

## "Losing One's Nerve in Iraq"

In response to the ever-growing sense that the United States is doing poorly in Iraq, indeed in the view of many is actually losing the war, the U.S. government has launched a campaign to persuade everyone that this is not so. In November, 2005, the U.S. National Security Council published, with great fanfare, a document entitled "National Strategy for Victory in Iraq." And President Bush has been pushing its line vociferously in public speeches.

What this document argues is that victory is occurring, but occurring in stages, that victory is a vital U.S. interest, that the U.S. has a quite clear strategy for victory, but that this victory will take time. The key sentence in this wordy document, which evades all concrete analysis of what is actually going on, is a quote from President Bush's speech on Oct. 6, 2005: "In Iraq, there is no peace without victory. We will keep our nerve, and we will win that victory."

We will keep our nerve, says Bush. But his Rasputin, Vice-President Cheney, is not so sure, since he constantly asserts that U.S. critics of the Bush administration, however mild their criticism, are undermining this "nerve" and risk making the U.S. lose its resolve. The number of Republican Congressmen and Senators who are worried that the voters have already lost their "nerve" and might vote against them seems to be increasing at a very rapid pace, and seems to be having a great impact on the "nerve" of these Republican politicians.

When Rep. John Murtha, ex-Marine and longtime stalwart hawk, called for pulling out of Iraq, most commentators felt he was the unofficial voice of large numbers of senior military officers who were unable to voice their concerns publicly. Is this loss of their nerve? Neither Murtha nor the hidden senior military officers would define it this way. They see a situation in which the U.S. will not at all be able to win the kind of victory Bush is talking about, and by staying in Iraq they believe that the U.S. armed forces are being weakened as a military force able to do its work elsewhere in the world. They want to cut their losses before the U.S. armed forces lose even more.

It seems clear now that virtually every member of the U.S. coalition that has military forces in Iraq intends to reduce its number, if not fully withdraw them, in 2006. It seems fairly clear that the U.S. itself will do this. Nobody of course admits to losing their nerve, but public opinion at home and impending elections are taking their toll.

What about the Iraqis? There are two main groups of Iraqis - those who are energetically fighting the U.S. forces and any Iraqis thought to be cooperating with them, and the others. Those who are energetically fighting the U.S. are said, in this U.S. document, to be composed of three groups: rejectionists (Sunni Arabs who have not "embraced" the changes); Saddamists (who wish to restore the old regime), and terrorists affiliated with or inspired by Al Qaeda. The U.S., according to this document, has more or less given up on the latter two categories but hopes to persuade "many" of the first group to reduce their opposition. There does not however seem to be much evidence that this is happening. In short, those whom the U.S. calls its "enemies" do not seem to have lost their nerve, or their competence in fighting.

But what about the other Iraqis? Here the U.S. seems to be counting on the new Iraqi security forces, presumably under the authority of the new Iraqi government. I say presumably because it is obvious that these security forces are deeply infiltrated both by the "enemies" of

the U.S. and by various militias - two kinds of Kurdish militias, and at least three kinds of Shi'a militias - who are pursuing their own objectives under the cover of being the national army. The U.S. says it is counting on these security forces to take over its task of fighting the "enemy" - that is, those who reject all legitimacy to the U.S. invasion of Iraq.

But is the objective of those who control various parts of the new security forces really the same as those of the Bush regime? Do they intend to be "a full partner in the global war on terrorism" - the longer-term goal of the U.S. according to this document? Is this credible over the longer run? Even if those who are in the new government now are still there two years from now (itself a dubious proposition), why would they want to play this role when it can only make it more difficult to create even a moderately stable political situation in Iraq?

And finally, among winners and losers, more attention is being paid by observers today to the possibility that the big winner will be Iran. It is not that even a Shia-dominated government in Iraq will be in any sense a stooge of the Iranians. It is simply that they will not in any way want to play a role of being hostile to Iran, and therefore could not, will not, be sympathetic to U.S. objectives vis-a-vis Iran.

Do not ask for whom the bell tolls in Iraq. They toll for George W. Bush, and the United States. Bush claimed the U.S. went into Iraq so that it would not have to fight this "war" on U.S. soil. But the contrary is happening. The turmoil is coming to U.S. soil with a vengeance. One of the claims as to why the U.S. should not immediately withdraw from Iraq is that it might result in an Iraqi civil war. But no one discusses what kind of civil war might be in the process of developing in the United States.

by Immanuel Wallerstein