

Vietnam in the Desert: Question Won't Go Away

by Michele Steinberg

"The Vietnamese people—in fact, a lot of them—were quite sympathetic to the insurgents, and they provided a base of support which we couldn't overcome. We could always defeat the guerrilla forces in the field no matter how big they got . . . but the problem was because there was this base of support and resentment against foreign occupiers—neocolonialists, whatever they thought we were—in the population, no matter how many of these guys we killed in the field, there were always more. The population of Vietnam grew every year, both North and South, throughout the war . . . so no matter how many people you captured, killed or dragged away, there were always more of them.

"So the question really is, I think, in Iraq . . . who is on the other side? Now, if in fact the situation is as the Administration says, that this is a handful of Saddamist holdouts and the soreheads are mad because they're lost their retire[ment] pay . . . [or] a fairly small group of foreign Islamic terrorists who have come in the country, then I would predict that our effective counter-guerrilla operations and civic action . . . will in fact erode this base of support and the problem will disappear before next Summer. . . . If, on the other hand, what we're fighting here is a situation in which a fairly large number of Sunni Arabs—which is what we're talking about right now—in the population, at least passively support the guerrilla fighters, on the basis of their resentment and dislike of us and what we're doing in their country; and they continue to support them, then this situation will not clear up and it will go on and on and on."

—W. Patrick Lang, Former Defense Intelligence Officer, Middle East, to Middle East Policy Council, Oct. 3

"Speaking of the policy of eliminating terrorists through assassination or other means, the former speaker of the Israeli Knesset, Avraham Burg, said last week—and I'll quote him—'We could kill a thousand ringleaders a day, and nothing will be solved, because other leaders come up from below, from the wells of hatred and anger, from the infrastructures of injustice.' So if we are really serious about stopping terrorism, and I'm sure we are, in bringing security for Israel and justice for the Palestinians, we need to turn back to bold, active mediation. No single American policy in my view would be more effective in turning the tide toward sympathy for the United States, the kind of sympathy and support we must have,

if we're going to effectively deal with terrorism."

—Philip C. Wilcox, Jr., Former Ambassador, Middle East specialist, to Middle East Policy Council, Oct. 3

The announcement by the White House on Oct. 6 of a major reorganization, that set up an "Iraqi Stabilization Group" in the National Security Council to replace the chicken-hawk imperialists at the Pentagon who pushed the Iraq war, was no surprise. Democratic Party Presidential pre-candidate Lyndon LaRouche had warned Congress that the neo-conservative utopians inside the Administration were out for a Clash of Civilizations war in Iraq that would be "a fuse" for global thermonuclear war. While these utopians were congratulating each other in advance on an Iraq war "cakewalk," LaRouche called for Vice President Dick Cheney, the true author of the "preventive war" doctrine, released in September 2002, to be impeached. And, while the utopians were congratulating themselves for winning the war, LaRouche warned that Iraq was "Vietnam in the desert." This week has seen the confirmation of LaRouche's warnings. Administration officials are under criminal investigation by the Justice Department for leaking classified information as revenge against critics of the Iraq war policy; and Iraq is a disaster for the United States and for the civilized world.

The bloodletting in Iraq took little notice of the shakeup in Washington which created the new occupation task forces. On Oct. 9-10, thirteen Americans and coalition allies were killed in Iraq. The violence included a suicide bombing of a Baghdad police station, where nine people were killed; an ambush of U.S. troops that killed one soldier; and the murder of a Spanish government intelligence official, shot by gunmen as he answered the door at his residence. The police station bombing occurred in Baghdad's main Shi'ite neighborhood, Sadr City, and the *Gulf Daily News* reported that "38 people were wounded in the blast, which sent bodies flying on to the roof of the police station." Then—contradicting the Administration's assertion that "only" Sunni holdouts of the Saddam Hussein regime are involved in resistance—a shootout between members of a Shi'ite militia and American troops overnight on Oct. 10, left one militiaman dead and two others wounded in the Sadr City area. On the morning of Oct. 11, two more U.S. soldiers were killed in an attack in the same Shi'ite neighborhood of Baghdad.

While Bush Administration officials, and their neo-con "Amen Chorus" shriek in anger whenever an analogy is made to the Vietnam War, it is a comparison that will not go away. And some of the top U.S. experts on the Middle East are taking the neo-cons to task, and going public about the waste, hostility, despair, and danger created by "Viceroy" Paul Bremer's occupation.

