

'The Greatest Strategic Disaster in U.S. History'

by Michele Steinberg

Eyewitness reports from U.S. soldiers returning from Iraq, as well as from exiled Iraqis who have just visited Baghdad after many years, establish, without question, that the United States must immediately initiate the process to leave Iraq now—while such an exit is still possible. The only question remaining, one retired Special Forces officer told this news service, is whether the United States can “walk out of Iraq,” or whether it has to “fight its way out.” The U.S. occupation has destroyed the nation of Iraq, and has so botched the drafting of a so-called “constitution,” that one retired Army officer and specialist on Iraq, told *EIR*, that the United States had better hope that the constitution is voted down, so that there is another chance to draft a new one. The present constitution is so divisive, and punishing toward the Sunnis, that the result will be civil war. These officers are only two of a number of high-ranking officers, both British and American, who say the Iraq War has not only become a quagmire, but that the Bush Administration has already *lost* the war.

Since the end of September, Washington has been the scene of powerful interventions by top military and retired military figures, saying it is necessary to force the White House to withdraw. At the same time, polls show George W. Bush's Iraq War policy with only a 33% approval rating. And, an increasing number of Republican members of the Congress and the Senate are breaking with the White House on that war policy. In the House of Representatives, the number of Republican co-sponsors of legislation to force Bush to draw up a withdrawal policy, is now five, out of a total of 60 co-sponsors. The Republicans are: Walter Jones (N.C.) and Ron Paul (Tex.), who were both original co-sponsors, and Jim Leach (Ia.), Wayne Gilchrist (Md.), and John Duncan (Tenn.). In the Senate, the backlash against the Iraq policy was reflected in the landslide vote of 90-9, to ban the U.S. use of torture on military prisoners, and put the treatment of these prisoners under international law (see article, p. 28).

But, it appears that the more the American population, and the President's own Republican Party, weigh in against the war, the more fanatical are the warmongering speeches given by President Bush and Vice President Cheney, as demonstrated in their respective speeches on Oct. 6 and Oct. 5. The Administration's fanaticism, including Bush's Oct. 6 call for further wars against Syria and Iran, makes the intervention by the military against the Iraq War all the more urgent.

'Why Not Cut and Run?'

On Sept. 28, retired Lt. Gen. William Odom, the ex-head of the National Security Agency (NSA), joined Rep. Walter Jones (R-N.C.), Rep. Neil Abercrombie (D-Hi.), and other members of the House of Representatives, at a news conference in Washington, to support their *bipartisan* legislation to withdraw from Iraq. Odom not only supported the legislation; he called the invasion of Iraq “the greatest strategic disaster in United States history.” Odom added, “We need a broad coalition of Europeans and our allies in Asia to put things in order. . . . We cannot do that as long as we are in Iraq. The precondition for a serious and effective strategic engagement to stabilize this region requires withdrawal and admittance to others that we may have made an error.”

But that was not all. On Oct. 3, General Odom wrote an article titled, “What's Wrong With Cutting and Running?” (See www.Antiwar.com.) “If I were a journalist,” he wrote, “I would list all the arguments that you hear against pulling U.S. troops out of Iraq, the horrible things that people say would happen, and then ask: Aren't they happening already? Would a pullout really make things worse? Maybe it would make things better.” Odom refutes in a devastating way, the arguments that the Administration usually puts forth as its only reason for “staying the course.” For example: Leaving would “risk civil war,” and would “encourage terrorists.”

But, Odom says, there already *is* a civil war. “Iraqis are already fighting Iraqis. Insurgents have killed far more Iraqis than Americans. That's civil war. We created the civil war when we invaded; we can't prevent a civil war by staying.

“For those who really worry about destabilizing the region,” Odom adds, “the sensible policy is not to stay the course in Iraq. It is rapid withdrawal, reestablishing strong relations with our allies in Europe, showing confidence in the UN Security Council, and trying to knit together a large coalition including the major states of Europe, Japan, South Korea, China, and India to back a strategy for stabilizing the area from the eastern Mediterranean to Afghanistan and Pakistan. Until the United States withdraws from Iraq and admits its strategic error, no such coalition can be formed.

“Those who fear leaving a mess are actually helping make things worse. . . .”

There is a similar groundswell against the Iraq War, in Britain. On Oct. 2, the London *Sunday Telegraph* published a chilling article, citing British military historian Col. Tim Collins (ret.), who says that British forces have been decisively defeated in southern Iraq, and may soon be chased across the border into Iran.

