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Interview: Gen. Joseph Hoar (USMC, ret.)

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## Gonzales's Policies Put American Soldiers at Risk

*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 is one of a group of senior flag officers who on Jan. 3 released an extraordinary statement of opposition to the nomination of Alberto Gonzales as Attorney General, which came before the Senate Judiciary Committee on Jan. 6. General Hoar was interviewed on Jan. 1 by Jeffrey Steinberg. A previous interview with General Hoar by Steinberg appeared in the May 21, 2004 EIR.*

**EIR:** It's now Jan. 1, 2005, and in just several days, I believe on Jan. 4, a group of generals and admirals is scheduled to hold a press conference in Washington, D.C., on the eve of the confirmation hearings for Alberto Gonzales, the White House General Counsel, who is now President Bush's nominee for Attorney General.

General, I understand that you and the group are opposing the nomination of Alberto Gonzales, and I wonder if you could give us some of the background on how this group of very impressive retired military officers, including several prominent Judge Advocates General, came together, and why you're opposing the nomination of Gonzales.

**Hoar:** Well, first of all, on the personal level, Jeff, I would characterize my own opposition to this as going back earlier in the Gulf War, and more especially, the Afghan war, in which Mr. Gonzales wrote the famous memoranda for the President, in which he described the Geneva Conventions as "outmoded and perhaps quaint"—I think that was the word that he used. And I thought it was extraordinary, that somebody who's an attorney, who is in the White House, could view these Conventions, which have the effect of law, since they've been approved by the Senate, as quaint or outmoded, because the motivation for these conventions, of course, had been the protection of American military men and women, who might become prisoners of war later on.

And so, while I'm not a legal expert by any manner or means, my concern is, as an operator, as a person who has been involved in combat operations, that our major concern with respect to these things, is to protect the safety and the lives of potential American POWs in the future.

The other issue is—my major issue—is my own belief that these papers that were written by Mr. Gonzales, and Mr. Yoo, who was also in that office, if memory serves me correctly, were the basis for future developing policy statements in the Department of Defense, with respect to torture and the treatment of prisoners.

And I think, again, the major problem that I see, is that—this is an area that I'm a little bit more familiar with, in that, having taught at our command and staff college at Quantico, Virginia a year ago, and having taught courses about what we used to call revolutionary warfare, and counterinsurgency—that there is a very discernible line in other countries, where nations, particularly democratic nations, have been faced with an internal security problem, or terrorism, and inevitably, they have chosen to compromise the rights of individual citizens. And inevitably, torture in one form or another is used, as a means of extracting information from people that are held prisoner. And of course, this goes back to the Geneva Accords, again, and to international law, where torture is prohibited by international law.

And so, even in democracies, like the United Kingdom, and France, and Israel, these rules have been compromised. And so, my concern in the case of the torture issue, is that this is a very slippery slope, and could very easily find its way into not only the torture of "enemy combatants," but also American citizens, and it just needs to be stopped.

**EIR:** There's another, I'd say clearly secondary, issue to the issues of international law, and fundamental morality, but I've heard a number of military people who have been involved in intelligence work say, that, in point of fact, torture never really works very effectively as an interrogation technique for extracting useful information. Is that your view as well?

**Hoar:** Yes. I've never seen any kind of empirical work that would back that [torture] up. And people that we all know and respect, including Senator McCain, who has been subjected to this sort of thing, have said exactly that: That different kinds of interrogation techniques, most specifically, those that are more gentle, but persistent, that cause a detainee to gain confidence in his interrogator and so forth, usually produce better information.

I might say that the French in Algeria justified torturing

terrorists, because of the timeliness of the information they were trying to extract, but there's no evidence that they were able to achieve any kind of a better record than anybody else.

**EIR:** In fact, one of the French generals who was involved in what they referred to as the "dirty war" of the Battle of the Casbah, wrote a book many years later, which reflected on the lack of success of those methods, and the fact that they seemed to be winning the counterinsurgency war, but in fact, were really losing any ability to maintain control over that situation.

