

## Fire the Generals!

*American failures in Iraq are often laid at the feet of the White House and the civilian leadership of the Pentagon. The top military leadership deserves just as much of the blame*

by Douglas Macgregor

When Gen. George Casey took over as commander of U.S. and coalition forces in Iraq during July 2004, he asked his staff in Baghdad to set up a meeting with the headquarters' counter-insurgency expert. His request was met with silence. Incredible as it may seem, after fighting what American military authorities had been calling an insurgency for over a year, the Army's headquarters in Baghdad had no experts on counter-insurgency operations.<sup>1</sup>

A year later, Casey returned to Washington and told members of the Senate that more American troops would hurt, not help, matters in Iraq. He insisted that the large American military presence in the country "feeds the notion of occupation" and actually extends "the amount of time that it will take for Iraqi security forces to become self-reliant."<sup>2</sup> Even in areas of the country where American forces were showered with flowers when they arrived in April 2003, they are now under attack.<sup>3</sup>

In war, military strategy is supposed to reduce the probability of armed conflict, to persuade those who might fight not to fight, and when necessary, to win at the least cost in lives and treasure in the shortest possible time. In Iraq, America's top generals achieved the opposite outcome. Meanwhile, many of today's top generals are repeating the Vietnam pattern of speaking critically of the Pentagon's leadership in private, while eagerly accepting public praise and promotion from the secretary of defense for deferring to him in everything.<sup>4</sup>

American soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines are rightly lauded by the American public for their courage and sacrifice in the fight for Iraq, but the high quality of American soldiers and Marines at battalion level and below cannot compensate for inadequate senior leadership at the highest levels in war. Today, the senior leadership of the U.S. armed forces in general and, the U.S. Army in particular, is overly bureaucratic, risk averse, professionally inadequate and, hence, unsuited to the complex military tasks entrusted to them. The Bush administration has a preference for compliant, sycophantic officers who are fatally dependent on the goodwill of the secretary of defense and the president who promoted and appointed them.

It is bitter to contemplate, but Americans now confront issues of the utmost gravity:

- first, the lack of character and competence apparent in the most senior ranks;
- second, the willingness of the civilians in charge, from the commander in chief to the secretary of defense, to ignore this problem; and,
- third, the probability that future American military operations will fail if generalship of this quality persists.

### ***The Roots of the Problem***

Finding generals who are competent and ethical practitioners of war -- officers who will communicate to their civilian superiors the truth of what is really happening and what actions and resources are required for success -- has never been easy. In American history, armies and their

generals have been treated as afterthoughts, producing a pattern of emergency improvisation in wartime to replace generals who could not shake the habits and mindset of an unprofessional garrison army culture.

President Abraham Lincoln struggled with such incompetents for the first two years of the Civil War until he found someone who won battles. The man was Ulysses S. Grant, an officer no one in the Army's command hierarchy wanted. Long before America entered World War II, Gen. George C. Marshall, an officer who had waited 36 years for promotion to flag rank, ended his first year in office as Army chief of staff in 1940 by retiring 54 generals. After the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, Marshall continued to replace hundreds of generals and colonels, elevating men like James Gavin, a captain in 1942, to brigadier general and division commander in 1944. When Gen. Matthew Ridgway assumed command of the Eighth Army in Korea, he was no less ruthless than Marshall had been with commanders in the field who did not measure up.

So, what has changed? Why, after three years of inconclusive action in Iraq, have none of America's top generals been fired?

One reason is the absence of capable enemies to fight.<sup>5</sup> Since 1990, America's enemies have had no navies, weak air forces, weak to non-existent air defenses, and incompetent armies that lacked both the will and the training to fight effectively. Our superb combat soldiers and Marines easily overpowered their enemies regardless of what decisions or actions the senior military leadership took. Emergency improvisation was not needed.

The inevitable consequence of this situation is that there is no political constituency for excellence in generalship; no politician who will galvanize public opinion and demand results from generals. Consequently, while Americans can force the removal of homeland security officials from office or specify with great precision the intellectual and professional attributes of a Supreme Court justice,<sup>6</sup> they don't make similar judgments about generals. They don't make judgments because, for the most part, they don't know what generals are supposed to do in war or peace.

In war, this condition is dangerous because the nation's three- and four-star generals are the key figures who interface between policy and action. They decisively shape and implement the military component of national strategy that is consistent with American policy goals, ensuring that results are attained within the framework of the mission, and taking into account intangibles such as the reputation of the American people. They determine the metrics that measure success or failure, and they create the command climate that motivates subordinate commanders to take prompt action to overcome any and all difficulties.

