

U.S.-Arab Meeting: Leash the Dogs of War

by Michele Steinberg

At the final session of the annual conference of the National Council of U.S.-Arab Relations which took place in Washington on Sept. 8-9, Chas. Freeman, former U.S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia during Desert Storm, and former Assistant Secretary of Defense for Regional Affairs during the Bush "41" administration, blasted the fanatical Iraq war "group-think" around the current Pentagon and White House. It "reminds me of a dog chasing cars," yapping loudly but not knowing what will happen if it catches a car, Freeman said. "Perhaps it is time to put that dog on a leash."

"If regime change is the answer" to the Iraq crisis, he added, "then what is the question?"

It was remarkable to hear such a criticism of the Iraq war rhetoric in Washington on Sept. 9, in the midst of hysteria over terrorist threats that some in the Bush Administration—especially Attorney General John Ashcroft and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld—injecting into the build-up to the anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks.

General Franks Hears From Arab League

But the statements by Freeman, who heads the Middle East Policy Council in Washington, were all the more remarkable, because seated next to him on the podium was Gen. Tommy Franks, Commander-in-Chief (CINC) of the Central Command (CENTCOM), which covers the Middle East and West Asia, including Iraq—the commander who will have to carry out the Iraq war. Franks not only sat through Ambassador Freeman's reasoned refutation of *every* argument for an Iraq war presented to date—including by *President George W. Bush at the United Nations on Sept. 12*—but also the immediately following remarks of another high-level diplomat and longtime acquaintance, Ambassador Hussein Hassouna, chief representative of the League of Arab States to the U.S.A., who had just returned from the Arab League Foreign Ministers meeting in Cairo.

Ambassador Hassouna gave a powerful firsthand briefing on the Sept. 4-5 Arab League meeting. First and foremost, he said, was that he had encountered the strongest ever "new sense of unity among the Foreign Ministers" in Cairo, and these Arab states are determined to seek solutions to the Israel-Palestinian crisis and the Iraq crisis. The meeting also discussed how to end sanctions against Libya, since that country had already complied with United Nations' resolutions on the trial of the alleged perpetrators of the December 1988 Lockerbie plane bombing. The trial of the accused Libyans is

long over, and now it is time to lift the sanctions. Hassouna reported that the Arab League had taken up the newly exploded crisis in Sudan, where peace negotiations have broken down.

Ambassador Hassouna said that the Arab League had been instrumental in setting up the talks between Baghdad and UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, which took place in three sessions, the most recent in Vienna. The League, he said, now has the "hope—and this is the view of all of the Arab League—that the government of Iraq will re-enter the dialogue and accept the inspectors." He said that this agreement between Iraq and the UN has to, in turn, lead to the end of the sanctions against Iraq.

Hassouna gave a comprehensive briefing on Iraq, rarely heard in Washington in recent months, as the Wolfowitz-Perle cabal and their media friends have heated up the war propaganda. He reminded the listeners that the adoption of Saudi Arabia Crown Prince Abdullah's Middle East peace initiative, at the Arab League summit in Beirut in March, had been accompanied by a very important agreement between Kuwait and Iraq, now being followed up with specific actions such as the return of Kuwait's national archive, to take place next month. Of the three areas of concern with Iraq—relations with the UN, relations with Arab countries, and relations between Iraq and the United States—only U.S.-Iraq relations are stalemated. Hassouna insisted that what is most important is that President Bush is now going to be consulting the UN Security Council, and that there be "full unity of the Security Council behind the inspection regime."

That General Franks was flanked by two compelling speeches against an Iraq war was ironical; he had originally been scheduled to speak at a different time. But that this conference of the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations took place—an annual event which General Franks and dozens of other top military leaders have attended for the last three years—could well be one of the contributing factors, if the stampede for a "imperial Roman" war of aggression against Iraq is stopped.

Against the 'Clash of Civilizations'

The conference, which assembled several hundred of Washington's leading foreign service personnel, students, diplomats, and military officers, was one of the capital's most important counterpoles to the Samuel Huntington/Zbigniew Brzezinski/Bernard Lewis doctrine of the Clash of Civilizations, since the Sept. 11 irregular warfare attacks of a year ago. Over the last year, the Clash of Civilizations fanatics have taken over the "war on terrorism" debate, and used it to drive toward both an Iraq war and a total collapse of all peace efforts in Israel and Palestine. The same neo-conservative operatives pushing the Iraq war have also been behind the drive—in the name of "counter-terrorism" and Israeli security—to get the Bush White House in full support Ariel Sharon's fascist assaults against the Palestinian people in the Occupied Territories.