**Hoar:** Was that Tranquier's book?

**EIR:** Yes.

**Hoar:** Yes. It's interesting that you've read that. I stumbled through it in French, and subsequently found an English translation of it, and it's a very, very powerful book. I think one of the things that's so interesting today, is the movie, the "Battle of Algiers," which has been re-issued, on DVD, I'm told. I've not seen it in its current form. It's something of a documentary and *enormously powerful*. And most important for those of us who have served in the military, it is a great example of how the French military won the Battle of Algiers, lost their honor, and ultimately lost the war. Because all of these things are political, rather than military, and the military must serve the political ends of the government, and Mr. de Gaulle in his situation as the President of the French Republic, and long experience as a soldier, realized this, and was perhaps the only person in France that could have made this decision to cut Algeria loose, and allow them independence.

**EIR:** The last time that we spoke in an interview format, we talked about your appraisal of the on-the-ground situation in Iraq. I think that was probably about eight or nine months ago, and I'd been interested in getting your updated assessment. You expressed grave concerns about the approach that was being taken. That was at the time of the initial Fallujah encounter. We've now gone through two more battles of Fallujah. I'd like to get your overall appraisal of where the situation stands, on the eve of the upcoming elections there.

**Hoar:** Well, let me start with Fallujah, because I think Fallujah has been, and will be, pivotal in the success of the counterinsurgency effort in Iraq. I think your readers will recall that the Fallujah campaign was precipitated by a grotesque murder of four American citizens in that city, and their bodies hung up on lamp posts, and so forth. And at the time, as I recall, the *Wall Street Journal* indicated that the White House had ordered the attack on Fallujah. I'm told that the British commanders in Iraq had recommended against it. I've heard also that the Marines were against it.

But nonetheless, the attack took place, and, of course, once it got started, I think for multiple reasons, first of all, the casualties, but secondly, members of the Coalition govern-

ment threatened to pull out if the attack continued, [it was stopped]. But the fact of the matter was, that once begun, from a military point of view, it probably should have been allowed to continue to a successful conclusion, particularly since some months later, we went back in again.

And my own view is that the insurgents precipitated this attack. They continued to stay in that city, to come and go as they chose, to use it as a base of operations. And, of course, once it was clear, after the U.S. elections in November that we were going to have Act II of Fallujah, they continued to stay there, and then, at the appropriate moment, the leadership all pulled out, leaving what, my guess would be, fanatic soldiers of the insurgency who were willing to stay and fight and die in the city.

But I think that the combination of American firepower, and the skillful use of fortifying mosques and using mosques as weapons sites and so forth, has created something throughout the Muslim world that will be very, very difficult to overcome in the future. The view on the Muslim street, of course, is that this was a desecration of holy places, of mosques; pictures of Marines standing around, with all their equipment in mosques, were flashed on the internet, all around the world.

The political implications of this military success are that the insurgents are no longer using Fallujah as a base of operation. The downside is that, if there were Sunnis in the Sunni Triangle who thought there might be a chance of being a part of all of this, and participating in the election, I suspect that there are very few left. The larger problem is, again, throughout the Muslim world, where the combination of pictures, al-Jazeera, al-Arabiya—the cable Arabic-speaking stations—have again created the belief that the United States is not only an occupying power, but a cruel occupying power.

I really think that we turned the corner with Fallujah. I think that the military piece of this is irretrievable, not because American forces are not able to do the job—they've done a superb job. I think that the fighting qualities of the men and women who are serving in Iraq, are unsurpassed, far better than anything that I can remember in my own service, that goes back into the 1950s. It's not an issue of military capability. It's an issue of, at the highest levels, being able to see that, first and foremost, this is a political operation, and that the military action has to support the political objective. And if you would reflect for a moment, that the President's stated objective, I believe, is to create a free and democratic democracy in Iraq, that includes the rule of law, and the protection of minorities; if that's our strategic objective, the operational objective, of destroying a city of nearly 300,000 people, makes no sense whatever.

There is such an enormous disconnect between the strategic and the operational level out there, I think that we have lost. And how we have lost, remains to be seen, because there's much more at stake now than just the elections, and who will be elected, and who will write a new constitution.

