

Press Release – Embargoed until 00:01 Monday 8 October 2007

British involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan “a disaster”

New report calls for fundamental changes in policy and also warns of dangers of war with Iran

After six years, the ‘war on terror’ has failed to achieve its aims and has, instead, played into the hands of al-Qaida. A fundamental re-think is required if al-Qaida is to be rendered ineffective as a violent revolutionary movement, according to a new report from one of Britain’s leading independent think tanks, Oxford Research Group (ORG), in its 2007 International Security Report.

Towards Sustainable Security – Alternatives to the War on Terror points to numerous fundamental errors:

- Terminating the Taliban regime with military force in 2001-02 has failed to bring security to Afghanistan. The Taliban militias have been re-invigorated and the country is now the world’s largest producer of heroin. Moreover, *“terminating the Taliban regime was of direct value to the al-Qaida movement”*(p116) and has created a security vacuum in the country.
- Occupying Iraq has been a grievous mistake and is providing a jihadist combat training zone for future generations of al-Qaida supporters, *“comparable to the insurgents fighting the Soviet troops in the 1980s except that their training is against well-equipped and highly trained US soldiers and Marines.”*(p113)
- Mass detentions without trial of many tens of thousands of people, widespread torture, prisoner abuse and extraordinary rendition have all played into the hands of extreme groups and are a *“constant source of propaganda”*(p117); the al-Qaida movement has more support than six years ago.

If the al-Qaida movement is to be countered, then the roots of its support must be understood and systematically undercut. Combined with conventional policing and security measures, al-Qaida can be contained and minimised but this will require a changes in policy at every level. If successful, report author, Professor Paul Rogers argues “it will still take at least 10 years to make up for the mistakes made since 9/11.” Failure to make the necessary changes could result in the war on terror lasting decades.

Among the measures recommended in the report are:

- Far greater civil aid to Afghanistan, immediate scaling down of military actions, especially air strikes, and negotiations with militia groups aimed at bringing them into the political process.
- Withdrawal of foreign forces from Iraq paralleled by intensive diplomatic engagement in the region, including with Iran and Syria.
- Cessation of extraordinary rendition, prisoner abuse and detention without trial.
- Sustained commitment to a just settlement of the Palestine issue, recognising that this is at the root of much of the intense anti-western mood across the Middle East.

Commenting on the launch of the report, Paul Rogers said “Western countries simply have to face up to the dangerous mistakes of the past six years and recognise the need for new policies.”

He also warned of an even greater danger lying ahead – the risk of a war with Iran. “Going to war with Iran”, he said, “will make matters far worse, playing directly into the hands of extreme elements and adding greatly to the violence across the region. Whatever the problems with Iran, war should be avoided at all costs – the mistakes already made will be completely overshadowed by the consequences of a war with Iran.”

Notes to Editors

- 1) *Towards Sustainable Security: Alternatives Approaches to the War on Terroris* written by Paul Rogers and will be published on 8 October 2007, priced £15 (ISBN 978-0-9552846-3-2).
- 2) Advance electronic and hard copies of the report are available to editors and journalists. Please contact kayte.rath@oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk to request a copy.
- 3) Report author, Paul Rogers and ORG Executive Director, John Sloboda are available for interview. Paul Rogers will be available on an ISDN line between 6.30am and 9am on 8 October. He will be in London from 12.30pm onwards. John Sloboda can be available in London for TV interviews in the morning and for telephone interviews throughout the day. Please contact Kayte Rath at ORG on +44 (0)20 7549 0298 or +44 (0)7974 214 255 or kayte.rath@oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk or Paul Rogers on +44 (0)7867 982 061 or John Sloboda on +44 (0)7787 975 689.
- 4) 8 October, 6.00pm – 7.30pm: ORG will be holding a launch event with Paul Rogers and Philippa Drew (Former Director of Global Issues at the Foreign Office) to discuss the report. There will be an opportunity to ask questions. The meeting will be held at Development House, 56-64 Leonard Street, London EC2A 4LT. If you would like an invitation, please email kayte.rath@oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk
- 5) Paul Rogers is Professor of Peace Studies at the University of Bradford, and Global Security Consultant to Oxford Research Group.
- 6) Oxford Research Group (ORG) is an independent non-governmental organisation which seeks to bring about positive change on issues of national and international security. Established in 1982, it is now considered to be one of the UK's leading global security think tanks. ORG is a registered charity and uses a combination of innovative publications, expert roundtables, residential, consultations, and engagement with opinion formers and government, to develop and promote, sustainable global security strategies. In 2003, ORG was awarded the Niwano Peace Prize and in 2005 *The Independent* newspaper named ORG one of the top twenty think tanks in the UK. www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk

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