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US general condemns Iraq failures

Ed Vulliamy in New York

Sunday June 22, 2003

[The Observer](#)

One of the most experienced and respected figures in a generation of American warfare and peacekeeping yesterday accused the US administration of 'failing to prepare for the consequences of victory' in Iraq.

At the end of a week that saw a war of attrition develop against the US military, General William Nash told The Observer that the US had 'lost its window of opportunity' after felling Saddam Hussein's regime and was embarking on a long-term expenditure of people and dollars for which it had not planned.

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'It is an endeavour which was not understood by the administration to begin with,' he said.

Now retired, Nash served in the Vietnam war and in Operation Desert Storm (the first Gulf War) before becoming commander of US forces in Bosnia and then an acclaimed UN Civil Affairs administrator in Kosovo.

He is currently a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations in Washington, specialising in conflict prevention.

In one of the most outspoken critiques from a man of his standing, Nash said the US had 'failed to understand the mindset and attitudes of the Iraqi people and the depth of hostility towards the US in much of the country'.

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war,' he added. 'It comes from 12 years of sanctions, Israel and Palestinians, and a host of issues.'

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As a result, he says, 'we are now seeing the re-emergence of a reasonably organised military opposition - small scale, but it could escalate.'

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It was insufficient for the US to presume that the forces now harassing and killing American troops were necessarily confined to what he called a residue of the Saddam regime. 'What we are facing today is a confluence of various forces which channel the disgruntlement of the people,' said Nash.

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'You can't tell who is behind the latest rocket propelled grenade. It could be a father whose daughter has been killed; it could be a political leader trying to gain a following, or it could be rump Saddam. Either way, they are starting to converge.'

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He said: 'the window of opportunity which occurred with the fall of Saddam was not seized in terms of establishing stability'.

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'In the entire region - and Iraq is typical - there is a sense that America can do whatever it wants. So that if America decides to protect the oilfields and oil ministry, it can.'

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'And if America doesn't provide electricity and water or fails to protect medical supplies, it is because they don't want to or they don't care.'

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Nash is reluctant to make comparisons with Vietnam: 'There are far more things that were different about Vietnam than there are similarities. Except perhaps the word "quagmire". Maybe that is the only thing that is the same.'

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