

- Front Page
- Greater China
- China Business
- South Asia
- Southeast Asia
- Japan
- Korea
- Middle East
- Central Asia
- World Economy
- Asian Economy
- Book Reviews
- Letters
- Forum

War and Terror

The Complete Spengler

The Complete Henry C K Liu

The Best of Pepe Escobar

# Middle East

Mar 31, 2006

## HOW TO LOSE THE WAR ON TERROR PART 1: Talking with the 'terrorists'

By Mark Perry and Alastair Crooke

Seventy-two hours before the Iraqi people voted on a new parliament, on December 12, 2005, we were told by a senior US administration official that "detailed data received by the White House" pointed to a "decisive win" for Ayad Allawi's Iraqi National List. "Allawi's victory turns the tables on the insurgents," this official said gleefully. "Sectarianism will be the big loser."

Allawi's prospective triumph was trumpeted repeatedly over the next two days by US news networks quoting administration officials. Weeks later, after the results of the election became



known, it was clear that the White House had overestimated Allawi's popularity: his party received just over 5% of the vote.

On the eve of the Palestinian parliamentary elections in late January, US-funded Palestinian polls suggested that while the mainstream Fatah movement had lost much of its popular support, Hamas was expected to win no more than "a third of the legislature's 132 seats". [1] On January 27, when the results of the polling were complete, it was clear not only that Fatah had been defeated, but that Hamas had swept into office in a landslide. A prominent front-page article in the Washington Post stated that US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice was "stunned" by the results, as the Hamas victory contradicted everything the administration of President George W Bush believed about Palestinian society. [2]

Just two weeks after the Hamas victory, on February 6, Lebanese Maronite leader Michel Aoun and Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah appeared together in Beirut to sign a memorandum of understanding between the Free Patriotic Movement and Hezbollah. The Aoun-Nasrallah agreement shook the State Department, which had worked for years to isolate Hezbollah.

The US had underscored its anti-Hezbollah strategy as recently as November 23, when Aoun met with State Department officials in Washington. The State Department blithely discounted the importance of the talks that Aoun's movement had been having with Hezbollah and reassured the press that Aoun would remain a staunch supporter of the United States' Lebanon policy. Certainly, it was believed, the leader of Lebanon's Maronite Christians would

Print this article

Email this article

Currency converter

Comment on this article: Go to

THE EDGE  
Your world, your forum

Tailor-made China Tours

- China Travel
- China Tours
- Yangtze River Cruise
- Great Wall of China
- China Airline
- Map of China

HotelTravel.com

- New delhi Hotels
- Maldives Hotels
- Sri lanka Hotels
- Manila Hotels
- Bali Hotels
- Korea Hotels

### RELATED ARTICLES

[It's the media, stupid](#)  
(Mar 24, '06)

[Wanted: A new Middle East initiative](#)  
(Feb 2, '06)

[The many faces of political Islam](#) (Jan 26, '06)

[What to believe in the 'war on terror'?](#)  
(Dec 21, '05)

[More power to Hezbollah](#) (Jun 10, '05)

TO SEE HOW AMERICANS ARE SUPPORTING OUR TROOPS VISIT  
AMERICASUPPORTSYOU.MIL

AMERICA SUPPORTS YOU

never tie the future of his own movement to that of a group allied with Damascus and Tehran.

In the aftermath of the Aoun-Nasrallah agreement, however, all of that changed: not only was Aoun's support for the US-led program against Syria in question, his agreement with Hezbollah meant that he was justifying Hezbollah's alleged kidnapping of Americans in Lebanon during the 1980s. [3] Overnight, it seemed, Aoun had gone from being a friend of the US to a man allied with terrorists.

