

## The Bottom Line: No Strategy Can Defeat an Enemy You Refuse to Understand

By Dr. Michael Sheuer

The list of topics sent for me to discuss in this session would have sufficed to fill a moderate-sized book. Among the topics were demographic changes and trends; evolution of terrorist tactics; differences between Shias and Sunnis; connections among terrorist groups; personality profiles of terrorist leaders; and terrorist communications. All of these items are knowable things and are easily available in open-source literature. But in a very real sense they are irrelevant. Although they are components of the threat America is facing, the most dangerous aspect of the threat America faces is -- to put it simply and clearly -- our own willful ignorance of the enemy. So, instead of addressing the foregoing issues in a matter-of-fact presentation, I have tried to fit as many of them as I could into an assessment of U.S. Grand Strategy in this war as it might be seen from al-Qaeda's perspectives. I would be happy to answer questions about the specific issues mentioned above in the question-and-answer period.

To prepare an analysis of U.S. strategy from al-Qaeda's perspective, I thought it best to first review current U.S. strategy. Sadly, I found that America is without a strategy for the war, or at least without a strategy to win the war we are fighting, and not the one we want to fight. Following the lead of political leaders from both parties, who encapsulate the motivation of our Islamic enemies as "hatred for who we are, what we believe, and how we live," U.S. strategists are stuck with a misperception of a deadly enemy that prevents the development of a coherent, real-world strategy. To paraphrase the late movie actor John Wayne: "Devising strategy is tough, but it's even tougher if you're stupid enough to delude yourself about the enemy."

After spending much of the last year trying to explain in my writings and remarks that militant Muslims -- and hundreds of millions of non-militant Muslims -- hate the United States for what we do in the Islamic world, not for our democratic beliefs and civil liberties, I must forthrightly admit that I have failed to make much of an impression. Indeed, that probably is an overestimate of the impact I have had. My efforts, however, have not gone without reward. For arguing that U.S. policies are perceived by tens of millions of Muslims as a lethal threat to their faith and brethren, and that their war on America is shaped and motivated by this perception, I have won many diverse titles. "Liberal appeaser"; "Bush-hater"; "Islamophile"; "blame-America-first spokesman"; "Buchananite isolationist"; and -- my personal favorite -- "anti-Semitic, right-

wing weasel." I never expected that kind of renown when I left Buffalo a quarter-century ago.

Still, I am stubborn enough to think I am on to something in believing our enemy hates and fights us far more for what we do than for what we are, and so I have begun to cast about for a way to present the argument in a manner that would get a decent listening. To make the point that the militants are not "freedom haters," I thought I might ask wise-Alek questions, such as: "How often have you seen sky-writers inscribing the Egyptian sky with messages that say "We Love You Hosni, Man of the People"?; bumper-stickers on Saudi cars that exult "Long Live the Austere and Tolerant al-Sauds"?; or T-shirts labeled "Long Live the Gentle Algerian Generals". These questions were to make the point that it seems illogical to describe as a freedom-hater someone who risks his life in attempting to overthrow Mubarak, Abdullah, or the Algerian junta. I dropped this idea, however, believing that while the questions might provoke a bit of thought, they would still be dismissed because they came from a well-known "right wing, anti-Semitic weasel."

I finally decided on another tactic to present my case by drawing on my experience as a veteran but now over-the-hill intelligence officer. As has been widely reported by the media, the Director of the CIA has a long-established practice of asking his Chief-of Station in a particular country for his unvarnished, all-source view of how things are going in the country where he is based. The Director usually requests this kind of report to give him, the president, and cabinet-level officials the historical context to on-going events in a particular country. The cable usually amounts to a summary view of a society on the eve of significant event -- such as a national election -- or when the interests of the United States are perceived as suffering in a particular country. You may recall that such **an alleged** report from CIA's Baghdad's Chief-of-Station in the summer of 2004 was leaked to neoconservative media pundits and they decried it as an attempt to undermine President Bush because it clearly said America was not on the verge of triumph in Iraq. Thus we treat truth tellers -- but that is another story.