There are regional issues that must be thought about, in terms of what would happen if a civil war followed the elections, and what would that do to our friends in the region.

**EIR:** Very much reminiscent of what you were discussing a few moments ago, about the Algeria situation, where, in the case of France, General de Gaulle, being a military leader as well as the head of state, had the foresight to understand when a defeat had actually occurred on the political level, and had the courage to pull out: Do you see any indications of a similar level of recognition of the actual dilemma from the Bush Administration?

**Hoar:** [Laughs.]

**EIR:** A wishful thinking question.

**Hoar:** Well, you know, we can only look back and view all of this, and say, that there is no discernible effort of self-examination. No discernible effort to go back over various phases of what has gone on out there in the last couple of years, and have some sort of a hot wash-out, some sit-down, and have a critique about what went well, and what didn't go well. And to take appropriate action, which, in some cases, should have meant that people would have lost their job. I've said publicly for something over a year now, that both Mr. Rumsfeld and Mr. Wolfowitz ought to be fired, but clearly that's not going to happen.

The point is, that there has been no reflection on how all of this has gone.

The larger issue, and where the Iraq problem diverges from Algeria, is: You recall that Algeria was really considered to be part of the Metropole, to be part of France, and not truly a colony. And so, the likelihood that defeat on the part of the French government in Algeria would somehow affect other countries in North Africa, I don't think was ever considered to be a real possibility.

Unlike Iraq: There is enormous sympathy for the Iraqis as Muslims, for the Iraqis as Arabs. There are other powerful forces in the region that would like to see, first and foremost, a stable Iraqi government, but also one that satisfies their own particular needs.

If I could start with Iran, I think that if you could produce a strong central government in Iraq, that there would be very little interaction politically with Iran. Iraqi Shi'a don't acknowledge primacy of Iran, and the Shi'a intellectual and religious groups in Iran, but could certainly be driven in that direction, if they had no other friends in the region.

Similarly, the issue of Kurdistan. Whether or not the Kurds will be deprived of what they hope is some sort of a confederation that gives them a great deal of autonomy, remains to be seen. My guess is that they will not get it, that the elected government, which will be dominated by Shi'a, will attempt to create a very strong central government, and this will cause further internal discord. But efforts on the part of Iraqi Kurdistan to become independent, would

be opposed by both Turkey and by Iran, with potential dire consequences for the region.

And then, finally, there is the problem of the Sunni minority, which has run the country for such a long time, that is clearly not going to be dominant in any kind of democratic society in the future, and, under some circumstances, could find itself as an oppressed minority. And so, all of these forces are in movement, and are all going on at the same time, in a confined area, where we have countries like Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan, that are on the borders of these countries; less powerful militarily, and yet each one is important to American foreign policy and economic policy. And so, this is where the second- and third-order consequences of a failed state in Iraq come into play.

That, if we fail in Iraq, the political consequences in the region could be disastrous. And so, that really is the danger. And unlike the French, we really need to tough it out. But the problem is, is that we have a civilian leadership that doesn't understand what it's going to take to win.

**EIR:** What would be some of the elements, in your view, that would be required? For example, the issue of training of an Iraqi military and police, and border guard, infrastructure questions, all of these things? What do we have to do in order to actually turn this disastrous situation around, to at least salvage some stability in the region?

**Hoar:** Well, I think that's the problem. And from a standpoint of a purely security, or military, problem, we would, in order to leave the country, need to leave it in the hands of an entity that had sufficient resources to provide at least for its own internal security. And that certainly is not one of the possibilities at this moment. And my own judgment is that General Petraeus, who's a renowned and respected Army general officer, who commanded the 101st Division during the original fight in Phase 3, going up to the overthrow of the Saddam Hussein government, has been put in charge of training Iraqi forces; but a couple of months ago, the 600 people that he's supposed to have on his staff, something like a third of the positions on his staff had been filled at that time, and two-thirds had not been filled.

So, we, first of all, haven't given it the priority that it deserves.

