fight that type of war. And he predicted that al Qaedaâ€™s ideal structure for, and historical proficiency in, fourth-generation warfare ultimately would secure its victory â€” despite the fact that jihadists were outgunned by the Americans in both types and quantities of weapons. Al-Qurashi said that while the U.S. military was designed and equipped with the concept of deterrence in mind â€” that is, to deter attacks against the United States â€” the guiding principle was not applicable in the struggle against a nonstate actor like al Qaeda.

â€œWhile the principle of deterrence works well between countries, it does not work at all for an organization with no permanent bases and with no capital in Western banks that does not rely on aid from particular countries. As a result, it is completely independent in its decisions, and it seeks conflict from the outset. How can such people, who strive for death more than anything else, be deterred?â€• he wrote.

In contrast, al Qaedaâ€™s leaders persistently have exhorted their followers to fight a war of attrition similar to that successfully waged by the mujahideen against the Soviets in Afghanistan. In bin Ladenâ€™s words, â€œWe donâ€™t articulate and we donâ€™t quit.â€•

One principle that has been emphasized in many statements by bin Laden and others is that the jihadists love death the way Americans love life â€” a concept originally stated by Abu Bakr, a companion of the Prophet Muhammad, as he led an army into battle against the Persians.

A Four-Part Strategy

The United Statesâ€™ military response to the 9/11 attacks was the reaction al Qaeda wanted and expected. The statements of al Qaeda leaders have made it clear that the

jihadistsâ€™ goal was to make sure these became protracted, painful and costly wars.

Ayman al-Zawahiri put it this way in August 2003, as the insurgency in Iraq was beginning to take hold: â€œWe are saying to America one thing: What you saw with your eyes so far are only initial skirmishes; as for the real battle, it hasnâ€™t even started yet.â€•

Now, whether al Qaeda or the jihadist movement actually retains the capability to achieve its long-term goals is a matter for vigorous debate, and one we have explored at other times. For purposes of this analysis, however, it is useful to examine just what those long-term goals, to which al-Zawahiri obviously was alluding, actually are.

Internal al Qaeda documents indicate that a U.S. withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan is but one of the stages factored into the movementâ€™s long-term planning. One of the most telling documents was a July 2005 letter from al-Zawahiri to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in Iraq, outlining a four-step strategy for establishing a caliphate in the â€œheart of the Islamic world.â€• (The authenticity of the al-Zawahiri letter has been questioned by some, but our own analysis has led Stratfor to conclude it was bona fide.)

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The steps he outlined were:
1) Expel the Americans from Iraq.
2) Establish an Islamic authority or emirate in Iraq.
3) Extend the jihad wave to secular countries neighboring Iraq.
4) Initiate a clash with Israel.

Al-Zawahiri said he was proposing the four-step strategy in order to â€œstress something extremely importantâ€• to al-Zarqawi, â€œand it is that the mujahideen must not have their mission end with the expulsion of the Americans from Iraq, and then lay down their weapons, and silence the fighting zeal.â€• He clearly wanted the jihadists to press on toward bigger objectives following the U.S. withdrawal.

In the letter, he cautioned: â€œThings may develop faster than we imagine. **The aftermath of the collapse of American power in Vietnam â€" and how they ran and left their agents â€" is noteworthy.** Because of that, we must be ready starting now, before events overtake us, and before we are surprised by the conspiracies of the Americans and the United Nations and their plans to fill the void behind them. We must take the initiative and impose a fait accompli upon our enemies, instead of the enemy imposing one on us, wherein our lot would be to merely resist their schemes.â€•

It follows from this that a U.S. withdrawal from Iraq would be construed by the jihadists as an opportunity to establish an important base or sanctuary â€" and then to consolidate their gains and continue their â€œjihad waveâ€• to other parts of the region. With that in mind, jihadist attacks against â€œJews and Crusadersâ€• could be expected to continue even after a U.S. departure from Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Ultimate Objective

Al Qaedaâ€™s grievances with the United States have been well documented by Stratfor and numerous others since the 9/11 attacks: Bin Laden was outraged by the presence of U.S. military forces in Saudi Arabia following the 1991 Gulf War, and by what he sees as an unholy alliance between Western powers and â€œapostateâ€• secular regimes in the Islamic world. Historical conflicts between Muslim and Christian entities also have been referenced as a precedent for what bin Laden describes as â€œaggressive intervention against Muslims in the whole worldâ€• â€" meaning the U.N. embargo against Iraq, the existence of Israel and U.S. support for said â€œapostateâ€• regimes.

In a February 1998 statement, bin Laden declared that â€œThe ruling to kill the Americans and their allies â€" civilians and military â€" is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it, in order to liberate the Al Aqsa mosque and the holy mosque from their grip, and in order for their armies to move out of all the lands of Islam, defeated and unable to threaten any Muslim.

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An important point is that al Qaeda defines terms like the â€œlands of Islamâ€• as territory that includes present-day Israel, India and Spain. While Israel is clearly more significant to Muslims than other areas, given the importance of Jerusalem and the Al Aqsa mosque to Islam, Spain â€" which was the Caliphate of al-Andalus from 711 to 1492 â€" is also in the crosshairs. An equally important point is that the political shift in Madrid (which followed a 2004 commuter train attack in the capital) and the governmentâ€™s decision to withdraw Spanish troops from Iraq have not removed Spain from the jihadistsâ€™ target list. In a July 2006 message â€" in which he threatened revenge for the Israeli aggression against Lebanon and the Palestinians â€" al-Zawahiri said, â€œThe war with Israel â€¦ is a jihad for the sake of God â€¦ a jihad that seeks to liberate Palestine, the whole of Palestine, and to liberate every land which (once belonged to) Islam, from Andalus to Iraq.â€•

In other words, at least as long as the state of Israel exists â€" and the â€œapostateâ€• governments in places like Iraq, Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Morocco and Kuwait remain in power, with U.S. support â€" the jihadists will continue to complain about U.S. â€œaggression against Islam.â€• And, insofar as they are able, they will carry on their war.

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This analysis, using their own words, tells us there is the multi-generational war in the wings. The age of instant gratification/Desert Storm type â€œwinsâ€• arenâ€™t going to be a reasonable expectation.

Is this a surprise to many? Maybe the link should be sent to Nancy Pelosi and Harry Reid.

Note the expectation of us ending this war in Iraq just as we did in Vietnam. My, my, my! So the Democrats in power are playing right into their plans, which would show the Democrats cannot understand their role on the larger stage of the World, then and nowâ€¦

Posted in Little Green Footballs comment sectionâ€¦.
H/T: Diary of a Mad Pidegon, Samantha Burns

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1. Geo-Political
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