Allawi's failure, Hamas' success, the Aoun-Nasrallah agreement - and the inability of the West to predict, shape or even understand these seminal events - have been variously interpreted: as a signal that the US intelligence community needs increased resources, that the West has not been doing enough to sell its "program" in the region, that the US and its allies have not been harsh enough in their condemnation of "radicalism", that the West has underestimated the amount of support its secular allies need, and (in the case of the Palestinian elections) that Hamas didn't really win at all - "Fatah lost."

We have reached a much more fundamental and alarming conclusion: Western governments are frighteningly out of touch with the principal political currents in the Middle East. The US and its allies overestimated Ayad Allawi's strength, were "stunned" by Hamas' win, and were surprised by the Aoun-Nasrallah agreement because they don't have a clue about what's really going on in the region.

But why?

With the exception of Israel (where a US and European appreciation of realities is critical to the formulation of policy), there are, inter alia, five political movements and governments in the Middle East of undeniable importance: Iran, Syria, Hezbollah, Hamas, and the Muslim Brotherhood. The governments of the West don't talk to any of them.

They do talk to the leaders of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and the Persian Gulf region; but the net result of most of these contacts is that Western governments are dependent for information about the region on a set of clients who, as often as not, are mere reflections of what Westerners want the Middle East to be, rather than what it actually is: Ayad Allawi, who was wrong when he reassured US officials that Iraq's voters would reject sectarianism, Fatah, which was wrong when it told us that their acceptance of US funding for their campaign would enhance their legitimacy among Palestinian voters, and Lebanese leader Saad Hariri, who was wrong when he told the US government that its program for isolating Hezbollah would work.

This clientism is not new; rather, it is a continuation of the misreading that led US and British officials to believe their soldiers would ride to Baghdad along flower-paved highways.

Once again, we're being "Chalabied". [4]

#### **First encounter**

In August 2004 - in an attempt to provide an opening to political Islam - a delegation including the writers of this article traveled to Beirut for discussions with the leaders of Hamas and Hezbollah. We were accompanied by Bobby Muller, a well-known American veterans advocate and a political activist recognized for his leadership of the anti-landmines campaign, and Dr Beverley Milton-Edwards, a professor at Queens College, Belfast, and an expert on Hamas.

Our purpose was to begin a process that, we hoped, would eventually persuade Western governments to recognize and open up to political movements whose political legitimacy was derived from a broad base of popular support in their own communities. We knew our meetings would be controversial: both Hamas and Hezbollah were on the US and European Union lists of proscribed terrorist organizations, both had either been accused of participating in or had actually participated in the targeting of civilians, and both had vowed continued enmity to Israel - which enjoyed the strong support of the United States and its European



[www.NostradamusOnline.com](http://www.NostradamusOnline.com)  
Ads by Goooooogle

**WIN A  
BMW 120i  
THIS  
WEEK**



allies.

Even so, the public statements of Hamas and Hezbollah reflected a desire to reinforce their political legitimacy by espousing elections - Hamas was then considering entering candidates in prospective Palestinian parliamentary elections, while Hezbollah was engaged in a national parliamentary campaign in which its candidates were gaining increasing support. Then too, and notwithstanding Bush administration statements linking both groups with al-Qaeda "and related groups", both had condemned the events of September 11, 2001, both had publicly stated their willingness to open contacts with the United States and Europe, and both had maintained that their conflict with Israel was legitimate and had nothing to do with the West.

Ours was one of the first organizations to seek such an opening, although various church organizations and one US think tank had engaged in discussions with the groups. But nothing had come of these meetings. In one case, during a conference in the Gulf region with officials of the Brookings Institute's Saban Center, the leaders of both Hezbollah and Hamas left the discussions in anger "after we were harangued about 'terrorism'".

We thought little could be gained by an exchange of accusations, so we worked to reassure our interlocutors that it was not our intention to engage in lectures, or to present ultimatums in advance of our discussions. As a further reassurance, we told the leaders of both movements that it was our intention to listen - and not just talk. We proposed that we not call our meetings a "dialogue" but "an exercise in mutual listening".