Secondly, the unbelievable decision to send the Iraqi Army home, by Mr. Bremer, early in the occupation, was a fatal error. And so, we can train all the recruits we want, but if you don't have senior NCOs, and officers, to lead them, you're not likely to be able to produce either an effective military fighting force, or a police force. And so, the time lag between the period in which we occupied the country, and where we are today, with very few effective security forces, already trained and operating, most of which are Kurdish forces, it seems unlikely that we could go, even if we wanted to. We have created this unstable situation now, and we have to stay on to fix it.



*U.S. soldiers in a cemetery in Fallujah. General Hoar comments on the nomination of Alberto Gonzales, that it is extraordinary, that someone in his position could view the Geneva Conventions "as quaint or outmoded, because the motivation for these conventions, of course, had been the protection of American military men and women, who might become prisoners of war later on."*

My own view is, and has been for some time, that we needed to postpone elections, and to give 100% effort to training police, and military forces, and integrating them into the U.S. forces, with U.S. equipment, so that they could be protected. And the insurgents have very skillfully used their own people to undermine the respect and the trust for Iraqi forces.

For example, the suicide bomber that was able to penetrate the Army base at Mosul, and kill himself along with 20-odd Americans and Iraqis: This is the sort of thing that politically does enormous damage to our overall effort, because one of the key aspects of this successful campaign, is for loyal Iraqis, and U.S. forces, to trust one another, and work closely together. And this is where the parallel between Vietnam and Iraq is relevant. There were very good Vietnamese military formations, but there were many very poor military formations in Vietnam. In fact Hanson Baldwin, a fellow that used to write military columns for the *New York Times*, said, sometime in the late '60s, that everything that you say about the Vietnamese Armed Forces is true, and the implication was that there were superb units, and just terrible units that were out there. And we've yet to see too many very effective units emerge in Iraq.

But, we went through something called Vietnamization in those years, starting about 1969, 1970, if memory serves me correctly, but the view was, ready or not, Vietnam, we're pulling out, and so we're going to give you every effort to train up your forces, but we're not going to be here for the big fight.

That is where I see the parallel between Vietnam and Iraq: That sooner or later, we're going to feel domestic pressure to pull forces out of there, and that line is going to be converging

with the need to train an effective, capable military and security force, and it remains to be seen how successful we'll be in creating that force, that will allow us to leave. But we certainly can't go until we bring some degree of stability to Iraq.

**EIR:** At a recent meeting between President Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair, Secretary of State Colin Powell made a very strong case for the need for expanded American forces in Iraq. Yet some other military commentators have pointed out that our force structure at this point is stretched to the limit, and questioned whether or not we could actually significantly expand, and actually deliver the required force, without either going to a draft, or some sort of massive call-up of Reserve and National Guard, beyond what we've already done. Are we at that point of stretching the military force structure to the limits?

**Hoar:** Well, the issue really relates, in my judgment, to the Army Reserve, and National Guard. And I've heard on television, respected retired Army general officers say that we have about another year, year-and-a-half, and then we'll hit a stone wall, because we will have exhausted our ability to redeploy Reserves and National Guards, and they'll be no other place from which to draw the people. If memory serves me, there's something like 40% of the U.S. Army forces that are currently in Iraq, that are Reserve and National Guard. So, there is a train wreck coming, in that respect.

But the point is, that it's not going to get any better unless you get enough forces on the ground. And you know, there was a time in the U.S. military when, in the Second World War, troops served for the duration, and it was not

at all unusual for somebody to be gone two years, or longer, in combat zones. And so, it would seem to me, that it would be better to put the right number of forces on the ground now, and make a beginning at defeating this insurgency, especially through the training of Iraqi forces, and worry about the long-term consequences of this as we come down. Because, it's apparent to me, from day one, that there were not enough forces on the ground to do the job. Even during the invasion period, the Phase 3, and it certainly continues to be true today.

