

BAGHDAD ALAMO

by Michael Ventura

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The widespread and richly deserved condemnation of President Bush's new Iraq "plan" has been high on rhetoric and low on specificity. There's a reason. The Iraq mess is so complex and FUBAR (Fucked Up Beyond All Recognition), it's difficult to present it coherently. How to be coherent about a situation that is itself incoherent?

To begin with, the Bush plan goes against the wishes of the democratically elected government that Bush and Cheney brag about creating. Last November, Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki proposed to Bush "that U.S. troops withdraw to the outskirts of Baghdad and let Iraqis take over [the city's] security... Maliki said he did not want any more U.S. troops at all, just more authority." [*The Washington Post*, January 21, p.1] Hadi al-Ameni, the leader of the security committee in Parliament, has been "unequivocal in opposition to a troop increase... Hard-line Shiite politicians have been saying with growing vehemence that [Bush's policy amounts] to an attempt to deprive them of the victory they won at the polls, and that instead of placating Sunnis, a minority of about 20%... the United States should stand aside and 'allow the minority to lose.'" [*The New York Times*, January 11, p.20] This is the Mideast, where nobody compromises. What Shiites mean by "allowing the minority to lose" is a virtual eradication of Iraqi Sunnis. It's been widely reported that the Iraqi Army and National Police are predominately Shiite and have acted as death-squads and/or looked the other way while Shiite militias murdered Sunnis. (In predominantly Sunni territories, the opposite applies.) Bush is actually to be applauded for rejecting Maliki's proposal, for what Maliki was really proposing was an act of genocide. The irony is that Bush can't admit he's trying to prevent genocide, for that would be tantamount to admitting failure on every level of U.S. policy in Iraq.

It's not only militarily that Shiites are attacking Sunnis. "The Shiite finance ministries now close banks that may finance Sunni investments.... [and] health ministries dismiss Sunni doctors." [*The New York Times*, January 25, p.25] In short, civil conflict is taking place not just among extremists but at every level of Iraqi life. Meanwhile, the Iraqi government is not functional. "Parliament in recent months has been at a standstill. Nearly every session since November has been adjourned because as few as 65 members [out of 275] made it to work" [*The New York Times*, January 24, online], so quorums -- and, therefore, decisions -- have been impossible. As *The Christian Science Monitor* put it: "The Iraqi state, in many respects, does not exist." [December 19, 2006, on-line.] Yet this is the entity our military is asked to work with and protect.

The day after Bush announced his new plan, Maliki "failed to appear at a news conference and avoided any other public comment"; Maliki wants "to be able to fight and govern according to the dictates of Shiite politics." [*The New York Times*, January 12, p.15] That article reports that, over American objections, Maliki appointed a hard-line Shiite, Gen. Aboud Gambar, to command Iraqi troops in Baghdad. "Gen. Gambar will report directly to Mr. Maliki, outside the chain of command that runs through the Defense Ministry... because the Defense Minister is a Sunni... American officials noted that American officers would be assigned to Gen. Gambar's headquarters." Sunnis will be cut out of the command loop but our guys will spy on Gambar. Most importantly, "an American battalion will be twinned with each Iraqi brigade, and... every Iraqi unit, down to the company level, [will] have American military advisers." Bush thinks he can prevent mass bloodshed by implanting American soldiers at every tier of Maliki's operation. *The actual Bush strategy is to police a civil war.*

Already the "twinning" of Iraqi and American units -- the key element of Bush's plan -- is a deadly farce. In a recent engagement, Iraqis soldiers "showed up late [and] never seemed to take the task seriously, searching [apartments] haphazardly, breaking dishes and rifling through [residents'] personal CD collections... Eventually the Americans realized that the Iraqis were

searching no more than half the apartments; at one point the Iraqis completely disappeared, leaving the American unit working with them flabbergasted... [Later], though two Iraqis were struck by gunfire many of the rest could not stop shouting and guffawing with amusement..." [The New York Times, January 25, p.12] Who but Bush and Cheney would disagree that it's flat-out crazy to ask American soldiers to risk their lives under these conditions?

It's no wonder that "support for the war in Iraq has declined sharply among active-service members of the U.S. military. Only 35% approve of President Bush's handling of the war, down from 54% last year." [The Military Times Media Group, quoted in The Week, January 19, p.17.] Bush-Cheney's decisions are wrecking our armed forces and endangering national security. "Senior Army officers said yesterday that all the Army's combat brigades in the United States -- except for a handful on alert or ready to go overseas within a month -- are currently rated as unready to deploy. If there is another 'combat scenario' involving the demand for heavy conventional forces, 'that's where America is taking risk,' Lt. Gen. Stephen Speakes, the Army's deputy chief of staff, told reporters." [The Washington Post, January 24, p.10] General Peter J. Shoomaker has said, as summarized by The Washington Post, "Fighting a sustained ground war overseas with an all-volunteer force... is almost unprecedented in U.S. history." Because of the strain, the Army is cutting all domestic spending, "limiting purchases to critical wartime needs." [The Washington Post, July 21, 2006, p.4] Nevertheless, inexplicably, the White House "is trimming [the] Army budget" for 2007. [The New York Times, October 6, 2006, p.16]

Bush is "ordering his top military brass to take action they initially resisted and advised against... There was," for instance, "the thorny problem of finding enough troops to deploy. Those [in the White House] who favored a 'surge'... were looking for a sizeable force that would turn the tide in Baghdad. But the Joint Chiefs made clear they could muster 20,000 at best -- not for long, and not all at once." [The Washington Post, January 10, p.1] "The authors of the surge plan, military historian Frederick Kagan and retired Gen. Jack Keane, said it would take at least 30,000 additional troops to subdue Baghdad, and as many as 80,000. Bush is sending only 17,500..." [The Week, January 26, p.4] More insanity. Bush is going forth with the plan, though he can deploy only about half of the lowest estimate of troops needed. No wonder that, in Baghdad, U.S. soldiers in one of the first neighborhood "joint security stations" call their post "The Alamo." [The New York Times, January 23, p.1]

Bush's reckless exposure of our young men and women is unforgivable. Almost as unforgivable is the long-term economic damage to our national stability.

The Christian Science Monitor [January 27, 2006, on-line]: a U.S. audit discovered "chaotic' ... 'spectacular' misuse of tens of millions of dollars [in Iraq]... more than \$9 billion of Iraq's [2004] oil revenues could not be accounted for... [American officials paid out] huge sums in cash... with little or no supervision and often without any paperwork." There will never be any way to trace, much less recover, this money -- while New Orleans still remains to be rebuilt. But our financial dilemma goes far beyond lost funds. "The U.S. is spending about \$10 billion a month on Iraq and Afghanistan. By the end of this year, the total... will be nearly \$600 billion... [for which the U.S. is using] its credit card, counting on the Chinese and other foreign buyers of debt to pay the bills." [The Christian Science Monitor, January 16, p.1] Read that twice. Its dire meaning is: *we have not yet begun to pay for this war.* We've been fighting on credit, accumulating a bill (plus interest) that we will be paying for decades. And that's not all. The Monitor article continues: "Congress looks only at its cash outlays, not at the war's future costs... an estimated 42,000 light trucks are in use in Iraq. Although it costs something to run them, the major cost will be replacing them... The same is true of the cost of taking care of injured veterans in the future." The Chinese are merrily funding our self-destruction as a military and economic super-power -- and doing so at our earnest invitation.

In effect, we are fighting a war against ourselves. No conceivable act of terrorism could do more long-range harm to this country. The disaster has been accomplished. There's nothing left for Americans but to endure the consequences.

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