



Win the War? Yes, We Can!

(Published in [*The Weekly Standard*](#), June 9, 2008)

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Colaboraciones n° 2328

June 13, 2008

Don't look now, but evidence of progress in the war on terror is just about everywhere. Last week CIA director Michael Hayden noted some U.S. accomplishments for the Washington Post: "Near strategic defeat of al-Qaeda in Iraq. Near strategic defeat for al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia. Significant setbacks for al-Qaeda globally." USA Today: Attacks in Iraq are "down 70 percent since President Bush ordered a U.S. troop increase, or 'surge,' early last year."

The New Yorker's Lawrence Wright devoted a long essay to Sayyid Imam al-Sharif, onetime mentor to Ayman al-Zawahiri, who now criticizes his former protégé and Osama bin Laden and suggests they be put on trial. In the New Republic, Peter Bergen and Paul Cruickshank told the story of Sheikh Salman al-

Awdah, author of an open letter attacking bin Laden and violent jihad that has caused shockwaves across the Muslim world. The sheikhs of Anbar Province in Iraq lead a national, transsectarian movement preparing for provincial elections by the end of the year. Polling shows a widespread decline in support among Muslims for suicide bombing and for bin Laden. Fareed Zakaria observed that the number of Islamist attacks worldwide has declined precipitously since 2004.

How did this happen? It is partly due to Muslim outrage at al-Qaeda's killing of its coreligionists. It is partly due to Muslim rejection of al-Qaeda's malign interpretation of Islam. For these reasons, Bergen and Cruickshank wrote that "encoded in the DNA of apocalyptic jihadist

groups like Al Qaeda are the seeds of their own long-term destruction."

True. But such seeds must be sown, watered, and tended. Read the authors mentioned above, and you would think that al Qaeda's troubles sprung up overnight. They did not. Its troubles cannot be separated from U.S. counterterrorism policy. From President Bush's policy.

After 9/11, the president mobilized all forms of American power against bin Laden and his global jihadist movement. The constant pressure--cutting off the movement's funding, bringing down the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, hunting down jihadist affiliates in the Philippines and the Horn of Africa, spying on the terrorists' global communications--put the enemy on the defensive for the first time.

Then the president denied the jihadists an ally by removing Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq. Bin Laden declared Iraq the "central front" of his war against the West, and the Sunni insurgency helped Al Qaeda in Iraq gain a foothold there. Bush changed strategy last year, sending reinforcements to Iraq and ordering General Petraeus to secure the country's population. The results have been dramatic. By the time the first reinforcements arrived in Iraq, the Anbaris were already turning against al Qaeda. The Americans helped to almost completely eliminate the group in Anbar. Al Qaeda in Iraq is on the run. It has been denied its strategic goal of establishing an Islamic State of Iraq. Its black flag flies no more there.

What once seemed a war between jihadists and the West is now a war between jihadists and Muslims who reject terrorism. Bin Laden is close to losing this fight on his central front. Al Qaeda is no longer the attractive "strong horse" of bin Laden's December 2001 metaphor. It is that fact, more than any other, that accounts for his movement's current disarray.

But a global war has many fronts. Progress in one battle is often accompanied by setbacks in another. Al Qaeda may be on the brink of defeat, but its leadership maintains a safe haven along Pakistan's northwest frontier. In Afghanistan, Coalition forces continue to fight al Qaeda, the Taliban, and other agents of state failure. Meanwhile, the Iranian theocracy moves steadily forward in its quest for nuclear weapons. Iran's proxies in Iraq, Gaza, and Lebanon commit murder in the pursuit of illiberal ends. A disturbing number of European Muslims are sympathetic to the jihadists and are a potential source of fresh recruits. And a precipitous withdrawal from Iraq would erase all of the progress that has been made in the last year and a half. A precipitous withdrawal would provide aid and comfort to al Qaeda.

The left's analysis of jihadism has been proved incorrect at every turn. It argued military power would be ineffective against the terrorists. Wrong. It argued that intervention in Iraq would energize bin Laden's movement. That movement is in shambles. The left argued Iraq was a lost cause. It isn't. The left argues

that a "war on terrorism" is futile, that defeat is inevitable, because terrorism is a "tactic," not an enemy. Nonsense. President Bush has dem-

onstrated through perseverance and (more often than not) sound policy that the war on terror can be won. And right now we're winning it.