And, again, there is a reluctance on the part of the people in the Department of Defense, the civilian leadership in the Department of Defense, to own up to their miscalculations, and say: "We were wrong, and that the military was correct." And that Tommy Franks's first plan, presented to the Secretary of Defense for some 470,000 troops, was the right plan, and that the one that they wound up with, which was, in my judgment, forced on the military, was the wrong plan.

And so, we have to face up to the fact that there have never been sufficient troops in Iraq to do the job, and there aren't today. And unless we make some major changes, *particularly* in terms of how we train, and how we work with the Iraqi security forces, it's not going to get any better.

**EIR:** And the neo-cons at the Pentagon now, after the Nov. 2 election results, seem to be putting the Syria regime-change issue back, if not on the front burner, at least on middle burner, even as this Iraq situation goes as you've so aptly described it.

**Hoar:** Well, I think that these people feel as though their policies have been affirmed by the electorate. I think that's an arguable point. Much of the kinds of discussions that we're having are very complex issues, and when you still had, here this past fall, 42% of the American people that thought that Saddam Hussein was involved in the 9/11 attack on the United States, that only leads you to the conclusion that most Americans don't have a clear sense of who's running the Department of Defense, and what the issues are.

I think it would be a great mistake to try and broaden this conflict into Syria. Perhaps the only good news about our problems in Iraq, is that it makes further adventurism in another country, it would seem to me at least, impossible to actively consider at this moment, because of the paucity of combat forces to be used in another country.

**EIR:** Unfortunately, there's been—there's a level of insanity, I fear, among some of these people, that they continue to talk, although Congress sort of slapped them on the wrist on the issue of developing capabilities for conventional use of micro and mini-nuclear weapons. . . . I fear that the insanity factor, or being disconnected from reality, among some of these neo-conservatives, who know nothing about war-fighting, one would hope that the reality is weighing in to the point that we're not going to get into any further adventures, but. . .

**Hoar:** Well, I think . . . I have the same hope, Jeff. I think

the concern is, who in the government will speak out and openly oppose these kinds of thoughts? My belief is that, having worked with Colin Powell for a number of years, that I feel reasonably certain, without having ever asked him, that he was constantly the voice of caution about much of this military adventurism. And with him gone, it's hard for me to believe, and certainly with the change at CIA, I think the likelihood that you're going to have senior government officials counselling caution—I think anything is possible. I really do. I think it's a frightening prospect.

**EIR:** One of the other aspects of this, is that there's a big push coming out of the same civilian grouping at the Pentagon, to carry out other kinds of questionable operations under the umbrella of the war on terrorism, and that there are some things being put together under Steven Cambone, and General Boykin over at this new Office of Intelligence, in the Secretary of Defense's office, that has a vision of recasting Special Forces as international hit squads, under the umbrella of the same sort of lack of concern, or regard, for international law.

**Hoar:** Well, I couldn't agree more. And I think this is a very scary aspect of what's been going on as part of the "reorganization of the intelligence community." I think it's a big mistake. And given General Boykin's demonstrated poor judgment, in my judgment, he shouldn't be allowed to make any decisions about anything, after his public displays of bad judgment about Islam, and his experiences in other places.

**EIR:** Two final questions: Last year, you joined with a number of very respected diplomats and other retired military commanders, in a kind of ad hoc organization, I think it was called Diplomats and Military Commanders for Change, that advocated regime change in Washington, and criticized a lot of the Bush Administration's policies. I wonder if you've had discussions with any of those people, and if there's going to be a continuation, either of that grouping, or some combination of those people, because it had a very important political impact to see individuals with such depth of diplomatic and military experience, coming out publicly, in a way that obviously active-duty people simply can't do.

**Hoar:** Yes. It was kind of too bad, but I think it was also indicative of the population that that group represented, in this respect. Retired military people, for the most part, are very reluctant to become a part of the political process, and my sense is that this is true for retired diplomats, as well. They tend to eschew public statements, critical of the government, or, worse yet, to endorse a particular political candidate. The endorsement of candidates, as you know, is not new in the United States, but it's just that for a period of time, it was dormant. When you had giants like General Marshall who was so apolitical that he's reputed to not ever have voted, because he felt that a military officer shouldn't be part of the

political process at all.

