

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*