After several more private preliminary meetings, we convened two larger engagements, bringing a group that included former senior US and British diplomats and retired officers of Western intelligence services to Beirut in March and July last year. By then, our "exercise in mutual listening" had been expanded to include the Lebanese Muslim Brotherhood and Pakistan's Jamaat e-Islami. Even so, our focus remained on Hezbollah and Hamas.

We asked each group to begin the sessions by making a presentation on "where you see the Middle East now, how you view your role in it, and where you see it going". Our discussions were blunt, touching on nearly all the subjects sensitive to the groups and to the West: suicide bombings, attacks on Israel, the compatibility of democracy and Islamic law, philosophies of governance, the compatibility of Islamic economics and globalization, their views on al-Qaeda and radical Islam - as well as issues of particular interest to them.

We knew there would be difficult moments in our discussions, and our delegation came prepared: every delegate had served in the Middle East, often in conflict situations. All of our team, without exception, knew the history of the groups we would be speaking with and all were familiar with their personalities, leaders and political goals. Many had served in high-level positions - as ambassadors, military officers, or as senior officials in Western intelligence services.

While our meetings with the leaders of political Islam were not a secret, the meetings themselves were private. Because of the sensitivity of the topics we covered, a number of our delegates preferred that their participation not be highlighted and that statements made during the more informal sessions that occurred between sessions not be used at all. Finally, we confirmed that - unless explicitly agreed to by individual delegates - we could characterize what was said only in general terms.

This said, our delegations (the members of which varied through two meetings over a period of five months) included the original four Conflicts Forum delegates, plus three former officers of the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), a well-known television producer, a former member of the Mitchell Commission, [5] a former ambassador, two Middle East activists, and the head of a US foundation focused on the Middle East.

A number of delegates were anxious to confront our interlocutors - and particularly Hamas and Hezbollah - over their use of violence, a number of others were skeptical of any of the groups' claims for engagement with the US, and nearly all of our delegates had

suffered the loss of close friends in the region's conflicts. In no sense could it be said that any member of our delegation arrived in Beirut sympathetic to the groups to whom we were speaking. Sympathy was not what was required, but a hard-headed and unsentimental appreciation that US and other Western interests require that we look at facts as they are.

### **Hezbollah: 'Not a threat to America'**

Our Hezbollah interlocutor, Nawaf Mousawi (the chief of the group's foreign relations department), was pressed repeatedly to explain Hezbollah's reputed attacks on Americans during the 1980s in the midst of the Lebanese Civil War. He was closely questioned on his movement's role in the bombing of the US Marine Corps barracks in Beirut in 1983, on the torture and death of marine Colonel Rich Higgins, and his organization's ties to terrorist mastermind Imad Mugnyiah, who is thought to be the head of the movement's external security apparatus. Mousawi's response was forceful and blunt: "We have no American blood on our hands." He repeated this statement several times to the point of insistence.

When pressed again to explain Hezbollah's ties with Imad Mugnyiah, Mousawi refused to mention his name, shook his head, and confronted his questioners: "If we open every file on the civil war, then the Americans would not be able to set foot in the office of any political party in Lebanon.

"Everyone in the US administration knows we are not a terrorist organization or a threat to America," he said. "This is about politics and Israel's psychological headache of Hezbollah. We are not raising our children to hate America. Israel is our enemy; but not the Jewish people - this is not a religious war against the Jews. Our war is against occupation - that is it."

In later, private, discussions with a number of our delegates, Mousawi repeated his claim that Hezbollah was not affiliated with Mugnyiah and that the organization "does not have American blood on our hands".

The exchange with Mousawi, and his insistence and unwavering tone, spurred several of our delegates to return to the US to reinvestigate the period of the Lebanese Civil War. Former and current US officials were closely questioned on the source of their information on Hezbollah activities in the 1980s and on the organization's ties to Mugnyiah.