Collins, described in the article as a respected officer



Gen. William Odom (ret.)

whose “eve of battle address during the Iraq war has been praised as among the greatest in British military history,” warned that the “incompetence and lack of direction” of the political leadership has created a situation in which “the danger is that we could face defeat in the field. We could be overwhelmed. The Army could be chased over the border into Iran.” Asked how humiliating that would be for Britain, he answered, “It would be historic.” He called on Prime Minister Tony Blair to “fall on his sword” for presiding over a “right rollicking cock-up.”

These two military leaders are just the latest voices of warning. On Sept. 15, at an informal hearing called by Rep. Lynne Woolsey (D-Calif.), Gen. Joseph Hoar (USMC-ret.), and former Sen. Max Cleland (D-Ga.), a decorated Vietnam War vet, testified that not only is the situation in Iraq getting worse and worse, but the Army itself is “broken,” and the United States is going bankrupt, paying for the no-win war. After the four-hour hearing, in which about 30 members of Congress questioned Hoar, Cleland, and other expert witnesses, the Administration could be likened to Hitler in the bunker in the early part of 1945, when World War II was lost for the Nazis, but Hitler dreamed up ever wilder expansions of the war.

U.S. Creates Failed State

The reality of what is happening in Iraq is that the U.S. and U.K. forces have *already* been defeated. From a military standpoint, it is already a hopeless situation. *EIR*’s reports from a number of highly qualified military sources match precisely what Colonel Collins told the *Sunday Telegraph*. The situation in Iraq cannot be salvaged, so long as American and British forces remain there.

The main exit routes out of Iraq—to Jordan and Kuwait—will soon be totally in the hands of insurgents. We may soon be faced with the need to literally shoot our way out of the country. Already there are reports, in western Iraq, of Shi’ite atrocities against Sunni villages. There is no longer any area where the U.S. military is in control. The British have withdrawn from Basra, the largest city in the south, and cannot control the region. Even worse, there is a likelihood, with the continuing threats by Cheney to attack Iran, that the Iraqi Shi’ites will launch their own insurgency against the United States, in the event of a U.S. and/or Israeli attack on Shi’ite Iran.

It is already an ugly civil war. U.S. Marines who recently returned from Anbar province in Western Iraq, say that the U.S. is facing a “widespread, hard-core, nationalist insurgency,” which should be understood as analogous to the French resistance to the Nazi occupation. Eventually, these returning Marines warned, the entire population opposed the Nazis, and that is what is happening now in Iraq. The hatred of the U.S. occupation is also fueled by revenge killings being carried out by Shi’a troops accompanying the U.S. forces. These Shi’a forces are not under U.S. military “fire control,”

and have been killing Sunnis in their villages, as revenge for the Sunni massacres of Shi’ites during the failed, U.S.-backed Shi’a uprising under President George H.W. Bush.

The brutality of the civil war—with the U.S. clearly involved in allowing pro-occupation gangs to carry out mass murders—is beginning to find its way into media reports. On Oct. 5, the website TomPaine.com noted recent reports by CBS News and the *Chicago Tribune*, about Iraqi Shi’ite commandos, working for the new Iraq government, who have targeted Sunnis, terrorizing families in the middle of the night, and killing Sunni men on a mass scale. Much better known, and reported sensationally in the Western media, are the actions claimed by the al-Zarqawi terrorist group that have killed hundreds of Iraqi Shi’ites in bombings of mosques and marketplaces. It is, as General Odom reports, already a civil war. But the report in TomPaine.com notes an additional element: The Shi’a forces involved in targeting of Sunnis are officially working for, and trained and equipped by the United States, in the name of stability.

Meltdown in the Washington Command

On Sept. 28, at a hearing of the Senate Armed Services Committee, all hell broke loose, when U.S. Army Gen. George Casey, Commander of the U.S. and coalition forces in Iraq, said that there is only one battalion of “fully capable” Iraqi troops. After months of hearing reports from Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, and speeches by President Bush that there are 150,000 to 170,000 “trained” Iraqi security forces, the Senators went ballistic. After all, a battalion unit is approximately 300 to *maximum* 1,000 personnel, according to the Army’s official site.

Republican Sen. John McCain (Ariz.) blasted General Casey, who was testifying, demanding to know: “*You had three battalions, now we’re down to one. . . .*” And a distraught Sen. Susan Collins (R-Me.) told Rumsfeld and the generals that these numbers cause a “loss of public confidence. . . . It doesn’t feel like progress when we hear . . . that there is only one Iraqi battalion fully capable.”

