

U.S. Lurches for the Exit In Iraq: 'Fall of Saigon II'?

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Being "a little bit sovereign" is like being "a little bit pregnant": not workable. This sums up the paradoxical dilemma the United States has now found in Iraq. Following the accelerating escalation of attacks by the Iraqi resistance, which peaked, for the moment, in the killing of 16 Italian *Carabinieri* in Nassiriya on Nov. 12, urgent talks were held in Washington by American pro-consul Paul Bremer, on how to deal with what has turned into a "Vietnam in the desert," in the words of Presidential candidate Lyndon LaRouche.

The upshot of Bremer's consultations was that the United States would seek to speed up the "transfer of power" from Bremer's Provisional Coalition Authority (CPA), to "the Iraqis." According to Nov. 15 reports from the Bush Administration, the plan foresees the creation of a "provisional" government by June 2004, to be selected by a transitional assembly, formed in turn of delegates elected through town meetings in Iraq. The provisional government is to be recognized; sovereignty is to be transferred to it; and by the end of 2005, a constitution is to be drafted and elections held. At the same time, Bremer and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld have made clear that U.S. military forces intend to remain. As one regional expert put it, they are telling the Iraqis, "Yes, you have sovereignty, but we will rule. . . . You are a little bit sovereign."

The only real significance of this American "policy shift," is that it denotes the level of panic that has gripped the White House over the escalating resistance in Iraq. In no way does it represent a viable solution, or a serious attempt to define one. It resembles more the U.S. "Vietnamization" policy in the early 1970s in Indochina. As the *New York Times* editorialized on Nov. 16, the current "new" plan will only lead to civil war. The only solution, as LaRouche has stressed from the outset, is to turn over the entire matter to the United Nations.

Even the UN may not succeed, but what is certain, the

Times says, is "that the Bush administration, which has made all the wrong bets so far, does not have any better options."

An International Pole of Resistance?

Indeed, whether or not even a full handover of responsibility to the UN—the only option coherent with international law—would lead to a peaceful solution, is in grave doubt. The resistance will expand in intensity and scope. According to reports from the region, "The train has left the station"; that is, the crisis has deteriorated so far that it is impossible to re-establish control. The resistance is becoming the rallying point for a global struggle against "American imperialism." The head of the German intelligence agency BND stated on Nov. 19, that there are clear indications that even Islamists in Germany have been leaving the country seeking to join the conflict in Iraq.

The strategy of the resistance is to attack U.S. targets and allies, in order to make it impossible for non-U.S./U.K. forces (Italians, Spaniards, Poles, etc.) to operate in Iraq, thus boiling the conflict down to a war against the Americans and British. The attacks against the Jordanian Embassy, the Red Cross, and the UN, have carried this message. Among the allies targetted are Iraqis involved in any way with the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC), or local administrations. Thus, following the killing of the Italian *Carabinieri*, resistance fighters also placed bombs in Kirkuk, targetting the offices of the Patriotic Union of Kurds (PUK) of Jalal Talebani, currently rotating chairman of the IGC.

Many imponderables still exist. The Shi'ite factor has not yet come into play, as this group is waiting to take majority power through political means. If this is denied, a force of perhaps 2 million Shi'ites could be mobilized, according to informed sources. Even without this factor, the guerrilla forces are growing in numbers. Estimates issued by Gen. John



What now? Occupation authority chief Paul Bremer meets with Defense Secretary Rumsfeld to discuss Iraq. Bremer's hurried consultations Nov. 14-16 in Washington led to a hasty "new" policy which is still unworkable. He reportedly agreed with recent grim CIA estimates of the potential of the Iraqi resistance.

Abizaid, commander of the U.S. Central Command, that the resistance numbers around 5-6,000, are absurd. Regional experts place the total force of former Ba'ath Party, military, intelligence, and security forces under Saddam Hussein, on which the resistance can draw, in the range of 2-4 million people. The active resistance fighters have at their disposal the entire intelligence and military apparatus; they know the terrain, have training, and literally limitless munitions. Their intelligence is precise, as demonstrated in their selection of targets.

In a CIA report recently leaked to the press—a report Bremer reportedly embraced during his Washington huddle—it was said that about 2 million Iraqis passively support the resistance. In the overall civilian population, there is obviously extensive active support as well, consisting in provision of living quarters, food, and munitions for foreigners arriving in Iraq to join the resistance. Regional diplomats point out the readiness of the Iraqi population to fight; the country has gone through three wars in 20 years, which means every family has lost someone.

