

## AMERICA DEFEATED IN IRAQ

By Jerry Harris

Just like Bruce Willis in *Sixth Sense*, George Bush is dead, he just doesn't know it yet. The America century hardly left the gate before its marines were retreating from Fullujah. In Viet-Nam it was the Tet Offensive and the massacre at My Lai that striped US strategy of all pretension, in Iraq its been Fullujah and Abu Ghraib. The only difference being in Viet-Nam those disasters happen almost two years apart, not two weeks.

The 1968 Tet Offensive lasted a month with fighting in every corner of South Viet-Nam. That happen as President Johnson was telling the world the "light at the end of the tunnel" could be seen. Instead of the fighting being nearly over every American suddenly knew we had been lied to. The war was going to get ugly, long and painful. That was the beginning of the credibility gap that undercut government legitimacy. Fullujah has had the same impact today. As marines tore down their sand bunkers and dismantled their barbed wire perimeters General Myers was on T.V. stating this wasn't a retreat. Yet every condition for victory was not met. No turn over of those responsible for the killing of the four US mercenaries, no capture of foreign fighters and no surrender of weapons. Fullujah, as Tet, revealed extensive popular support for the insurgency against the US occupation. As the military began to level Fullujah with missiles you could almost hear that colonel back in Viet-Nam who said we had to "destroy the village to save it." Yes, things are going to get ugly, long and painful.

Talk about pain, the photos from Abu Ghraib say it all. Just as the killing of over 500 innocent civilians at My Lai ended any remaining legitimacy for the US occupation of Viet-Nam; Abu Ghraib has demolished Bush's last remaining excuse for the current occupation. Few can now believe the US is spreading democracy throughout the Middle East. The My Lai massacre remained hidden for almost a year until an individual soldier exposed the horror. How similar to the current situation in which the Pentagon ignored reports of widespread torture and abuse throughout Iraq until a lone soldier supplied photos to CBS. As with My Lai the Pentagon is attempting damage control by blaming those in lower ranks.

Political leaders have been quick to cry this doesn't represent America. But it does certainly represent an aspect of our society, an aspect brought out by the violent and racist policies of imperialism. All one has to do is turn on right-wing talk radio to listen to the self-righteous anger and excuses. As one caller stated about the sexual degradation at Abu Ghraib, it was nothing more than "fraternity pictures." If this is what they've been doing at Yale's Skull and Crossbones all these years no wonder they've keep it such a secrete.

Even if Bush wins the election in November he cannot now launch another war against Syria or Iran. Bombings, maybe yes. But land invasions and remaking the Middle East in America's neoconservative image, that plan is buried in Iraq. The fall of Ahmad Chalabi is an indication of how badly things have turned out for the neo-conservative cadre core. This tightly knit group of policy makers pushed a strategy that detailed an American century lorded over by the military, starting in the Middle East and ending with the world. Chalabi was to be their "George Washington," running a neo-liberal regime in Iraq for US interests. But neo-conservative predictions of an easy victory with welcoming Iraqis showering flowers on America troops

turned into a quagmire of guerrilla war. Abu Ghraib deprived the neo-conservatives of their last argument for remaking the Middle East with a benevolent US occupation. Not only did this weaken the neo-conservative Pentagon fraction of Paul Wolfowitz, John Bolton, Douglass Feith and Stephen Cambone, it also undercut their main protector Donald Rumsfeld.

Rumsfeld and Dick Cheney are both old school Republican realists. But they were taken with much of the neo-conservative vision of US hegemony in a post-Soviet world. On the otherhand Colin Powell is lined-up with the mainstream realists of the Republican Party foreign policy establishment that ran the show under George Bush during Desert Storm. They believe in US leadership, but leadership means leading someone besides your own military. Multilateral coalitions still play an important part in their worldview, unlike the unilateral policy of the present White House. Another important aspect of realist thinking is keeping your eyes focused on key US interests. That means stability in Iraq not a campaign for democracy and remaking the Middle East. So if deals need to be made with old Ba'athist to quite Fullujah you do it. You work with whoever serves US interests in the short term and worry about the rest later. This policy is gaining the upper hand in Iraq and symbolized by the attack and isolation of the neo-conservative's main operative, Ahmad Chalabi.