Anyway, I decided to try to mimic this CIA reporting vehicle, and write a mock report as if it was authored by al-Qaeda's Chief-of-Station in the United States, a man who I will say is based in Washington. This man, lets call him Abu Alec, has been stationed in the United States for nearly ten years, and is -- like CIA's station chiefs -- writing directly to his top superiors; in this case al-Qaeda

chief Osama bin Laden and his deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri. [NB: I must note that the egalitarian nature of Islam yields Abu Alec's following informal salutation on his report. It is, I think, unlikely that a similar informality would be found in a CIA cable.] In the cable, Abu Alec provides a look at how, after a decade in America, he perceives al-Qaeda's strategy -- which bin Laden describes as "bleeding-to-bankruptcy" -- is working. It is my hope, that Abu Alec's report will cause some thought in America about the nature and motivation of the enemy we are confronting and thereby lay the beginning of a basis for a planning a U.S. strategy to defeat that enemy.

A final word. I am a Roman Catholic, and, as a mackerel-snapper, I make no pretense to deep expertise in the use of Islamic scripture. I have therefore used some of the terms of address used in public letters between Sunni militant leaders -- bin Laden and al-Zarqawi, for example -- but have not attempted to find Koranic passages or sayings of the Prophet to amplify the points made in the mock cable.

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DATE: 1 APRIL 2005

CITE: WASHINGTON

FROM: COS/WASHINGTON

TO: C/AL-QAEDA, DC/AL-QAEDA

SUBJECT: THE BLEED-TO-BANKRUPTCY WAR

1. Brothers Osama and Ayman: On this, the tenth anniversary of you sending me to America, I thought I should give you a summary appraisal of where al-Qaeda and its allies stand in regard to America's assumptions about and understanding of what our movement is motivated by and trying to do. Let me first say that I have followed your directions to the letter. As a white American Muslim convert, I and my family have lived an ordinary life here outside Washington. I have held the same, well-paid engineering job for these last ten years, and as you told me, I have had no association with anyone who the Americans could remotely identify as an "Islamic militant." I have, as you ordered, told no one -- not even my American wife -- that I had the honor to serve God by fighting the Communists in Afghanistan. As you directed, I have

simply observed life, read widely in the American media and scholarly journals, and have followed closely the words of major political leaders. After a decade, therefore, I thought it best to tell you what I see as the downside and upside of our having decided to fight the United States in the war brother Osama describes as the bleed-to-bankruptcy struggle.

2.) First, the Huge Downside of this War: We are, put simply, being hunted and attacked by the most powerful nation in the history of the world. Its people hate us with a vengeance for the blessed September raid, and their efforts against us are powered by a wonderfully -- even amazingly -- productive economy. In addition, the American population -- although far from perfectly equitable -- is on the whole tolerant, including toward their Muslim fellow citizens. At this point, brothers, we do not have the advantage here provided by the aggressively racist and anti-Islamic policies followed by most countries of the European Union. But on that score, as you have said brother Ayman, Allah will ensure that the cradles of Muslim homes will ultimately return Andalusia and all of Europe to the Muslim ummah. A final point of danger I must stress is that the military, emotional, patriotic, and economic power of the United States has been neither harnessed nor focused, the latent power of this country is enormous, and we have yet to feel its impact. God willing, the Americans will continue to slumber.

3.) Second, the Bounty of Advantages God has Given Us: Brothers, believe me, the Americans are either soundly asleep, unwilling to face reality, or fundamentally stupid. Based on my observations and discussions, they do not appear to have a clue as to what this war is about. This is, thanks to God, our greatest advantage. As examples, I cite the following for your consideration:

A.) They do not understand our motivation; in American terms, "they have not figured out what makes us tick." Their political leaders of both parties, as well as their media, military, economic, and social elites continue to claim al-Qaeda hates America for "what it believes and how it lives" and not "for what the United States does in the Islamic world." Honestly brothers, only God's love for Muslim believers could have kept American elites so dense for so long. It is worth thinking and worrying about how long this self-imposed ignorance can last, but on that score there also is good news.