The exchanges in Washington cast doubt on Mugnyiah's current ties to the organization and on the movement's role during the era of hostage-taking in the early 1980s. In short, these reports suggested that information on Hezbollah's participation in past terrorist actions against US institutions and individuals may well have been based on informants with an ax to grind. Charges of Hezbollah's responsibility for anti-American terrorism may well have been reported to US intelligence services to undermine Hezbollah's growing influence in South Lebanon at the expense of other parties.

But even if these past incidents ("the baggage they bring to the table", in the words of one delegate) were somehow to be cleared up, there is little hope for a direct US-Hezbollah engagement. "This will take a lot of time and a lot of work. It won't happen easily and it won't happen fast - and it might not happen at all," a former CIA officer said in the wake of our discussions. "There is just too much distrust."

Hezbollah leaders maintained during the course of our discussions that their actions were and are justified and can be defended as legitimate resistance. "We do not target civilians," Mousawi said in our March 2005 meetings. "Even when Israel was occupying southern Lebanon we were absolutely diligent in making certain that our actions did not endanger Israeli civilians, and we even stopped operations where Israeli families of military personnel would have been endangered by our actions. You cannot say the same for Israel."

Hezbollah's claims that its use of arms was simply a matter of self-defense was met with widespread skepticism, as was its attempt to play down its support for Syria and Iran and its

dependence on both for political and (in the case of Iran) financial support. Despite this, Mousawi emphasized the Lebanese character of his movement: "We are Lebanese," he said. "We were born here. We will die here. We did not come from somewhere else."

Mousawi was adamant in responding to US demands that the movement disarm and renounce violence. "I believe that to have a fruitful policy in the region Israel must be confronted," he said.

"Political settlement demands equity of power. Israel holds all the cards. So why is there a demand for our surrender? As far as we are concerned it is not in anyone's interest, including that of the US, to leave the Arabs weak. Also in the past four years there has been stability in Lebanon and even on the border to a certain extent. Hezbollah's arms have delivered this."

But perhaps Mousawi's most interesting, and most detailed, presentation was on Hezbollah's view of its political role in Lebanon, then besieged both by demonstrations marking the assassination of Rafiq Hariri and an intense campaign for seats in the Lebanese parliament. "We are prepared to work hard to maintain Muslim unity and avoid *fitna* [division]. We wish to avoid turning the protests and demonstrations into a sectarian division, which is why we are prepared to make such overtures."

In fact, Hezbollah and Maronite Michel Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement were then, in March 2005, engaged in a delicate series of private exchanges on forging a national consensus - one that both parties vowed would eventually include Saad Hariri's Sunni following (the "Future Bloc") and Walid Jumblaat's Druse party. The results of these first, tentative, exchanges have now become public, with the leaders all of Lebanon's major sectarian political groups meeting in an attempt to forge a common understanding.

After the end of the dialogue session that concluded in early March last year, the leaders of the various movements and factions agreed to the disarmament of Palestinian militias operating outside of Lebanon's Palestinian refugee camps and agreed that relations with Syria would be conducted on "mutual understanding and non-interference". The February 2006 Maronite-Hezbollah understanding formed the foundation of these talks, though a full agreement on all the issues facing Lebanon has proved elusive. After a third round of talks, which concluded this March 20, two difficult political questions remain unresolved: the status of Hezbollah's arms and the future of Lebanon's presidency, which is currently in the hands of Emile Lahoud, who is viewed as pro-Syrian.

At our delegation's second meeting, last July, Nawaf Mousawi's personal political capabilities were on full display - as he presented a seat-by-seat analysis of the parliamentary election, Hezbollah's success in winning a large portion of the contested seats, and the movement's political maneuvers to build political alliances across sectarian lines. Mousawi's impressively detailed disquisition, his obvious openness to any initiative by the United States to establish a serious relationship, and his repeated claims that Hezbollah is "first, a Lebanese party" were stated with such conviction that a number of our delegation's most skeptical members were convinced that Hezbollah "is not that interested in the Syrians remaining in Lebanon. Rather, their mass demonstrations of solidarity with Syria seemed more a parting wave of thanks before they set about the tricky process of defining their own autonomy, and balancing the elements in the complex political process."

