
Interview: Gen. Joseph P. Hoar

‘The Neo-Cons Have Had Their Day; Now It’s Time for a Clean Sweep’

Gen. Joseph P. Hoar (USMC-ret.), a four-star general, was Commander in Chief, U.S. Central Command (1991-94), commanding the U.S. forces in the Persian Gulf after the 1991 war. He also served in the Vietnam War, as a battalion and brigade advisor with the Vietnamese Marines. He was interviewed by Jeffrey Steinberg on May 6, 2004.

EIR: You were one of the people who had been critical before the outbreak of fighting, over whether or not the situation warranted going to war. I believe you also had some rather accurate warnings about what might happen, as the war unfolded, especially after the hot phase. What’s your thinking on these issues now, in hindsight, as we’re over a year past the formal fighting phase?

Hoar: There’s small comfort in realizing that perhaps you were closer to reality than the elected and appointed figures in the civilian government. Those of us that have had some experience in the region over the years, and don’t necessarily have ulterior motivations, particularly people that know very much about Iraq—and I don’t necessarily put myself in that category; specifically, I know a fair amount about the political-military situation in the region, but know enough about Iraq to know that any military operation and any subsequent reconstruction efforts, to include the interjection of democracy, were going to be extremely difficult, and perhaps impossible.

But, my major concern, Jeff, really was, that while I was in favor of regime change, I was not in favor of it a year and a half or two years ago, and certainly not these means. And the reason, of course, was the much higher priorities: the protection of the United States through the development of the Homeland Security activities; the completion, successfully, of the Afghanistan campaign; and the destruction of al-Qaeda; all seem to me to be much higher priorities than going after Iraq. And you know the arguments as well as I do: the weapons of mass destruction, the threat to the United States, the connection between al-Qaeda, and then finally, the reason was indicated that this was a rogue regime, that punished its citizens, and its human rights record was abysmal and so forth. We all know that story. The fact remains, that this would have been a very difficult undertaking under the best of circumstances, and unfortunately, with the exception of the Phase I

military operation, which terminated essentially with the end of organized resistance over a year ago, the rest of it has been a disaster.

EIR: I was at an event, where both Gen. [Anthony] Zinni [USMC-ret.] and Chas Freeman, former U.S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, spoke, and this was about eight months before the outbreak of fighting, in March 2003, and they both basically thought that the real troubles would begin after the “hot phase” of combat, when American forces would be there as an occupying force. And they rejected the neo-con and Cheney thesis, that this would be a cakewalk and we’d be greeted as liberators.

What was your sense of the neo-con vision of what was going to happen in Iraq?

Hoar: Well I think that there were two problems: The first one was that they created a set of circumstances that didn’t exist on the ground, and they were aided and abetted in this process by Ahmed Chalabi, who, to this day, is still on the U.S. government payroll. And Chalabi is a fraud. He was in the early 1990s, when I first came across him. Tony Zinni has spoken out against him, and got in a lot of trouble with [Sen.] Trent Lott [R-Miss.], for fighting to prevent the Congress from giving Chalabi’s Iraqi Congress \$94 million a few years ago.

Chalabi very quickly realized that the neo-cons wanted to hear certain things, and he obliged them, by giving them information, including planting erroneous intelligence. All of the stories, from dancing in the streets, to the locations of weapons of mass destruction, were all fabrications. And the people in the government bought into this, and there’s some evidence that they even cooked the books, with respect to intelligence information, so that they could cherry-pick unrefined information that had come to the United States, through intelligence sources, in order to make the case.

The second piece, of course, is that once they had made the case—if erroneously—to invade Iraq, they did an unbelievably poor job in planning for the reconstruction of the country. And this is evidenced by the fact, that a year after that phase of the operation began, that services, jobs, and security, are still woefully lacking in the country as a whole, and that we have done something that virtually no ruler of

Iraq has been able to accomplish, in the past: and that's to unite Sunnis and Shi'as in a common cause, against an external enemy; namely, the United States.

EIR: How do you assess the present situation on the ground? Word came back a few hours ago, that there's fairly heavy bombing and fighting in Karbala and Najaf, in addition to the situation up north, in the Fallujah area. How serious do you consider the situation on the ground, in terms of the building resistance against this U.S. occupation?

