

Wolfowitz Grilled at Congressional Hearing

by Edward Spannaus

The Bush Administration's military policy and the increasingly disastrous occupation of Iraq came under sharp, unreported criticism at a June 18 hearing of the House Armed Services Committee. The topic of the hearing, which featured Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, and Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman Gen. Peter Pace, was "U.S. Worldwide Military Commitments," and the theme running through the hearing was the overstretching of U.S. military forces due to the open-ended occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan, added to the nation's already-existing long-term troop commitments in Europe and Asia. Although the toughest criticisms came from committee Democrats, Republican members also criticized the Administration's lack of planning for the Iraq occupation.

Indeed, committee Chairman Duncan Hunter (R.-Calif.) appears to have stung Wolfowitz (and implicitly, also Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, known for his utopian "Information Age" fantasies), with his references to poor planning for the "occupation" of Iraq. Said Hunter, "It probably takes about the same number of troops to guard a bridge over the Euphrates River today as it did in the days of the Roman legions, which is at least one on each side of that river. . . . Occupation takes a lot of folks, probably takes a lot more folks than winning the war."

Hunter undoubtedly knew that this was a direct challenge to the Wolfowitz's statement in his Feb. 27 Congressional testimony, in which Wolfowitz declared that it was "hard to conceive that it would take more forces to provide stability on post-Saddam Iraq than it would take to conduct the war itself." The context for that, was Wolfowitz challenging the estimation of then-Army Chief of Staff Gen. Eric Shinseki, that "hundreds of thousands" of troops would be needed for post-war Iraq.

At the June 18 hearing, Wolfowitz reacted sharply, by countering Hunter's very use of the term "occupation"; Wolfowitz claimed that "what we're about in Iraq is the liberation of a country."

Because the June 18 hearing received almost no coverage in the daily news media, *EIR* considers it a public service to publish here substantial excerpts of some of the toughest questions and statements—so that Americans and readers around the world can get an idea of the actual mood of U.S.

troops and the American population, as it is reflected through their Representatives in Congress. (The following remarks are as transcribed by Federal News Service.)

Rep. Ike Skelton (D-Mo.): "American troops are being killed daily. Some American family awakens to the news as I did yesterday morning, this morning, to find that another American has been killed, and that family that day will have its hearts broken. On top of that, according to press reports, Sunni [Muslim] Arabs, fearful of a less prominent role in a new government related to the Shi'a majority, have begun recruiting Sunni Arabs from other countries to join in the guerrilla battle against the American occupation. And I would like to understand the plans that are in place for improving security in the regions of the country now facing unrest, and to address these potential emerging threats."

Rep. Solomon Ortiz (D-Tex.): "You know, as a member of Congress, we get many letters from our constituents. And sometimes we find some of them very hard to respond to.

"Let me read a letter to you that I got, and this is one of many that I have received. And it says, 'Dear sir, I know that you are very busy and this might not seem very important to you. But my husband is in the United States Army, and he was in the war on Iraq from beginning to end, and now they're being told that they will . . . now will have to be moved to another location in Iraq. This is coming just as they were about to start the process of coming home.

" 'I feel that after all that they went through and saw that they deserve to come home, just as the Navy and the Marines got to do. To be honest, our men saw more than both the Navy and the Marines. I might not live in Texas as of now, but I was born and raised in Corpus Christi for 25 years, and my husband signed on with the Army after 11 September.

" 'I know that this might not seem important to you, but I feel that it is important for the morale and welfare of the men to come home like they were planning. We don't need a repeat of the men freaking out like what happened when the war was starting. A lot of the wives feel a little jerked around, like holding a carrot in front of a turtle and pulling it away. Thank you for your time.'

"This is one of many letters that I get. And I know that we've gone through a transformation period, but what are the plans to bring some of these soldiers who have been there for a long period of time? And I know some of my friends have been to Iraq, and they tell some of the committee members who have been there, 'Please get us out of here. We came to fight a war. We're not police officers. We're not law enforcement officers.' "

Rep. Loretta Sanchez (D-Calif.): "At a speech at The Citadel [military academy] in Fall of 1999, then-Governor Bush scolded President Clinton for stretching the military to the breaking point. He said: 'Frustration is up as families are separated and strained. Morale is down. Recruitment is more difficult. And many of our best people in the military are headed for civilian life.' Well, hello! The military force

is still limited and people still wear out.

“And yet, I have heard the President [and] the Secretary resist all suggestions for expanding the force. And I have never heard the President urge young people to sign up, nor have I heard an apology to General Shinseki.