Two important corollaries must be mentioned. In war, for generals to succeed, they must be men of character and integrity, accepting risk and uncertainty as the unchanging features of war. They must also demonstrate a willingness to stand up and be counted, to put country before career and, if necessary to resign.<sup>7</sup> Generals also must be students of their profession and of their enemies. They must be able to put themselves in the position of their enemies, avoid rigid adherence to ideas and methods that are ineffective, and adopt what works while concentrating their minds on the essential tasks. These attributes have been largely absent in the U.S. senior ranks, both on the road to Baghdad and in the occupation of Iraq that followed.

### ***The Failure of Military Leadership in Iraq***

From the moment the idea of invading Iraq was suggested by the administration of President George W. Bush, in the aftermath of Sept. 11, the Army's three- and four-star generals were thoroughly convinced that U.S. ground forces would have to fight a long, bloody battle with Iraq's Republican Guard divisions for control of Baghdad, and they were unwilling to undertake such a war without a ground force on the scale of Desert Storm.<sup>8</sup>

Even after 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division's armor crossed the Euphrates River on March 23, 2003, and moved 300 miles in 96 hours to a point just 50 miles south of Baghdad at the cost of only two American lives, the fear of fighting without a disproportionately massive ground force in place persisted.<sup>9</sup>

When the use of attack helicopters in a pointless deep attack failed -- an operation characterized by extraordinary general officer incompetence that included a failure to integrate the mission with the U.S. Air Force and the Army's rocket artillery<sup>10</sup> -- Lt. Gen. William Wallace, commander of the U.S. Army's V Corps, and Maj. Gen. David H. Petraeus, commander of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division, were quick to conclude that "the war was in dismal shape."<sup>11</sup> In what was just the first in a series of misjudgments of the true situation on the ground in Iraq, preconceptions of warfare rooted in the sterile field exercises of the Cold War led Gen. "Tommy" Franks, Gen. David McKiernan, Third Army Commander, and Wallace to the wrong conclusions. These generals persuaded Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Bush to halt all ground offensive operations until after the Air Force bombed Iraq's meager and ineffectual forces.

Had Saddam Hussein and his generals known of the Army generals' meeting near Najaf, and the deliberations in Washington, D.C., that followed, they would have doubled over in laughter. Iraq's defense was really a giant confidence game conducted by the country's political and military charlatans. Maj. Gen. Jim Mattis, commander of the Marine division who was stationed forward with his lead combat element, saw through the veil. He later said, "I didn't want the pause. Nothing was holding us up."<sup>12</sup>

Nevertheless, the attack on Baghdad was put on hold. Without sustaining any significant casualties, the senior Army generals remote from the fighting clung to the illusion that Iraq's armed might was too great to challenge without extensive bombing. In reality, the only obstacle to victory lay not with Iraqi resistance, which was always negligible, but in the minds of the Army's commanding generals. Grudgingly, Bush and Rumsfeld acquiesced and approved the halt. The delay lasted from March 26 until April 1, when, reportedly, only the threat of being removed compelled McKiernan to resume the attack.

Baghdad eventually fell to a single armored brigade of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division in an action known as the "Thunder Run." However, the criticality of speed in the attack, of dramatically outpacing the enemy's decisions and actions, had been lost. Roaring into Baghdad with tank guns blazing without the unnecessary delay could have achieved precisely what Rumsfeld and the president wanted, such as the early capture of Saddam Hussein who was in the city at that time. However, the wrong generals with the wrong thinking at the top made this outcome impossible.<sup>13</sup>

When Baghdad fell, Rumsfeld held a video-teleconference with Franks, asking him how soon the Army could get a tank brigade to Tikrit. Franks consulted with McKiernan, and answered "10 days." The Army generals were opposed to any task that did not involve days of planning and a preponderance of force disproportionate to mission requirements. Rumsfeld was furious, but rather than waste time arguing with the Army's senior leaders, Rumsfeld told Franks to ask the Marines. Less than 12 hours later, Marine Task Force Tripoli,<sup>14</sup> under the command of Brig. Gen. John Kelly, was on its way to Tikrit.

By failing to press on and accept minimal risk to their flanks and rear, the top generals in Washington and on the ground in Iraq missed the opportunity to enter the capital, and force the surrender of the Ba'athist leadership. Saddam Hussein and his entourage escaped and the first of many opportunities to psychologically dominate the enemy was thrown away. Gen. George C. Patton would have been deeply depressed by the whole affair. Yet no one at the top of the Bush administration set out to remove these officers and replace them with more aggressive, confident commanders.

There were few political incentives for action by the administration, given the realities on the ground in Iraq. The predictions by Army and Marine four-star generals' (active and retired) of a three-month campaign against a determined Iraqi enemy and the inflated numbers of troops they insisted were required to win were never right, and the Bush administration knew it.<sup>15</sup> If what the Army generals in command did or did not do was irrelevant to the ultimate outcome, why make an issue out of the Army generals' demands for a few days' halt just 50 miles from Baghdad? Why bother replacing three- and four-star generals who refuse to attack, when Iraq's military position was always hopeless whether the fight against Iraq's Ba'athist Fedayeen in pick-up trucks lasted five days or 10?