Domestically, as speakers at the conference noted, the backlash against the the attacks of last September was turned into an “anti-Islam” reign of terror in the United States, under the measures of John Ashcroft’s Justice Department. One of the clearest examples of the anti-Islam and anti-Muslim frenzy, was the July 10 briefing at the Defense Policy Board, arranged by Richard Perle, that attacked Saudi Arabia as the “kernel of evil” and the main sponsor of terrorism against the United States. Speaker after speaker at the U.S.-Arab Council event referred to this Perle-organized briefing as a sign that the Clash of Civilizations agenda had taken over the U.S. policy.

No ‘Chicken Hawk’ War

The opening keynote was given by Gen. Anthony Zinni, who had immediately preceded General Franks as head of CENTCOM, and who had already ruffled the feathers of Perle’s “chicken hawks” with his remarks to a conference in Tampa, Florida in late August. In Tampa, Zinni came out as a leading military voice against the Iraq war, assailing those pushing the war in the strongest of language. He said the United States should instead concentrate on bringing peace between Israel and the Palestinians, eliminate the Taliban threat in Afghanistan, and rout the Al-Qaeda. “We need to quit making enemies that we don’t need to make enemies out of,” he warned, adding, “It’s pretty interesting that all the generals see it the same way, and all the others who have never fired a shot, and are hot to go to war, see it another way.” The “chicken hawks” got especially angry when Zinni compared the Iraq war to the U.S. mistakes in Vietnam.

In Washington, Zinni’s direct line of political fire was against the neo-conservatives who are pushing the war—and this time he was more explicit. He said that “we cannot allow hardliners to reverse the course” towards Middle East peace, and that “there are people out there who want the Clash of Civilizations. . . . It is not inevitable and we have to work hard to make sure that it is not a self-fulfilling prophecy.”

Zinni attacked those who “pooh-pooh the generals . . . [and] criticize their caution.” “I don’t know what planet they’re on,” said the general, referring to those—such as neo-conservative Likudniks Perle, Wolfowitz, Netanyahu, and others—who say that a strong American attack on Iraq “will help the peace process in Israel.”

All doubt as to who these creatures from “I don’t know what planet” might be, evaporated when Zinni answered a question from *EIR* correspondent Bill Jones. Jones asked about the notorious Defense Policy Board briefing of July 10, at which Perle sponsored “analyst” Laurent Murawiec (since fired from the RAND Corporation over the affair) to declare Saudi Arabia enemy number-one of the United States.

“I don’t know *why* the briefing was given,” Zinni replied



At the U.S.-Arab Relations Council on Sept. 9, Gen. Anthony C. Zinni—who commanded the 1998 bombing of Iraq, as shown here—gave the strongest speech against a new war and the war party of Richard Perle et al. The Council meeting was one factor in the rising tide of opposition to a U.S. unilateral attack.

angrily, saying he found it “unbelievable” that it was allowed to take place in “that policy group.” He said it was “uncalled for,” “unimaginable,” and “inconceivable” for CENTCOM to have allowed such a false intelligence picture to be presented against an ally that has fought alongside the United States, economically and militarily, dating back to World War II.

‘Alien Ideology’ to American Tradition

During the entire second day of the conference, the crimes and follies of the neo-conservatives were exposed in panel after panel, leading up to a remarkable session that featured former Senate staffer Dr. Clifford Kiracofe, who now teaches at the Virginia Military Institute, and Geoffrey Aronson, author of the “Report on Israeli Settlement in the Occupied Territories,” who works closely with Israel’s Peace Now movement.

After Aronson demonstrated that the Sharon government has no intention of leaving the Occupied Territories, and in fact favors a policy of “transfer” (a.k.a. ethnic cleansing), Kiracofe delivered a body blow to the neo-conservative gurus such as Perle and Irving Kristol. He identified neo-conservatism as an “alien ideology” against the American intellectual tradition, and said that this ideology had been engaged in a 30-year plot to infiltrate and take over U.S. foreign policy in favor of the Likud party fascists of Israel, and America’s Christian Zionist religious fanatics who want nothing short of an Armageddon-type war. Referring back to George Washington’s Farewell Address, Kiracofe said the neo-conservatives are “the Achilles’ heel of the Bush Administration, if not of the Republic itself.”