“The war in Iraq was tailor-made for America’s attention span. It might have even been a little bit too long. Well, it hasn’t ended. I believe this war is still ongoing. And I want to know, and the American people want to know, the cost of this war. We want to know about our soldiers: Why are we losing one a day? What is it acceptable to lose? We want to know about the billions of dollars that you’re going to—that you spent and you want to expend, diverted from homeland security, from economic security, from investment in ourselves and our infrastructure. I want to talk about the tally of at least 3,200 Iraqi civilians that were innocent in this that were killed in action over there—that doesn’t count the wounded or the maimed, about the 50,000 or so Iraqi soldiers—the estimate—that were killed over there. I want to know about the dollars, I want to know about the bodies, I want to know about the opportunity cost that this is going to take. And you—and the reason I ask is because initially, you said you would do whatever it takes, that you didn’t want to state how long and at what cost. But I want to know. And by the way, Americans want to know.”

Rep. Gene Taylor (D-Miss.): “Secretary Wolfowitz, I know none of us really like to look at words we’ve said about other things, and have them twisted around. But I noted with great interest your testimony from October of 1995 before this committee, and I’m going to quote from page 38. ‘That is all the more reason for the Congress to force the [Clinton] Administration, whose course in Bosnia has consistently been marked by vagueness, confusion, and ambiguity, to provide clear answers to those questions before, not after it has committed American troops or committed our allies to an essentially impossible policing mission in Bosnia. While the failure of the current peacekeeping efforts would be a setback, it would be a far greater setback if we commit the prestige and power of the United States to a mission that cannot be achieved and cannot be sustained.’

“It leads me to a couple of questions. If we’re going to achieve our mission, I agree with General Clark, it is going to take at least ten years. . . . I would certainly hope that just for the sake of the troops, who like certainty as much as you and I do, that some sort of a rotational schedule be announced so that they have some certainty as to when they’re going and when they’re coming home. Because as the Bosnian mission has taught us, for every soldier we’re going to have over there, we’re really tying up three—one training to go there, one who’s there, one retraining to do their regular job. . . .

“Secretary Wolfowitz, that, I’m going to ask you on a personal basis. I went to the White House last fall when the President made the pitch for the use of force. I really didn’t

think his presentation was that good, and I left less convinced that we needed to do it than before. A little while later I gave the Administration a second chance, and listened to Secretary Rumsfeld make the pitch. And again, I didn’t think his pitch was very good. It was the conversation between you and I after that meeting that convinced me that you were on the right track. And I regret that it didn’t write it down. I should have. If it was a strong enough conversation for me to vote in favor of the use of force, then I should have recorded it.

“What troubles me now is that even in an extremely patriotic place like Mississippi—and I do represent extremely patriotic people with wall-to-wall military bases—I’m getting questions from moms and dads saying, Where’s the evidence of the weapons of mass destruction? If the evidence is there, for the sake of the word of this nation—and nations, like people, are only as good as its word—I would request, based on our conversation which convinced me to vote for it, that you come forward with it. . . . But that really was the pitch for the war, Mr. Wolfowitz, a war that I voted for, a war that we’ve now lost close to 200 kids. So, as one of the people who voted for that war, just like Senator Warner, I think it is extremely important that you come forward.”

Rep. Neil Abercrombie (D-Hi.): “I just wanted—as I said to Secretary Wolfowitz before I—a short preamble that I feel I must put forward before I make my inquiries of you, and that—there’s a certain dream-like quality to this hearing and to the presentation. It’s almost an exercise in self-hypnosis, it seems to me.

“I must tell you, General, that these same sentiments in terms of the—almost the kind of ease that is promulgated by the tone of the presentation of the Secretary—more than yourself, I must say—reminds me of 40 years ago, when I first began to have doubts about Vietnam and what was going to take place there and what the role of the United States was going to be. And I regret that very, very much. . . .

“General Pace, we’re simply going to have to have a more clear understanding and presentation, not just from yourself or from the military side, but from the Secretary’s side, some coordination telling us exactly what you’re anticipating your needs are going to be. . . .”

[General Pace responds that anticipated requirements for police in Iraq are about 65,000, and that as they are trained, this would free up coalition troops.]

“If that’s the case, General, then we’ve got to start leveling with the American people. I can tell you when you have optimum circumstances for a police force to be deployed, if you will, in a city under conditions that we have in this country, it takes years to accomplish that. I suggest right now, that you better think seriously; or, that is to say, Ambassador Bremer better think seriously, about paying those Iraqi soldiers. . . . You’re going to have to get your military and civilian police force out of the same people who are there either as police officers before . . . or Iraqi soldiers.”