Hoar: Well, I think, that going back to the beginning of the reconstruction phase, all activities, once organized resistance was defeated a year ago, should have been turned over to political people, under the supervision of the Department of State. Because all activities going forward are, in fact, political activities. The military's responsibility is to provide security, and the exercise of force, in this circumstance, is much more useful when it's threatened than when it's actually used. And we find again and again, particularly in counterinsurgency operations, that when force is used amid an uncommitted, or generally hostile population, that the perpetrator of the force continues to lose political support.

And this, after all, is what this campaign, this current campaign, should be all about: Is winning the willing support of Iraqi citizens for the U.S. program going forward? And, by conducting large-scale operations in key cities, like Najaf and Karbala, we risk the popular support, or even grudging support of the Shi'a population, which we badly need, in order to bring about any successful transfer of power and movement toward democracy.

EIR: It seems that there are widely different approaches being taken in different parts of the country, and even disagreements on implementation. I'm referring to Gen. [James] Conway's decision to attempt to bring stability to Fallujah by putting together a new Iraqi military force in the city, to take up the primary security responsibilities. It seemed as if, after he had taken that move, which seemed to be a pretty smart move in my view, there was a lot of flak from back in the Pentagon civilian bureaucracy back in Washington, from [Paul] Wolfowitz and [Douglas] Feith and people like that. What's your assessment of what General Conway was doing up there, in Fallujah?

Hoar: Well, I have said it several times, and at least a couple of times publicly: Paul Wolfowitz is a very bright guy, but he doesn't know anything about war-fighting, and I suspect he knows less about counterinsurgency operations; and that Jim Conway has done exactly the right thing.

The attempt is to pacify Fallujah. If we get into the business of trying to conduct punitive operations against people in Fallujah, without specific actionable intelligence about who was responsible for the killing and the atrocities against the four civilian contractors, we're going to ultimately lose out.



General Hoar: "I think we're running out of time. If something is not done soon, I think it may be irretrievable."

Fallujah is a tribal city. It was a problem for Saddam Hussein. It has been a problem for virtually every government that has ruled Iraq, with the exception of a period prior to Saddam Hussein's rule; there was a military ruler who came from Fallujah. The solution to Fallujah has to be, to work through the tribal leaders in that city and that area, and that includes security, and ultimately to gain intelligence about the people that are in that city that are a problem.

The difficulty, of course, is that there is a larger disagreement within the U.S. military environment, and it extends to the uniformed services. The disagreement on how to conduct counterinsurgency operations, between the Army and the Marine Corps, goes back to Vietnam. When, in Vietnam, the Army's view was to meet and destroy main force Vietnamese units out in the hinterland. And the Marines' view, was to conduct counterinsurgency operations, to overcome the Vietcong infrastructure in the more populated areas. And, it seems to me, that these two divergent mind-sets have perpetuated themselves into Iraq. There is evidence that the U.S. Army continues to favor major operations, although I think a major diversion from that point of view was the 101st Air Mobile Division, which conducted very successful counterinsurgency operations in their area of responsibility, before rotating back to the States. But, other divisions, for the most part, favored large military operations, as well.

As I said earlier, these kinds of operations tend to alienate a population, and most especially those people that might have had positive attitudes towards the U.S. occupation, or at least were neutral in their views.

EIR: There's another dimension to what's going on now in Iraq, that I think is a rather new phenomenon in American experience, and that's the significant role of private contractors, both fulfilling logistical-type functions, and also a large number of security functions. The original idea of this outsourcing and privatization, as far as I know, emerged during



Gen. James Conway (center) in Fallujah, speaking with Iraqi Army officers on May 4, 2004, on the transfer of responsibility for maintaining order in the city from the Marines to Iraqi forces. Says General Hoar: “Jim Conway has done exactly the right thing.”

accomplished by military units that had been transferred to the Reserves. And this makes a lot of sense, because in peacetime operations, there is no requirement for literally tens of thousands of soldiers, whose primary responsibility is to run a port operation, or to drive an 18-wheel truck in a combat zone.