B.) The Americans are hamstrung by their own self-imposed political correctness. In some ways the American press is not as free as that

permitted by that apostate Pakistani tyrant Musharraf. And even if the Americans came to understand that tens of millions of Muslims hate their foreign policy and its impact, and not their society, it would take a near-revolution in public discourse in this country to allow a frank debate about the issue of motivation. Brothers, the indictment of the United States you have so clearly broadcast has put them at a disadvantage, for to discuss those points openly would be to breed a firestorm in U.S. politics for each of them has become a “holy of holies” and political poison.

--Unqualified support for Israel: To criticize this policy would be martyrdom operation for any U.S. politician. End of story. Our claims that Israel leads America around by the nose are true. If I was not living here I would not accept this contention, but in this country, thanks to God, criticism of Israel is not allowed. Men are called anti-Semitic and their careers ruined if they criticize Israel. By God Brothers, the apostate Mubarak is criticized more openly in Egypt than is Israel in America.

--Support for China, Russia, and India against Muslims: To question this would mean losing face with other Great Powers. The Americans do not seem to know how much their support for Putin’s genocide against Chechen Muslims hurts them in the Muslim world. Brothers, only the Lord of the Universe could have put Bush so squarely on the side of butchers Putin and Sharon.

--Energy Policy: This is unbelievable, Brothers, but three decades after King Faisal’s blessed embargo, U.S. leaders are unwilling to install an energy policy that would remove Arab domination of their economy, and those of its allies. One almost has to pinch himself to believe the good fortune God has given us in this regard. And just this month, Brothers, the apostate Crown Prince Abdullah agreed to expand Saudi oil production by the end of the decade. Unbelievably, Bush welcomed this move, which will only increase America’s dependence on Muslim oil, allow increased demand, and keep prices high. Imagine brothers, with the steady rise in the price of a barrel of oil from \$30 to \$55, our blessed financial supporters can increase their support for us to unprecedented levels. And oh the irony, Brothers Osama and Ayman, American parents are now paying exorbitant prices at the pump, and we are receiving a portion of those windfall profits to help us kill their

soldier children in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere. Truly, God is great.

--Support for Arab allies: We are safe on this one, Brothers. Energy dependence means that the talk of democracy-building in the Islamic world will remain mostly talk. Indeed, pictures of Bush's recent hand-holding with the apostate tyrant Abdullah will tell Muslims all they need to know about U.S. intentions. American leaders also do not have the courage to tell their people that they have deliberately made a mockery of America's heritage of freedom -- which so much of the Muslim world still admires -- by supporting Arab tyrannies and police states for many decades in Egypt, Kuwait, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Algeria and elsewhere. And Brothers, while the Israeli lobby has a powerful influence on the American Congress and media, the Saudi lobby -- thanks to God, for whom all things are possible -- is just as powerful and successful. The apostate al-Sauds send their smiling English-speaking sons like Ambassador Bandar to America -- he owns the Congress -- and Prince Turki to Britain and our infidel enemies believe they are dealing with the true leaders of the Arabian Peninsula. And even more, Brothers, the al-Sauds buy the loyalty of retired U.S. ambassadors, generals, and intelligence officers to lobby the Congress and White House on their behalf. And all the while, and for this all praise is due to the Lord of the Universe, our blessed Ulema in the Land of the Prophet, peace be upon him, are using funds from the al-Sauds to finance and preach the spread of God's word around the globe, and nowhere more aggressively than under the nose of the Bush Administration right here in the United States. Praise to God, Islam's huge coming generation of Muslim youth is being educated by our Ulema in what the Americans call "Wahabism" -- an Islamic theology is more martial and ruthless than the Salafism of al-Qaeda. As this gift from God proceeds, the American elites take the al-Sauds' word as they would take a hallucinogenic drug. It denies them contact with reality and they believe -- truly they do, Brothers -- that Saudi Arabia is their ally, and all the while Saudi clerics are lighting a worldwide anti-American fire. God is great.