Another important element that has put US imperial ambitions on hold is the debate over the size and nature of the military. Rumsfeld has been a major proponent of the Revolution in Military Affairs doctrine. This calls for a smaller military built around information technology. The idea is to move away from the massive W.W. II military of the past into a computer age of smart weapons. Ideally it will make the military more flexible and effective, needing fewer troops to accomplish more.

The first big test was the war in Iraq. This was the basis for the debate between General Zini and Rumsfeld when Zini said the US would need at least 250,000 troops to control Iraq. Zini was keeping faith with the Powell doctrine developed after Viet-Nam that says you go to war with overwhelming force. But Rumsfeld argued overwhelming force no longer meant troops on the ground but a technologically driven war that would create "shock and awe." The quick victory in Iraq gave credence to the new doctrine and gave Rumsfeld an additional advantage to argue the Pentagon should control the post-conflict situation, not Powell's State Department. But as the war evolved into an urban guerrilla conflict the US technological advantage began to mean less.

Certainly no military in the world can stand toe to toe with the US without being battered and destroyed. But as shown in Viet-Nam, the best resistance is popular guerrilla insurgency. Yet in comparing the guerrilla force in Iraq to those in Viet-Nam the weakness of the current US force becomes starkly evident. The resistance in Iraq has no central leadership and is organizationally splintered, it enjoys limited support confined mainly to certain urban areas, it enjoys no open friendly borders, and the country itself is politically, religiously and ethnically divided. Compared to Viet-Nam this should be a cakewalk yet the US occupation cannot secure the country.

Rumsfeld's small military force of 135,000 troops can not control the battle environment or the social situation. Without significant allies the US finds its military stretched to the breaking point. The Pentagon has now turned to forcing soldiers into service beyond their contracts and

pulling troops out of South Korea to fill gaps in Iraq. Morale is down as is recruitment. All this has played against the neo-conservatives and hard line realists as their critics inside the Pentagon and State Department move to try and salvage the situation. The big question now is when do US troops leave, not when do they march into Syria or Iran.

This has produced some serious strategic problems for US imperialism. The US not only needs smart technology, but also troops to oversee an empire and convince people that the American way is the best of all possible worlds. The inability to successfully occupy Iraq has exposed US weakness and policy makers are now faced with a number of choices. There are several ways to increase the size of the military. A draft is most obvious but the most politically explosive. The draftee army in Viet-Nam fell apart with widespread drug use, refusal to engage the enemy and growing armed attacks on officers by enlisted men. When Bush announced his war on terrorism he asked the American people to help by shopping more, hardly the type of sacrifice that turns American teens into soldiers. A draft is probably the last choice of any Washington politician who has hopes of reelection.

The choice that is currently in use is to privatize many military functions. Essentially this policy aims to create a neo-liberal army reduced to its core efficiencies of killing people and winning battles. All other functions are outsourced to contractors. This corresponds to Rumsfeld's vision of a smaller strike force. Logistics become privatized so you can reduce the number of troops and military training and strategy can concentrate on fighting. It is truly neo-liberal economics applied to military institutions. But this has begun to raise serious questions over command and control structures and legal questions over accountability. The involvement of private contractors in the Abu Ghraib tortures is one telling incident that has many people troubled in and out of Washington. In the final analysis privatization of logistics and some security duties still does not solve the need for more troops on the ground.

Lastly the US can turn back to multilateralism, working with allies and the United Nations to achieve stability for global capital. This would mean surrendering a certain amount of autonomy and recognizing the limits of US power. Something the nationalist wing of the US capitalist class finds abhorrent. But this approach fits the strategy of the globalist section of US capitalism. It includes nation building, military civic engagement and sharing the responsibilities of control. Policies articulated by President Clinton and those from the military like General Wesley Clark. If Bush wins the presidency we may get a hybrid policy preferred by Powell and the realists who reject nation building and civic engagement, but still support a US lead multilateral world.

Just as US imperialism was forced into retreat after Viet-Nam there is a chance that political and military leaders will be very cautious about unilateral engagement for the next decade. Too much has gone wrong on the neo-conservative path to power. Not the least of which is the weakness of a small volunteer military even armed with the best technology in the world. Once again the lesson that war is politics needs to be learned. No one doubts that the US can level every city in Iraq. But wars aren't won by body counts and rubble. If so the US certainly won in Viet-Nam. Wars are all about political and economic control and geopolitical security, but those goals are achievable only with strategic legitimacy for the broader political project. Once you are viewed as an occupier and oppressor unending resistance will follow your every footstep until the tents come down and the troops go home.