Rumsfeld tried to dismiss the Senators’ criticism with a sneer, saying, “I think reality is these folks are not going to end up at a level of U.S. forces, period.” But, for once, the Senators closed ranks and continued to demand answers. Pressed by Sen. Ted Kennedy (D-Mass.), about reports that insurgents are joining up for the Iraq police to get training, equipment, and weapons, Rumsfeld admitted it was true, then babbled, “It’s a problem faced by police forces in every major city in our country, that criminals infiltrate and sign up to join the police force.”

This showdown at the Senate sent the White House and Secretary of Defense’s office into a panic. On Sept. 29, the White House announced that Bush would dedicate “all” his time and effort to the war in Iraq, with major speeches to be made by him and Vice President Cheney. On Sept. 30, Rumsfeld called a special briefing at the Pentagon, where he



White House/Eric Draper

President Bush gives his address on “the war on terror” on Oct. 6, fulminating against “Islamic radicalism” and threatening war against Syria and Iran.

literally shoved General Casey aside, when reporters were pursuing questions about why the number of “capable” battalions had shrunk, and how long it would take to build them up.

According to the Defense Department transcript, Casey replied, “I think it will be a while. I think before we see much movement from one to two, it’s going to be a couple of months. . . .”

Then, as another reporter began his question, a frantic Rumsfeld abruptly took over:

Q: “General —”

Rumsfeld: “You know, this is—just a minute. This is—there are an awful lot of people chasing the wrong rabbit here, it seems to me. And let me put up this chart; it’s illustrative. I don’t want you to write anything —”

Q: “The reason I ask is much was made of this on the Hill yesterday —”

Rumsfeld: “That’s my point. I think folks are chasing the wrong rabbit.”

Needless to say, Rumsfeld’s “wrong rabbit” response did nothing to stanch the criticism of the war, but what followed from Cheney and Bush, was far worse.

According to media reports, and *EIR*’s sources in the Washington intelligence community, there were high-level meetings at the White House that were a combination of damage control, and flight-forward planning for attacks on Syria, to be conducted in “hot pursuit” of “terrorists” who would be fleeing an American offensive in the western Anbar province of Iraq. U.S. military strikes against Syria, and the overthrow of Syrian President Bashar Assad, remains high

on the agenda of Cheney and his neo-con cabal.

While no military action has been announced against Syria, as of Oct. 6, the speeches by Cheney and Bush indicate that they fully intend to expand the Iraq war to Syria and Iran.

Speaking at the Association of the U.S. Army, on Oct. 5, Cheney shamelessly pledged more American blood for his perpetual war policy, while claiming his policy had made Iraq more secure. Cheney raved that “the only way the terrorists can win is if we lose our nerve and abandon our mission. . . . We will help Iraqis build a nation that is free and secure and able to defend itself; we will confront our enemies on this and every other front in the war on terror. . . .”

And Bush’s “major speech on Iraq,” delivered to the National Endowment for Democracy on Oct. 6, was a fanatical call to return to the domino theory approach of the Cold War, while threatening immediate war on Syria and Iran. Bush’s speechwriters

deftly morphed Iraq into the home of Osama bin Laden, and Bush warned that if Iraq falls to Zarqawi and bin Laden, there will soon be a “radical Islamic empire that spans from Spain to Indonesia.”

In response to calls to get out now, Bush said there would be “no concession, bribe, or act of appeasement,” and that only “complete victory” would be accepted.

He then went into a psychotic litany attempting to prove that the war on terror is just like the war on communism. Five times he repeated: “Like the ideology of communism, our new enemy Islamic radicalism. . . .”

Most ominously, included in the speech is a description of Syria and Iran, by name, as “state sponsors” of terrorism, who “share the goal of hurting America and moderate Muslim governments,” saying that “they deserve no patience.” In the most blatant threat of more war, he said, “The U.S. makes no distinction between those who commit acts of terror and those who support and harbor them, because they’re equally guilty of murder. . . . And the civilized world must hold those regimes to account.”

There is no question that Bush and Cheney feel the walls of reality closing in on them, as the multiple criminal investigations are coming to a head, particularly the possible indictments of top White House personnel for the revenge leaking of the identity of covert CIA agent Valerie Plame Wilson, and the indictments of House Republican Majority Leader Tom DeLay.

But, feeling the political squeeze, Cheney and Bush, are planning new wars to get themselves a little “Lebensraum.”