Pentagon-Operated Theme Park

On Oct. 3, in a hearing room on Capitol Hill, the tip of the iceberg of the Iraq failure was revealed. Chas. Freeman,

President of the Middle East Policy Council (MEPC), told a standing-room-only audience of Congressional aides, diplomats, intelligence analysts, and military that, despite the successful “regime removal” in Iraq, there was no regime, and “we have not repaired the rifts with our allies around the world and with Iraq’s neighbors over our presence in Iraq. We have not restored basic services in Iraq, and we now find ourselves being shot at because we didn’t perform—we didn’t restore basic services. And because we’re being shot, we can’t restore basic services. Bechtel, which was to survey and set priorities, remains in the Kuwait Sheraton . . . and a lot of work that should have been done, clearly has slipped.”

Freeman added, “The UN has withdrawn to Jordan because of security concerns. An Oct. 23 conference in Madrid to pledge money for the reconstruction of Iraq has so far drawn a contribution of 200 million euros—\$234 million—from the European Union, and very little else.” Some now call Iraq, he noted, a “badly-managed, Pentagon-operated theme park.”

A day earlier, the American commander in Iraq, Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, had acknowledged the signs that the Iraqi resistance is building up far-reaching command structures. Sanchez told a news conference that the resistance is “a little bit more lethal, little bit more complex, little bit more sophisticated, and in some cases, a little bit more tenacious. We should not be surprised if one of these days we wake up to find there’s been a major firefight or a major terrorist attack,” he warned. “We are still fighting.” General Sanchez said three to six soldiers were being killed each week, and about 40 wounded.

In sharp contrast to the glib statements coming out of senior Pentagon civilians, including Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and his Deputy Paul Wolfowitz, Sanchez said there was increasing coordination in attacks by an enemy often “embedded in the population. . . . It’s clear that there’s local command-and-control that’s operating. We are still not seeing national command-and-control structures, and the regional structures—there are some indications that that’s beginning to evolve.”

On Sept. 30, Jessica Mathews, President of the Carnegie Endowment, who had just returned from a Defense Department-sponsored trip to Iraq, delivered a similar message at a Carnegie forum: There is no military solution for Iraq. More troops will not help, she stated, noting that serious mistakes were made in the de-Ba’athification, and the dismantling of the Iraqi Army. Mathews reported that the number of ambushes on convoys has increased, the daily attacks against coalition forces have increased by 40%, and there is an influx of foreigners joining the attacks. In addition, the 35,000 Iraqi police that have been trained are not qualified. Regarding “regime change,” Mathews said that even though one-third of the “55 Deck of Cards” (wanted posters of the top figures in Saddam Hussein’s government) have been arrested, no significant intelligence has been gained. If the UN were to

take over, she believes, there is only a 50% chance that the situation will get better.

‘Vietnam’ Heard Even at AEI

Even at the neo-con citadel, the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), on Oct. 6, the specter of Vietnam was raised—not by the resident chicken-hawks led by keynote speaker William Kristol, but by Carlisle Army War College professor Steven Metz. Metz said that Iraq today is in the situation of Vietnam in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Continued neglect of the Iraqi people by the U.S. in Iraq would further build the resistance, and it would become a full-scale nationalist insurgency the United States will be unable to defeat. His point was not welcomed by Kristol and his neo-con sidekick, Reuel Marc Gerecht, who were on the defensive for delivering the Cheney/Libby/Wolfowitz line—perhaps the worst military strategy in American history. Metz warned that the United States will have to remain in Iraq for several years, and faces a “21st-Century insurgency,” more like the Intifada or Northern Ireland, than paper counterinsurgency exercises.

The MEPC forum, by contrast, was one of the most competent “lessons learned” review of the Iraq war available. Panelists and members of the audience raised questions “verbotten” in the Cheney-dictated group-think that rules the Bush “43” Administration.

The Iraq war is not a “success” in the war against terrorism, but rather, a “breeding ground for terrorism that we hadn’t anticipated,” in the words of panelist Philip Wilcox. In response to *EIR*’s question challenging the overall preventive war doctrine, Chas. Freeman added, “If you assert a right to act outside the rule of law, or without regard to the institutions like the United Nations that administer the rule of law; and . . . if you insist on the right to conduct lynchings, when courts like the Security Council refuse to find in your favor on issues, then you fundamentally undercut your ability to combat terrorism.” The military situation was just “transmuted into a low-intensity conflict,” he stated.

Several speakers at the MEPC meeting condemned the Administration’s reconstruction double-talk: there are no services, no paychecks, no jobs, and no security. The \$87 billion requested by President Bush was just a down payment, and panelists feared that when the “next \$87 billion” is requested during the election season, the United States might just “declare democracy,” and cut and run.