--Military presence in Muslim countries: Another safe area for us. As the Americans merrily build bases in the Islamic world, they

have no notion that they are voluntarily donning the cloak of 19<sup>th</sup> century European imperialism and energizing a new generation of Mujahedin fighting in God's path. U.S. leaders have no conception of how the rehabilitation of this imperialistic image hurts America, and rallies Muslims to brother Osama's views. May God keep the Americans ignorant of each Muslim's possession of an extremely long historical memory.

C.) To go on, and by God Brothers brace yourselves, I tell you that American leaders continue to preach to their people that our movement has nothing to do with our blessed religion, nothing to do with Islam. Again, God is truly great. The American leaders call us criminals, gangsters, deviants, psychopaths, murderers -- they tell their people that we represent only "the lunatic fringe of the lunatic fringe of the Muslim world." And so important people like President Bush, Senator Kerry, President Clinton, and hundreds of others in their elites claim "we will hunt them down one at a time and bring them to justice." Pray God this continues, for it ensures they will not recognize that our movement is large and growing; that your claim that U.S. foreign policy is an attack on Islam resonates with hundreds of millions of Muslims, even if they disagree with al-Qaeda; and that you, bothers Osama and Ayman, are heroes and leaders in the Islamic world, especially among the youth. The Americans do not know that their identification of you as "gangsters" will offend all those who look up to you as good men and credible leaders in the otherwise leaderless Islamic world. May God let the Americans believe and preach that we are "gangsters" indefinitely.

D.) And brothers, the Americans have not found serious men to lead them -- God has blessed us with this reality for at least 15 years. Three and one half years after 9/11, Americans leaders have not closed their borders or found out who is in their country. Truly only God could have provided our movement with such a miracle. Amazingly Brothers, the American politicians lack the moral courage to enforce the laws they themselves have passed. God is great! They refuse to find out who is in there country and to stop illegal immigration because they loudly assert: "America is a beacon of liberty to the world that we do not want to dim." Truly, brothers, there is nothing more beneficial to us than having American politicians prefer to have the United States be seen as the "glowing beacon of liberty" rather than a country of enforced laws. Long may America maintain and enhance this glow of liberty, which provides a

light that warms, guides, and shelters al-Qaeda and the many jihadi groups we have inspired around the world.

E.) Another great advantage we have, Brothers, is that the Americans see our war against them only in terms of the detonation of explosives. There has been much proud crowing and preening here lately that America has not been attacked since the blessed 9/11 attack, and therefore America is winning the war against al-Qaeda and its allies. May God keep them mired in this dream state. War, brothers, as you know, is so much more than detonating explosives, and these non-explosive attacks on America, with God's permission, have continued every day since 9/11. I have learned the following in conversations with my work colleagues and casual social acquaintances. It is true that these stories are mere anecdotes, but I believe they faithfully reflect the mood of this country.

--We are slowly changing their way of life: People here are very upset with the increased difficulties of air travel -- may God smile on the blessed 19 for this -- and are appalled by security that requires the children of a fourth-grade class to empty their pockets and clear a metal detector before entering an art museum.

--They are unsettled by the "under-siege look" of their capital city; one man said to me in wonder: "Roosevelt did not have this much protection in all of World War Two." Several men have said too that they were disturbed by the invasive and militarized nature of the security for the celebration of President Bush's inauguration.