The American military response to the escalating guerrilla war has only fuelled its flames. As in Vietnam, or as Ariel Sharon's Israel in Palestine, American military are displaying brutal force, dropping 500- and 2,000-pound bombs on "suspected insurgent hide-outs," destroying civilian homes, and killing civilians. Regional experts fear that, if the Americans realize that they have lost control, they will raze entire cities to the ground, beginning with Tikrit, Fallujah, even Baghdad if necessary. This would recruit thousands more to the resistance.

Thus, there is no end in sight to the military conflict against the occupying forces.

Is There a Viable Approach?

Were America and Britain serious about establishing stability, and transferring sovereignty, they would proceed in an utterly different manner. First—as the Russian government, among others, is insisting—they would hand over all responsibility to the UN, in accordance with international law. This means withdrawing militarily as well. Dr. Hans Köchler, President of the International Progress Organization, issued a memorandum on Aug. 12, on the requirements for establishing a legitimate constitutional system in Iraq. In it, the international law expert writes: "The basis for *legitimate* authority on the territory of Iraq can only be created through a general referendum on the future constitution of Iraq and through general elections to be held on the basis of such new constitution. The process must not be undertaken under the control, either direct or indirect, of the occupation 'Authority'; and can, therefore, not be coordinated by the 'Governing Council' that, in reality, acts as proxy of the 'Coalition Provisional Authority.' The constitutional process . . . must be organized under the auspices of the United Nations Organization. This will require a new Security Council resolution to be adopted on the basis of Chapter VII, formulating the authority for: a) the setting up of an advisory committee, representative of all sectors of Iraqi society, for the drafting of a constitution; b) the organization of a general referendum on the proposed new constitution for Iraq; and c) the organization of general, free and fair elections." This, and not the ass-backwards short-cut now proposed, is the only acceptable formula.

This is not a legal formalism; it goes to the heart of an effective exit strategy, which requires the participation of new, credible figures who are politically representative of the Iraqi nation, to replace the Quisling IGC. This could

be accomplished only through truly democratic means, not cosmetic elections. What the United States is seeking to impose, de facto, is the creation now of a *second* Quisling government; this time with a pretense to legitimacy, due to the planned constitution—after the formation of the government! This cannot be acceptable to the Iraqi people. Iraq, unlike Afghanistan, is a country with a long tradition as an independent nation, with a thousand-year cultural identity, a continuous history, and national institutions which must be revived.

However, the open question which no one has dared to address thus far is: Will the United Nations assume responsi-

bility; and will it be able to do so? Following the bombings of the UN headquarters in Baghdad, which killed special envoy Sergio Vieira de Mello, Secretary General Kofi Annan pulled most staff out. He has recently pledged to appoint a new special envoy. But this does not mean that a full-fledged UN presence, as the mediating institution, would survive. For the resistance, as for a large part of the Iraqi population, the UN has been identified with the sanctions policy imposed on the country since 1990.

That said, there are no other institutions which could be asked to play the same role.

If the U.S. and U.K. were serious, they would not only

Voices Against 'Desert Vietnam'

A growing chorus of American national security and defense experts has targeted the Bush Administration's "Vietnam in the desert" fiasco in Iraq, providing a welcome and widening domestic flank against the Dick Cheney-led neo-conservative "war party" in official Washington.

Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) fellow Anthony Cordesman spent nearly two weeks in Iraq from Nov. 1-12. Cordesman filed an unclassified report on his interviews—with CIA weapons of mass destruction analyst David Kay; "viceroy" Paul Bremer; and all the major U.S. military commanders in the country, on Nov. 14. The report concluded, in very carefully worded, understated terms, that there were so many uncertainties in the situation that no forecast was possible about the future of Iraq.

The report, however, constituted a stinging denunciation of the neo-cons who drove the war policy, and who failed miserably to anticipate any of the consequences.