And so, the theory made sense from a practical point of view, and perhaps from an ideological point of view as well. I think that the logical extension of this, was in the '90-91 war, that the Reserves *had* to be called up. There was no way that we could conduct an operation that involved 500,000 American forces, without calling on the Reserves to perform these absolutely essential combat support missions. And so, I think, that while Halliburton has done a great deal of work, Halliburton was doing work for the U.S.

the period when Vice President Cheney was Secretary of Defense, when he commissioned the original Halliburton study of which functions could be outsourced. What's your evaluation of this added factor of private contractors, including private security, quasi-mercenary elements on the ground, there, in Iraq?

Hoar: Well, I think, as a concept, the idea really goes back to the Vietnam War, where there were contractors that deployed with Air Force, Navy, and Marine aviation units, in order to help service the aircraft. And to my knowledge this was the first time that major combat operations were undertaken with civilians working under contract to directly assist the military in performing their functions.

Additionally, there was a great deal of construction work that was done in Vietnam, by, I believe, American construction companies, but I'm not sure of that. Cam Ranh Bay was an example of the large port that was built in central Vietnam.

So, the concept predates Mr. Cheney's time as the Secretary of the Defense. Further, in the 1970s, the United States Army reorganized, to make sure—as I understand it—that the U.S. Army would never go to war, again, without activating the Reserves. You'll recall that in Vietnam, the Reserves were never called up, and the United States Army had a well-balanced force, in which virtually everybody that served was in an active-duty unit.

The change that took place in the '70s took many combat support activities—for example, medical hospitals, stevedore battalions that would open ports—in fact, all the day-to-day requirements for logistic throughput in a combat zone, from ships to ports, to trucks, and movement to the front, were

government, in places like Yugoslavia and Somalia, prior to this time. And indeed, if I'm not mistaken, Halliburton's association with providing contractual support to the U.S. government goes back to the time when Mr. Lyndon Johnson was the President.

EIR: We talked last week, about a proposal that Mr. LaRouche has put forward to stabilize the situation, through a fairly dramatic change in the present concept underlying the mission there: to keep American forces there, but under a radically different status of forces agreement; put much more emphasis on reconstruction, and turn the whole effort really officially, over to [Lakhdar] Brahimi and the UN to try to work out some kind of arrangement, with a more credible interim government, minus the Chalabi types.

What's your recipe for what can be done now? It's obviously a year into an insurgency situation; it's more difficult. But, what kinds of things do you think need to be done, to both bring stability to the Iraq situation, and to repair whatever damage has been done to the U.S. image in the Arab world and more broadly?

Hoar: Well, I think—to speak, first of all, about the image—I think it's imperative that there be some major changes. The most recent disclosure about the abuse of Iraqi prisoners is a good example of this. One of the reasons the Administration has used for the need to go and invade Iraq, was the abusive nature of the Saddam Hussein regime. It does us no good, to find ourselves being abusive to prisoners in the same prison where Saddam Hussein was abusive to Iraqis!

There is no question that we need to broaden the interna-



“Paul Wolfowitz is a very bright guy, but he doesn’t know anything about war-fighting, and I suspect he knows less about counterinsurgency operations.” Here, top neo-con Deputy Defense Secretary Wolfowitz (center) in Mosul, Iraq, in July 2003.

tional support. And the place to start, is with the UN. And the place, more specifically, is with the UN Security Council. We need a UN Security Council resolution that would authorize a UN Chapter 7 peacekeeping operation, with the United States as the lead; that would allow us to continue going forward with the UN operation, rather than solely a U.S. operation; with the UN taking the lead on the transition from the occupation force to an independent Iraqi government, and the conduct of elections there sometime in the future.

The fact of the matter is, there have never been enough troops on the ground to provide adequate security, starting with Day One when the invasion began, up until the present time. We have tried to get by on the cheap, with disastrous results. There have never been adequate resources, directed toward the reconstruction of Iraq. I’m told that unemployment in the country still remains at about 80%. [The United States] is a country that, during the Depression, put people to work on public transportation, public welfare projects for roads, dams, buildings, power. It seems to me, that so much more could be done to enhance the quality of life of Iraqis, more than just painting schools, and going about some of these minor programs; but rather, major programs to help revitalize the Iraqi economy, particularly since the original estimates about the ability of the oil sector of the Iraqi government to pay for the most of the expenses incurred during this reconstruction period, have been woefully incorrect.

