

McCaffrey Critiques Bush War Without End

by Carl Osgood

Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz wrote that the only ends of strategy “are those objectives that will finally lead to peace.” American strategy since the death of Franklin D. Roosevelt has repeatedly failed that test. As Lyndon LaRouche has noted, this was clearly the case in Vietnam, where America lost because it chose to fight that war; and while George H.W. Bush avoided that outcome in Iraq in 1991, he left behind an unsatisfactory situation, which George Shultz’s Synarchists used to successfully manipulate his son into a disastrous war in 2003, which, after four years, has no end in sight. Indeed, it has already spread beyond Iraq into the Horn of Africa, and the Cheneyacs are threatening to take it into Iran, Syria, and Sudan, and to do that without a strategy “that will finally lead to peace.”

The current situation in Iraq is the setting of the widely circulated March 26 After Action Report by retired Gen. Barry McCaffrey, who has travelled, to Iraq to assess the situation there, every four months or so, on behalf of a grouping at the U.S. Military Academy. In his report-back, McCaffrey paints a very grim picture of the present situation on the ground. McCaffrey writes that Iraq “is ripped” by a low-grade civil war, “which has worsened to catastrophic levels”: There are thousands of attacks on U.S. troops per month, from both Shi’a and Sunni; 3 million Iraqis are displaced or have fled the country; and the Maliki government has lost credibility among the Shi’a population, is despised by the Sunni “as a Persian surrogate,” and is seen as untrustworthy and incompetent by the Kurds. There is no function of government that operates effectively across the country, and the government cannot spend its own money effectively.

“No Iraqi government official, coalition soldier, diplomat, reporter, foreign NGO, nor contractor can walk the streets of Baghdad, nor Mosul, nor Kirkuk, nor Basra, nor Tikrit, nor Najaf, nor Ramadi without heavily armed protection,” McCaffrey writes. The Iraqi Army is too small, is badly equipped, and suffers from high rates of AWOL and desertion. Enemy insurgents and sectarian militias probably number more than 100,000 fighters, and in many ways are more capable of independent operations. In spite of the huge casualties that have been inflicted on the insurgent forces, the various groups, “without fail apparently re-generate both leadership and foot soldiers. Their sophistication, numbers and lethality go up not down as they incur these staggering losses.”

McCaffrey’s assessment of the U.S. military is equally bleak. “U.S. domestic support for the war in Iraq has evaporated and will not return,” he writes, further noting the \$9 billion monthly cost of the war, and the problems of recruiting, retention, and readiness. “The current deployment requirement of 20+ brigades to Iraq and 2+ brigades to Afghanistan is not sustainable,” he warns. McCaffrey also notes that up to nine National Guard combat brigades will be involuntarily called up for second tours. “Many believe that this second round of involuntary callups will topple the weakened National Guard structure,” he warns.

In summary, he says, “the U.S. Armed Forces are in a position of strategic peril.” A disaster in Iraq, he warns, will result in a struggle that will endanger U.S. interests in the region for a generation, and “we will also produce another generation of soldiers who lack confidence in their American politicians, the media, and their own senior military leadership.”

McCaffrey’s latest assessment stands in stark contrast to one he delivered less than a year ago, on April 25, 2006. In that earlier report, McCaffrey was generally optimistic that an Iraqi government, national army, and police could be formed the way the Bush Administration has attempted, but it would take two to five years to create an army that can stand on its own, and up to ten years to do the same with the police. He warned, however, that, “If we do not see the successful development of a pluralistic administration in the first 120 days of the emerging Jawad al-Maliki leadership—there will be significant chance of the country breaking apart in warring factions among the Sunnis and Shi’a—with a separatist Kurdish north embroiled in their own potential struggle with the Turks.”

McCaffrey is not without optimism that the current situation in Iraq can be salvaged, and uses adjectives as “awe-inspiring” and “magic,” in praising the performance of U.S. troops in action. However, recognizing the political situation in both Iraq and in the U.S. for what it is, McCaffrey concludes by calling for a variant of the “LaRouche Doctrine” approach to this disaster. He warns that there is very little time to get Iraq right. He says that while it is unlikely that the Democratically controlled Congress can force Bush to withdraw, the next President will have 12 months, perhaps less, to “get Iraq straight before he or she is forced to pull the plug.” Therefore, U.S. military planners should assume that we’ll be out of there in less than 36 months from now.

The only way out, however, is by reconciliation. “There will be no imposed military solution with the current non-sustainable U.S. force levels,” McCaffrey admits. The U.S. must also focus on the creation of a regional dialogue, led by Iraqis, with active U.S. participation. While diplomacy is unlikely to produce results in the short run, McCaffrey writes that, in the coming five years, “it will be a prerequisite to a successful U.S. military withdrawal that we open a neutral and permanent political forum in which Iraq’s neighbors are drawn into continuing cooperative engagement.”