Others were not so sure: "It is going to be difficult, if not impossible, for the United States to talk to a group that is so outwardly allied to Iran," one of the participants reflected.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Mousawi's presentation reflected his personal and his movement's pessimistic views on the region's future and on the US campaign against terrorism. Most prominently, while he was "quite careful and even cagey" (in the words of one delegate) on his movement's ties with Iran, he was less so on Hezbollah's vulnerabilities to "the Khawarij trend". Noting that prominent "Salafist and *takfiri* websites" had "actually marked Hezbollah leaders for assassination", Mousawi said these "jihadist movements", including al-Qaeda, "actually represent a

greater threat to my people and to the Palestinian population than they do to Western interests. [6] This is the real danger, and the United States needs to recognize it."

The reason for such targeting, Mousawi explained, is that "the jihadists think we are too moderate, too willing to participate in democratic processes - which they view as just another colonialist plot promoted by the Americans to dominate our region".

### **Hamas: A warning to the West**

The meetings with Hamas evinced even greater interest among our delegates than those with Hezbollah, in large part because - as the Hamas leaders with whom we met readily admitted - US and European officials had shunned any contacts with the movement after the start of the second intifada. The Hamas leaders with whom we spoke claimed not to have met an American "since the late 1990s", while another said that his last meeting with an American had been in 1996.

Our primary contact viewed our meetings as "a chance to clear up misconceptions about who we are and what we want". As in the case of our meeting with Hezbollah, the exchanges were blunt and focused on areas of strong disagreement over the conduct of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Hamas leadership present for our first meeting in Beirut, which included Sami Khater, Musa Abu Marzouk and Usamah Hamdan, began the exchange with a straightforward statement on Hamas' political beliefs and goals. "We will continue the struggle to provide national unity, to stop Israeli aggression, we will participate in Palestinian elections, we will establish the framework for rebuilding the PLO [Palestine Liberation Organization] to represent all Palestinians, we will offer a truce with Israel, and we will continue our work to make certain that Israel abandons the West Bank, Gaza and Jerusalem. We do not endorse murder, but we do support resistance."

Hamas' long period of targeting Israeli civilians in a series of bloody bombings of cafes and buses during the second intifada engendered the most detailed exchange during our first engagement in March 2005. Initially, Hamas leaders defended their actions by citing their right to lawful resistance and the religious foundation for their decision to target civilians. But as the discussion progressed, the Hamas leaders propounded an increasingly assertive defense of their tactics, noting at one point that their decision was not made lightly or without reflection and that it was only undertaken after it became clear that Israel refused to reciprocate a Hamas offer to end the targeting of civilians.

"We are against targeting civilians," Mousa Abu Marzouk said. "And we did not do so until 1994 - after the Hebron Mosque massacre [of settler Baruch Goldstein]. And they built a shrine to him in Hebron. And at that point, since we were never attacked in that way before, we determined that Israelis kill civilians. But no one asks about Palestinian civilians. In the last five years, 347 Palestinian civilians have been killed. The numbers you see are exactly reversed for Israeli and Palestinian deaths. What about the targeting of civilians who are Palestinian? And the homes and the farms of Palestinians that are destroyed? The Israelis have rejected our offer, and we have made the offer, that both sides should stop killing civilians. But they rejected that offer."

When pressed on their targeting of civilians, Hamas leaders seemed to contradict their earlier statements by expressing their conviction that there is no distinction between Israeli civilians and soldiers. "Every Israeli is a soldier," one of them said. "Settlers are armed."