So, there’s a great deal of things that need to be done. Services and jobs and security are the three key things that the occupying power, whether it is us or the UN, needs to provide; and that costs a lot of money. And it costs a lot of people on the ground, in terms of providing security. And

without improving those three things—services, jobs, and security—we are not going to have a successful ability to change the attitudes of the people in Iraq.

EIR: What would you see as the consequences, regionally, of failure to make those policy corrections?

Hoar: Well, I think we are certainly at a pivotal point, in terms of what is going on in Iraq. The first thing is, that there is no possibility that we can walk away from Iraq. The consequences of that would be enormous. Secondly, the success of our efforts is really dependent on broadening the base of those that are involved in the operation, namely through the UN and perhaps ultimately bringing NATO into it, as well.

But, the consequences for the neighbors are quite large, because,

while there’s no evidence that al-Qaeda was present before the invasion, it appears that a virtually misguided, but perhaps idealistic Muslim, who feels that the United States has been unfair to Muslim countries, wants to go to Iraq to fight Americans. And, if a power vacuum were created there, it would be fertile ground for terrorists of all stripes; it would be fertile ground for neighboring countries, particularly Iran, to attempt to make inroads in the political structure; and it would be fertile ground for al-Qaeda to enter into a failed state that was about to implode on itself.

And so, the United States must stay. In order to be successful, in my judgment, we need to broaden our base of support through the UN, and spend more money and more time, and more ambitious programs, and more armed soldiers on the ground. And if those soldiers don’t come from other countries, we’re going to have to provide them ourselves, in order to make this work. Even at the cost of severely upsetting the nature of our rotation policy for soldiers and Marines, we must do this on an emergency basis, until we gain the upper hand, and gain some modicum of control. If we can bring other countries in to help us, so much the better.

EIR: How significant a linkage do you see, between the Israel/Palestine situation, and the challenges on the ground in Iraq, and throughout the whole region?

Hoar: There’s enormous significance. And there are many people in government and elsewhere in the United States that have attempted to decouple the inter-connectedness of these two issues. They are connected, because 1.2 billion Muslims—worldwide, but largely spread out between the Philippines and all the way across South Asia and North Africa to



Israeli President Ariel Sharon and President Bush at their April 14 meeting in Washington, at which Bush approved Sharon's repudiation of the Road Map and 50 years of U.S. policy toward Israel and Palestine. "The timing of it could not have been worse," says Hoar, "given the internal unrest that exists right now in Iraq, and then, on top of that, the events of this maltreatment of Iraqi prisoners."

Morocco—believe that the United States has unjustly taken the part of Israel, in the Palestine/Israel confrontation. Many of our activities in the region, including the invasion of Iraq, are connected to our support for Israel.

And, our public diplomacy in this regard, has been horrendous, in that we have taken the back seat to Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya, two of the most prominent cable television stations, which have cameramen and newspeople on the ground all the time, and are looking for opportunities to make this case. Now, whether the case is a good one or not, from our point of view as American citizens, it's important to point out that there is linkage in the eyes of Muslims worldwide; and if we don't deal with that problem, it makes the problem in the region—and more specifically in Iraq—more difficult.

And so, when the President stands with Mr. Sharon, and makes statements that are patently not in congruence with the work of the Quartet and the Road Map that had been put together by the Quartet—namely, the United States, the EU, Russia, and Kofi Annan, UN Secretary General—that that is immediately read as another example of how the United States unjustly supports Israel. And in fact, the timing of it could not have been worse, given the internal unrest that exists right now in Iraq, and then, on top of that, the events of this maltreatment of Iraqi prisoners.

So, it's a major part of this. It's a major issue in terms of public diplomacy. It's a major issue, because throughout the Arab world and the Muslim world, the larger Muslim world of 1.2 billion people, we are perceived as an occupying power, and treating the Palestinian issue unfairly, while at the same time, our circumstances in Iraq are not improving.

EIR: As someone with a great deal of experience in the re-

gion as a whole, how do you appraise the situation with the major regimes that have been historically pro-American: Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan? Does this combined Iraq problem and the failure to deal justly with Israel/Palestine create, in your judgment, serious threats of instability in those countries, also?