Cordesman wrote, "Some of the uncertainties in Iraq are the fault of major strategic and tactical mistakes made by the United States. U.S. officials relied on ideology instead of planning for effective nation building, internal security, and the risk of asymmetric warfare. They failed to either make realistic assessments of the country's divisions and problems, or properly prepare for the fall of the regime. . . . Part of these failures came from the Administration's inability to appreciate the level of political chaos that was certain to follow Saddam's fall, in spite of clear and repeated warnings from State, intelligence officers, and area experts, and from an ideological faith in a largely ineffective outside opposition. This failure occurred at the civilian policy level, and combined with a failure to understand

the weaknesses in the Iraqi economy, and be ready with suitable short- and long-term aid plans."

'Iraq Will Not Be a Model'

Cordesman spelled out a dozen different factors that could lead to an American defeat in Iraq, including any continuation of the Administration's efforts to cover up the dangers of the Iraq operation, and likely escalation of asymmetric warfare and higher American casualties.

"The U.S. can lose the 'peace' because of a failure to deal effectively with any one of these factors," he reported, "and any U.S. victory is almost certain to be relative. Iraq will not suddenly emerge as a model to the Arab world, and its regional impact on change and modernization will at best be far more limited than many American neo-conservatives hoped."

Cordesman's critique was echoed in a Nov. 17 interview by Gen. Brent Scowcroft, published in the German-language edition of the *Financial Times*. Scowcroft is not only a long-time close aide to ex-President George H.W. Bush and the co-author of the former President's memoirs. He is the current head of George W. Bush's President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board (PFIAB). He was in Germany, attending a series of national security conferences, when he gave his high-profile interview. Scowcroft debunked the idea that the Iraq war was fought to promote democracy in the Middle East. He bluntly stated that if the United States were serious about promoting democracy in the Arab world, it would start in Palestine, where the conditions are ripe for the emergence of a secular democratic state. He ironically added that Iran would be a better place to start than Iraq, since Iran had gone through several successive free elections, in which reformers won.

Scowcroft, who had opposed the Iraq war adventure from the outset, declared that the United States should get out of Iraq while the getting was good, and turn over authority to the United Nations, perhaps with a NATO force presence.—*Jeffrey Steinberg*

hand over complete responsibility to the UN, but at the same time, contact all Iraq's neighbors (nations which met in Damascus recently, the most important of which are Syria, Turkey, and Iran), seeking their cooperation. Due to political, ethnic, and religious factors that they share with Iraq, particularly Iran and Syria could be crucial assets in reestablishing stability. But the United States adamantly refuses to do this; on the contrary, it is targetting Syria (witness the passage in the Senate of the Syria Accountability Act), and is raising its polemical tone vis-à-vis Iran. Turkey is being targetted for massive destabilization, as the bombings of Nov. 15 and Nov. 20 demonstrate.

Becoming Desperate on the Ground

There is another vital consideration in mapping a way out of the Iraq mess. Diplomatic sources in the region have stressed to *EIR*, that the only workable approach, sketched above, must emphatically include a solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Not only has Iraq supported the Palestinians' liberation struggle since the 1970s; but now that struggle is becoming identified with the Iraqi resistance. With continuing injustice to the Palestinians, whatever stability might be introduced into Iraq, would be fragile, to say the least.

A just peace is the precondition for stability in the entire region, politically as well as economically. This means that the lip service paid in the White House to a two-state solution, must be replaced by an actual peace and economic development policy like the "Oasis Plan" proposed by LaRouche. This, in turn, requires that the Washington war party led by Vice President Cheney, opposed to such an approach and intimately tied to the genocidal policies of Ariel Sharon, must be removed from power.

Two points must be emphasized. First, that the situation in Iraq (and increasingly in the region, since the bombings in Saudi Arabia and Turkey), is worse than desperate. The United States is losing the war against the resistance, and has lost credibility internationally. Even if a UN-led transition were to be initiated, there is no reason to believe that those forces engaged in armed resistance would be approachable in any way.

Second, the entire mess could have been prevented had the words of wiser men, like LaRouche, been heeded, and this utterly unnecessary, illegal war not been launched.

Diplomats from the affected region have not concealed their support for LaRouche, in private discussions with *EIR*. One told this author: "The U.S. needs a man of wisdom to guide it out of this disaster. Mr. LaRouche is that man. Not only does he understand the mentality, the culture, the history, and the strategic process, but he has solutions." Another "sincerely hoped Mr. LaRouche will win, as he is the only hope for saving America, and this region." A third pointed to the need for the Arab-Americans and the Muslim-Americans to join LaRouche's campaign, as "they have nowhere else to go."