When asked whether, in their view, terrorism "worked", they answered that it served to unite their people and to gain support for their political program. This claim was not a surprise: Hamas began their bombing campaign not simply as a means of fighting what they viewed as Israeli aggression, but to seize the political initiative from Fatah. (In fact, Hamas' radicalism in the first days and months of the second intifada forced Fatah leaders to follow the Hamas example, and adopt suicide bombing as a tactic.) "Their description of terrorism," one of the delegates noted, "convinced me that we are not dealing with genetically encoded monsters, but hard-headed - albeit brutal - political actors who

carefully choose their tactics and attempt to manage the effects of their actions."

At the time of our first exchange with Hamas, there had been no suicide bombings in Israel since August 2004. Hamas leaders signaled that this unofficial calm would be maintained, so long as the calm was reciprocated by Israel. Even so, Hamas leaders said that they retained the right to respond to "Israeli aggression" just as (as they pointed out) Israel said that it had the right to continue targeting Palestinians it viewed as ticking bombs.

"It wasn't so easy losing our founders, our people, our leaders, and our friends," one of their leaders said. "When all channels are closed to us, we use violence. We don't have jets, we don't have tanks. So we made the decision. It is one of the ways we resist, it is not the only way."

In July, with the unofficial period of calm nearing the one-year mark, Hamas officials reiterated their commitment to "maintaining a *hudna* [truce] with Israel, even though Israel does not respond and continues to target out leaders".

In both meetings, Hamas officials stridently objected to US proscriptions against any contact between American and Hamas officials, arguing that "we didn't wage war on the US, even verbally. We have never expressed a link with Osama bin Laden and we don't support him."

Usamah Hamdan was outspoken in his criticism of the US decision to add Hamas to the State Department's list of proscribed organizations: "We knew it was going to happen and in 1996 we tried to communicate with [then secretary of state] Madeleine Albright to find a way to object - to talk with her about the decision," he remembered. "We were told that she was unavailable to talk with us and that we should call back. We were then put on the list and we made our second call, and we were told, 'We're sorry, but secretary Albright doesn't talk to terrorists.'"

Hamas leaders were also particularly intent on promoting their decision to participate in the Palestinian Authority's scheduled parliamentary elections - even after they were postponed from last July until this March. At times, their leaders even seemed prescient, focusing on their organizational skills, their ability to appeal to a broad base of Palestinians, and their continuing commitment to provide constituent services, all of which they cited as evidence for their belief that they would likely win a majority in the Palestinian parliament. [7]

"The Palestinians decide their leaders and the international community must accept that," one of them noted in March 2005. "And when we win those elections it will be a great problems for the Americans, I am sure. Is the international community going to ignore the results of the elections?"

Hamas' leaders also denied that they would impose strict Islamic forms on Palestinian social life, using the Koran as an example of "respecting diversity" among peoples, a claim they have repeated in the wake of their recent parliamentary victory.

"Islam is comprehensive and we understand that, but the Palestinian people are diverse," one of their leaders said last March. "The people will decide who will lead them and what kind of government they will have and we must respect those difference and will respect those differences."

Usamah Hamdan gave a more detailed answer during our July meetings, acknowledging Western fears about what impact the election of an Islamist party would have on an otherwise secular society: "There is a fear that is based on historical baggage," he said, "that Hamas will be the next Taliban. We are not. We have always insisted that our people should be allowed to make choices - not just on who to vote for, but on how to live. We do not recruiting forcibly, but by persuasion. For us, Islam is the answer, but that is not true for everyone. We believe that there should be the launch of a democratic process in the whole region."

Once again (as was the case with Hezbollah), Hamas leaders were outspoken in their condemnation of America's "inability to differentiate" between Islamist movements, of the United States'

and Europe's willingness to list Hamas as a "terrorist" organization - alongside al-Qaeda.