Hoar: I think very much so. It's interesting, that in perhaps more elegant terms, both President Mubarak of Egypt and King Abdullah of Jordan have said essentially what I've just said a moment ago, with respect to the linkage between the Iraqi business and the Israeli-Palestinian issue. Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia has carried forward a peace proposal to the Arab League, and received 25 votes to nothing, unanimously supporting it, which in large measure looked very much like the Oslo Accords, with some differences, but certainly, a place where the negotiations could begin again. It seems to me, as a representative of a government in the Middle East said to me some months ago, but after the invasion of Iraq, that the United States makes it very hard to be friends with them. And, I think, in the Middle East, the countries that encircle, or are neighbors of Iraq, which have historically had close ties to the United States, find it very difficult to be supportive of U.S. policy in the region, and at the same time, be responsive to their own, indigenous populations.

EIR: Do you see any evidence, from within the particularly neo-conservative circles within the Bush Administration, that there's any sense of lessons learned, any kind of rethinking, as the result of the mess that we're in on the ground right now in Iraq?

Hoar: Well, the military doesn't always get it right. But, one

of the things that the military has learned over the years, is that you continually have reviews about how organizations perform. And you have after-action reports, you have critical discussions about what went well, and what went wrong. I see no evidence of anybody in this government going back and looking back at the events of the last couple of years, with an effort to try and determine what went well, and what went wrong. And, I mean on the ground. I don't mean the 9/11 Commission, and some of these others that are more narrowly focussed. We have had a Congressional committee to look at intelligence.

But, what went well with the offensive campaign, that allowed us to seize Iraq in a relatively short period of time; what went wrong in that portion of the campaign; and similarly, what steps had been taken during that period in planning, and what had taken place in execution in the post-offensive operation phase of this; without the ability to go back and be critical of your own actions, it seems to me that there's very little ability to make changes in the future.

And I would just point out one example: the manner in which we handled the Iraqi Army. You will recall, shortly after the offensive operations terminated, the decision was made to disband the Iraqi Army. This was done, at least in part, on the recommendations of Mr. Chalabi, that these people were all Ba'athists and couldn't be trusted in the government. But, as I recall, within a day or two, soldiers came out on the street and rioted. U.S. Army troops were called out; they fired into the mob, killed some number of protesting former soldiers of the Iraq government. The next day, it was decided that there would be a stipend for soldiers. So, they were all sent home with their rifles and their rocket-propelled grenades, with a small stipend. And then, we come full circle, in almost a year, where we have now decided, that perhaps we're going to have to hire some of these people back again, if we're going to establish an effective force, border patrol, police, and so forth.

And, finally coming to the realization that there were many people who joined the Ba'athist Party during the Saddam Hussein regime, only to make a living, and be able to get by, where any kind of promotion or any kind of status—whether they were academics or in the government or in the military—was dependent on their membership in the Ba'athist Party. And that all of those people were not necessarily ardent supporters of Saddam Hussein.

So, I think that the neo-conservatives had their day, by selling to the President the need for invasion of Iraq. I think



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it's now time for a clean sweep—and it has been for some time, in my judgment—to get rid of these people. And, to see if we can put together a more coherent policy than has existed for the last couple years.

EIR: Any closing comments, you'd care to make? I very much appreciate your time.

Hoar: Well, Jeff, I don't think all is lost. But, we're getting to the point, where it is becoming increasingly more difficult to make the case that our purposes were noble and that the end of this occupation will be a better day for the Iraqis. We have a lot of convincing to do, to convince the Iraqis of our nobility and our honest efforts, with regard to a new Iraq. And, without their belief in our noble efforts, and without their active support, the success of this endeavor is almost certainly doomed to failure.

There are some things that can be done: the UN multinational effort; a serious increase in resources, both in terms of troops on the ground, and also money to help rebuild the country and convince these people that we have their best interests at heart.

But, I think we're running out of time. If something is not done soon, I think it may be irretrievable.

EIR: With some pretty horrifying consequences, both for the region as a whole, and also elsewhere around the planet.

Hoar: Well, and for the reputation of the United States. We are certainly not going to come out of this, with our reputation as a beacon for democracy intact. In fact, it's seriously damaged already.