

Soldiers admit: 'Iraq war is lost'

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The war is lost. That's the message coming out of Iraq and Afghanistan by those sent to fight it.

From ordinary soldiers to frontline military commanders the message is bleak for those who dragged us into the "long war".

Lieutenant Colonel Paul Yingling is a senior commander in the 3rd Armoured Cavalry Regiment and has served in two tours of Iraq. He wrote in the May issue of the US Armed Forces Journal:

"For the second time in a generation, the US faces the prospect of defeat at the hands of an insurgency. In April 1975, the US fled the Republic of Vietnam, abandoning our allies to their fate at the hands of North Vietnamese Communists.

"In 2007, Iraq's grave and deteriorating condition offers diminishing hope for an American victory and portends risk of an even wider and more destructive regional war."

The reason for the looming defeat, he wrote, is that the military downplayed the growing resistance to the occupation:

"For reasons that are not yet clear, America's general officer corps underestimated the strength of the enemy, overestimated the capabilities of Iraq's government and security forces, and failed to provide the US Congress with an accurate assessment of security conditions in Iraq."

He said that most senior officers agreed with his analysis.

Yingling's article has sent shock waves through George Bush's administration, which has placed all its hopes for victory on a "surge" of 30,000 US troops.

The mood of despair among those sent to fight in Afghanistan and Iraq was highlighted by a candid interview with a British soldier who just has returned from Basra in southern Iraq.

Intolerable

Paul Barton, a private in the Staffordshire Regiment, told his local paper that far from British troops handing over security to Iraqi soldiers, the British were being driven out of Iraq by an increasingly sophisticated resistance movement.

He said, "The situation has become intolerable. We are meant to be there peacekeeping but

there is no peace to keep. There's a civil war going on and we are caught in the middle, and are coming under attack day and night.

"Insurgents are getting access to a lot more weapons, and are becoming stronger and stronger.

"As far as I'm concerned, we're coming into the end game. We're losing around four soldiers a month and it won't get any better."

The retreat from Basra began last year when the British fled their consular building in the city. They then abandoned a military base on the edge of the city and are now holed up at the airport, miles from population centres.

According to Barton, even this has become unsafe:

"They've even started attacking our base at Basra airport, now they've got proper artillery guns. Once that's gone there's nowhere left.

"We're just sitting ducks under constant attack – three or four times a day. Fifteen mortars and three rockets were fired at us in the first hour we were there. It was unbelievable.

"From the end of January to March, there was a siege mentality. We were getting mortared every hour of the day. We didn't sleep for months.

"Every patrol we went on we were either shot at or blown up by roadside bombs. It was crazy. Once, when our tents were attacked, I got out but my mate was hit. He was in bed and had the top of his head blown off. Luckily he survived, but he's got brain damage."

Resistance

The picture emerging from Afghanistan echoes the sense of failure. The Taliban are now moving into areas that were once considered secure.

Last week insurgents launched attacks in a district that is only 45 miles from the capital, Kabul. They have appeared in areas dominated by ethnic groups that have been hostile to the Taliban in the past.

The resistance has also spread from their heartlands in the south to the west of the country. Demonstrations against bloody military raids and air strikes are also becoming more common.

Over 1,000 Afghans sacked and burned government buildings in a western province on Monday of last week, demanding that occupation troops halt all military operations in the area.

Protesters say that Nato troops are regularly targeting civilians and then claiming they are killing Taliban fighters.

As Nato pours more troops into a bloody "spring offensive", some Western and Afghan officials have admitted that the US-backed government has little support among ordinary people and the occupation faces defeat.

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