A “compromise” suggestion, already floating around Congress, that the \$20 billion for reconstruction be a *loan*, was quickly demolished by Freeman, who is both a former diplomat in the Middle East and a businessman. His blunt truth: “There is no one to sign a loan” in Iraq—there is no government, and an occupation power is *not* authorized to sign loans.

Freeman, panelist Patrick Lang, and others voiced frustration and impatience, over the platitudes—if not lies—from



"Several more \$20 billions" will be required, while the Iraqi resistance grows stronger as the population turns against the U.S.-British occupation, Mideast experts said.

the neo-con war planners about the Iraqi economy. Freeman pointed out that the UN Development Program was "on the ground everywhere. . . reporting exactly how bad it was. . . ." He also pointed out that former Secretary of State Madeline Albright had defended the "death of a million Iraqis from sanctions" as necessary to "make a point." Lang demolished the analogy—very popular with Administration spokesmen—to the post-World War II reconstruction of Germany. His father, Lang noted, had trained for that job for a year and a half before the Allies even invaded France. The U.S. occupation knew the language, and worked with the Germans to rebuild their own country. From the discussion, it was clear that the neo-con war party has only addressed what they wanted to address, and only discussed what they planned on manipulating the American people into believing.

The utopian arguments on "democracy" were the most easily demolished. Panelist Amy Hawthorne, from the Carnegie Endowment, pointed out that the Administration is schizophrenic about "democracy," because they know that the democratic "majority" may turn *against* the U.S. occupation. A Middle East journalist hit the nail on the head, pointing out that Iraq already once *had* a constitution imposed from the outside—by the British in 1926. It ultimately led to dictatorship, said Mutapha Malik, where the most destabilizing factor in Iraq was British imperial hegemony—whether the British troops were there or not. "Why should they love us more than they loved the British?" he asked.

This picture is not a mystery to the U.S. military—which went up against Wolfowitz over the war plans—nor to the retired Middle East hands who know something about Iraq, the Arabic language, and the history of the region. But it was irrelevant to Cheney's neo-cons, led by Lewis "Scooter" Libby, who accompanied the Veep to CIA headquarters to

demand reworks of intelligence reports to exaggerate the threats from Iraq; and to Wolfowitz, who has been hawking an Iraq war plan since 1998, for a victory "on the cheap," with about 75,000 troops, and a heavy reliance on Ahmed Chalabi's Iraqi National Congress. That Wolfowitz plan was derided, appropriately, in a 1999 *Foreign Affairs* article, as a "Bay of Pigs."

Unfortunately, however, one of the authors of that piece, Ken Pollack, now at the Brookings Institute, had a "Damascus Road" conversion to the neo-con viewpoint. At the MEPC, panelist Pollack argued that the preventive war against Iraq was necessary—boasting of his own role in justifying it (egos are not in short supply in the neo-con camp). But, Pollack admitted that it would take several tranches of \$20 billion "reconstruction" funds (larger than the entire pre-war Iraqi GDP of \$18 billion, under Saddam Hussein, when there were both electricity and jobs). If supplied, the United States "might" even win, he suggested.

***EIR* Names Names**

The unique role of LaRouche's *EIR* in this debate has been to debunk the idea the Iraq mess is a snafu; rather, it was deliberate. And the best remedy for U.S. patriots, is to admit it. That is why Congressional hearings—such as the Ollie North, Iran-Contra hearings—are necessary.

At the Carnegie Forum Sept. 30, when Lawrence K. Freeman of *EIR* raised the question of the role of Cheney and his former Gulf War aides, Wolfowitz and Libby, Carnegie Endowment specialist Joseph Cirincione, who had been with Mathews on the trip to Iraq, said that the only thing more rapid than the rise of the neo-cons, was how quickly their policies are failing. Cirincione said that all the intelligence used by the White House, was based on the National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) influenced by Cheney and Libby. Cirincione voiced his doubts that the Pentagon's Chief Weapons Inspector David Kay's recent report concerning weapons of mass destruction (WMD) would ever be made public, because it points to conclusions opposite to those sought by the White House.

And, at AEI, Kristol turned beet-red when Jeffrey Steinberg of *EIR* cited military professionals such as Gen. Anthony Zinni (USMC-Ret), who had warned before the war, about another Vietnam. Metz responded that the three main axiomatic assumptions of the Bush Administration, going into the Iraq war, had all proven wrong: that the U.S. troops would be greeted as "liberators"; that the Iraqi army and police would rapidly switch sides and join the American forces, and would be doing most of the peacekeeping and street patrols; and that the international community would forgive the United States, and flood Iraq with reconstruction funds.

These examples are the mere *beginning* of "lessons learned." The Bush Administration should clean house, as LaRouche has suggested, and Congress should act.