One Hamas leader was explicit in setting out the differences and in explaining how the West's lack of sophistication and political nuance could be fatal for America's standing in the region. "We have been warned by the Salafists that what we are doing in accepting democracy is playing into our enemy's hands," this leader said.

"The message was a warning. One of them, I remember, said to me: 'Listen, my brother, we wish you well in your elections. But you should know that whether you win or lose, the Americans will never, ever accept you are equal partners. And you will learn this. And when you do, you will come back to us, and together we will make a beginning. And together we will finish them here. Together we will burn it. That is the only solution. Burn it. And we will begin in Mecca and Medina.'"

#### **Notes**

1. "Palestinians' risky elections", Washington, Post, Editorial, January 22.
2. "Hamas sweeps Palestinian elections, complicating peace efforts in Mideast", Scott Wilson, Washington Post, January 27.
3. US assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs David Welch played down the Aoun-Nasrallah agreement during a press conference on February 9, saying that the State Department view was that "this is a discussion between two political currents and not a governmental discussion". Welch was then asked: "Now, obliquely, you referred to somebody justifying taking American hostages. You're talking about Aoun? Can you say that on the record?" To which Welch responded: "Yes."
4. Ahmad Chalabi was an Iraqi exile who fed the US government "intelligence" about the Saddam Hussein regime ahead of the US invasion, much of which turned out to be wrong or self-serving. See [Chalabi: From White House to dog house](#), May 22, 2004.
5. The Mitchell Commission, chaired by former US senator George Mitchell, was convened by then US president Bill Clinton to investigate the causes of the "second intifada", the violence in Israel and Palestine that followed the visit by Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem in September 2000.
6. The Khawarij - or Kharijites - were separatists from the army of Ali ibn Abi Talib, the son-in-law and cousin of Mohammed. Ibn Muljam, a Kharijite, is blamed for his murder. The Kharijites believe that being a Muslim is equivalent to salvation, that there is no salvation for sin, that all non-Kharijites are sinners, that all sinners are apostates, and that all apostates should be put to death. *Takfir*s are Muslims who view all Westerners as *kafir*s (infidels).
7. Claims from American Hamas experts that the result of this month's parliamentary vote was as much of a surprise to Hamas as it was to the US are simply wrong. In more recent meetings (held in Beirut in the immediate aftermath of the parliamentary vote), Hamas leaders confirmed, however, that they purposely played down their expectations of a clear parliamentary victory over fears that the US and Israel would press Palestinian President Abu Mazen to cancel the elections until Fatah could gain more strength.

#### ***Tomorrow: Handing victory to the extremists***

**Alastair Crooke** and **Mark Perry** are the co-directors of [Conflicts Forum](#), a London-based group dedicated to providing an opening to political Islam. Crooke is the former Middle East adviser to European Union High Representative Javier Solana and served as a staff member of the Mitchell Commission investigating the causes of the second intifada. Perry is a Washington, DC-based political consultant, author of six books on US history, and a former personal adviser to Yasser Arafat.

Please contact us about [sales, syndication](#) and [republishing](#) .)

Ads by Goooooogle

[Iraq Dinars](#)

Buy Today-Riches Down the Road Investment of \$1 dollar \$1471

Dinar

[www.iraqdinars.org](http://www.iraqdinars.org)

[Business Centric Security](#)

Intelligent business focused solutions to security issues

[www.christianthomasgroup.com](http://www.christianthomasgroup.com)

[Amazing Images from Iraq](#)

Gallery of Iraq images Check out these photos now!

[www.dotdragon.com](http://www.dotdragon.com)

**All material on this website is copyright and may not be republished in any form without written permission.**

© Copyright 1999 - 2006 Asia Times Online Ltd.

**Head Office:** Rm 202, Hau Fook Mansion, No. 8 Hau Fook St., Kowloon, Hong Kong

**Thailand Bureau:** 11/13 Petchkasem Road, Hua Hin, Prachuab Kirikhan, Thailand 77110