--The budget deficit is spiraling: Brothers, when we next attack inside the United States their economy will be weaker than on the Tuesday of God's glory. It is impossible to imagine the amount of money they have spent since 9/11 on what they call "homeland defense" and on the wars they are running Afghanistan and Iraq. And when we next attack, with God's permission, they will know that all this spending has been for naught, and we will tear the heart out of their economy and their morale as well.

--The American people are frightened: I have heard much discussion about their worries of more al-Qaeda attacks and their fears about erosion in civil liberties. It as you said in 2001, Brother Osama, al-Qaeda needs to do nothing to terrorize Americans

because their leaders and the media will and are performing that task. May God make their fears worse.

6.) Finally, Brothers, I close this too-long message with the great and happy news that the Americans do not appear to realize the wondrous opportunities they have opened for the al-Qaeda movement and all believers by invading Iraq.

--Praise God for the unimaginable. The Americans have now occupied the three most holy sanctities in Islam -- the Arabian Peninsula, Iraq, and Jerusalem. Regarding Jerusalem, the Americans fail to understand that they are viewed by Muslims as interchangeable with Israelis -- every bit of Muslim hatred for Israelis, praise be to God, also accrues to Americans. By occupying our sanctities they have made Iraq a magnet for mujahedin far more powerful than the blessed land of jihad in Afghanistan ever was.

--And, Brother Osama, by occupying Iraq the Americans have made your predictions come true in the eyes of the Muslim ummah. You said: America will destroy all strong Muslim states, and it did; You said: America will destroy all threats to Israel, and it did; You said: America will seize Muslim oil, and it did; You said: America will destroy our religion and holy places, and it did. You said: America will replace God's law with blasphemous, man-made laws, and it did. Praise to the Almighty God for showing you the truth, Brother Osama.

--And, Brothers, God has now properly validated your call for a defensive jihad in accordance with the terms of His blessed religion. In their intensely legalistic way, the Americans always have taken a delusionary solace from the fact that neither of you are trained Islamic scholars, convincing themselves that, because you lacked a diploma, no one could legitimately answer your call to jihad. Now, the Americans' invasion of Iraq has called forth fatwas from many well-credentialed Islamic scholars declaring the defensive jihad in exactly the terms in which you have spoken. Praise to God, the Sustainer of both worlds.

--Finally, the American leaders do not see that in Iraq they have opened a door for us to project our forces into Jordan, Turkey,

Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and thence onward to Lebanon and Israel. Brothers, the Americas see Iraq as honey to attract mujahedin so they can be killed there. They fail to see that their military presence in Iraq not only gives us U.S. targets, but that it is helping to satisfy Brother Usama's goal of securing contiguous safe haven from which to infiltrate and attack the apostate regimes of the Levant and Turkey. It will be too late, God willing, when the Americans discover that the flow of non-Iraqi mujahedin through Iraq into the Levant, Turkey, and the Gulf is far more dangerous to their interests than the mujahedin entering Iraq from Syria and Jordan.

7.) For now, dear Brothers, thanks to God the good news outweighs the bad by a large measure. But we must remember that America is a powerful enemy and one terrible in war when roused to a united and focused anger. Our advantage now lies in their failure to understand their enemy: part of this failure is due to their woeful lack of historical knowledge -- both ours and theirs -- and the rest is due to a rampant moral cowardice that prevents debate over foreign policy because of the potential of such a debate holds devastating domestic political consequences. The American leaders' combination of historical ignorance and moral cowardice are, with God's support, a potential war-winner for us; they cannot develop a strategy to defeat us as long as they do not understand us. However, always remember dear Brothers, that we must wage war aggressively and viciously for we must not count on the Americans remaining ignorant forever. They may someday -- may it be far in the future -- recognize that their destiny is in their own hands. Only they can change the foreign policies that are powering our drive to God's victory. Yes, Brother, God helps those who help themselves, and so we must continue to carry this war to the Americans while they remain asleep. God bless you both. Abu Alec.