

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; "viceroys" 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