You need only go back to the Civil War to see that in the second Lincoln Presidential campaign, he was opposed by a general that he had fired, who was the Democratic nominee. So, things don't always remain the same.

The other thing, particularly with respect to military, senior military officers, is they tend as a group, to be very conservative in their thinking, both politically and socially. And, as a result, the majority of them are Republicans, or at least, if independent, at least think along the lines of many of the precepts of the traditional Republican Party. All of this made this distinguished group somewhat unusual, in that, of all the retired diplomats, of all the retired general officers, there were still an awful lot whom I know of, that were dissatisfied with the first [George W.] Bush Administration, particularly the handling of Iraq, both on the political side, and the military side, but yet were not prepared to go public.

And so, you'll recall, that while that group called for change, they never endorsed a Presidential candidate, and for some, that was a great badge of honor: That they were willing to be critical of policy, and ask for change in the policy, but not directly to oppose a seated President by supporting another candidate. I happened not to share that view, but I was willing to oppose the policy, *and* support another candidate. But many of the people in that group did not want to do that. And there had been some discussion by e-mail about continuing the process, and continuing to work. But I sensed that the majority felt that they had done what they wanted to do, which was to illumine the issues that had existed in Mr. Bush's first four years, and point out where the shortcomings were, and ask for change.

It might very well have come in a second Bush Administration.

So, nobody stood up and said, "Look, I'm willing to take over the leadership of this group, and let's keep fighting, and keep making the points." And so, I think it had died a natural death, at least that's—I could very well find that I somehow or other, missed that this is continuing on, but I see no evidence of it.

**EIR:** That leads into, really, the final question, which is the genesis of this current initiative on the nomination of Alberto Gonzales, for Attorney General. Again, a highly ranking group of military officers, retired, including several Judge Advocates General, have come forward on a policy issue, namely challenging the viability of Gonzales's candidacy. Can you give me a bit of background on how this came together, and what you expect to come out of this press conference this week in Washington?

**Hoar:** Yes. Well, I think, first of all, of all segments of the retired community, the retired staff Judge Advocates, the military lawyers, have really had the courage of their convictions. They have stood up and been counted, for Abu Ghraib, for Guantánamo, treatment of prisoners—as a group. Consider-

ing their relatively small numbers, they have been extraordinary in their willingness to stand up for the rule of law, and dealing with these complex issues in an even-handed and appropriate way.

You will notice there are very few line officers, like myself, that have been involved in these issues.

I think that the key thing, the thing we are asking the Senate Judiciary Committee, is to ask a series of questions of Mr. Gonzales during his confirmation hearings, that will fully illuminate Mr. Gonzales's role in the development of these policy papers, that had to do with the abrogation of Geneva Accords in the Afghan campaign, and the use of torture for detainees. And I think it's imperative that these issues be *fully illuminated* at the hearing. And this is what we hope will happen: Is that the Senate Judiciary Committee, which will recommend to the Senate as a whole, whether or not Mr. Gonzales should be confirmed as the Attorney General, really needs to bear down on these issues, and taking the documentary evidence that we have, and connect the dots, to find out what Mr. Gonzales's role has been in these very troubling issues.

And, we are doing nothing more than, as concerned citizens, asking the Senate Judiciary Committee to perform its duty, to make sure that we all have a better understanding of what Mr. Gonzales's role has been in the development of these policies.

**EIR:** One would hope that the Senate will be able to rise above the immense pressures of partisanship coming out of the White House, and particularly Vice President Cheney's role as President Pro-Tem of the Senate, and that this will be fully aired. We're going to be submitting testimony ourselves, also in opposition to the Gonzales nomination, because of some of the very issues that you've raised.

**Hoar:** I *really* think that what is most important, is to get into the record what this person's views were, and what role he played in the development of policy. And I would personally look to people like Senator Leahy, to take the leadership role in running some of this stuff to ground. Because it's not so much a question of having the votes, as it is making clear to the American people, and to the world, what role Mr. Gonzales has had in the development of this policy. And I think that's critical.

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