Glowing reports from the journalists embedded with the superb soldiers and Marines who actually did the fighting persuaded the American public that the generals in charge had just executed an immensely successful lightning offensive to Baghdad. Only Mattis offered a truly honest appraisal of the enemy. He said, "The [Iraqi] generals were dumber than you-know-what, they were real dumb."<sup>16</sup>

### *Their Weakness Conceals Our Own*

The details of the campaign that removed Saddam Hussein's regime from power are beyond the scope of this essay, but the victory was due principally to the extraordinary weakness of the Iraqi enemy. That weakness concealed serious flaws in the readiness, deployment and composition of the American ground force, flaws that would come to light after the fall of Baghdad.

The offensive's greatest weakness was in the organization and composition of the attacking American ground force. In the Middle East, the offensive capacity of American armor is America's trump card in land warfare, but armor constituted a mere fraction of the force that attacked to Baghdad and, in time, its effect was dissipated by dispersing much of it to light infantry formations that sustained unnecessary casualties without it.

In addition, American command and control (C2) structures were unchanged from 1991. Like the headquarters that fought the first Gulf War, the C2 headquarters in Operation Iraqi Freedom were an improvised collection of single-service headquarters, each fighting its own war according to its own thinking--Army, Marine or Air Force. In practice, operations and logistics that should have been joint were ad hoc and not designed for war, certainly not the long war that developed.

In maneuver warfare, supply is a potential showstopper. As the Army discovered during the first Gulf War, fuel is by far the most important logistical requirement. Thanks to gas-guzzling tank engines that were never modified or changed in the 12 years that separated Desert Storm from Iraqi Freedom, it took about 120 sorties of fuel tankers every 24 hours to keep the armor in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division moving. In addition, the deployment of other Army ground forces was confused and slow. Although the attack did not start until the United States was ready, the 101<sup>st</sup> Airmobile Division was still off-loading at Kuwait ports on March 23, 2003, when the offensive began. Spare parts were in short supply. Body armor was inadequate.

Further, despite 12 years of experience in the Persian Gulf, the generals had done nothing to prepare Army forces to cope with the complexity of operating in a Muslim Arab country.<sup>17</sup> The Army's chiefs of staff between 1991 and 2003 lost sight of their interwar duty: preparing for the next conflict and thinking about how it ought to be fought differently from the last war.<sup>18</sup>

Fortunately, the actual fighting potential of the Iraqi Army was nil.

### *How to Create an Insurgency in 30 Days*

As American generals triumphantly occupied Saddam's palaces, so reviled by many Iraqis, chaos and criminality ruled Iraq for 30 days. No fresh American troops arrived, trained and organized to conduct post-conflict stability operations. Thousands of Iraqi Army soldiers and officers who co-operated with American forces by choosing not to fight stood by, waiting for direction from the U.S. military leadership to assist in the restoration of order.

The same generals who had attacked Baghdad so reluctantly again declined to act.<sup>19</sup> What happened next in Baghdad was an eerie replay of Operation Just Cause, the U.S. Army's invasion of Panama in 1989. Then, the Army generals focused on capturing Panamanian dictator, Manuel Noriega, but they neglected the importance of minimizing Panamanian Defense Force (PDF) casualties. Instead, the Army generals destroyed the PDF and created the conditions for chaos and criminality when the fighting ended, to the point where some Panamanians contend that Panama has still not fully recovered from the consequences.

By the time U.S. Ambassador Paul Bremer arrived in Baghdad in May 2003 to announce the disbanding of Iraq's governmental structures and its military and police forces, Iraq was in ruins. Directing the Army and Marine Corps to occupy and effectively govern Iraq simply completed the process of the country's total destruction.<sup>20</sup> Even though McKiernan had previously met privately with Iraqi generals who handed him lists of Iraqi Army officers who could be used to command a rapidly reformed Iraqi army, McKiernan did not protest the Iraqi military's disbanding. The hundreds of thousands of disgruntled former Iraqi soldiers who were thus set loose were to prove a valuable source of recruits for the rebellion then in its infancy.<sup>21</sup>

American soldiers and Marines soon discovered that Iraq's population did not wish to be governed by foreigners, especially Christian Americans and Europeans.<sup>22</sup> Violence escalated quickly in response to U.S. arrests of Muslim men on the street. They were often apprehended in front of their families, dragged away in handcuffs with bags over their heads for interrogation and incarceration.<sup>23</sup> Even when innocent Muslim men were released, they were further humiliated by returning under guard in broad daylight to where they had been captured -- cuffed and hooded.<sup>24</sup> Predictably, a climate of hatred, suspicion and resentment began to emerge.

The growing violence signaled to journalists the emergence of fundamentally new conditions in central Iraq. During a video-teleconference Maj. Gen. Raymond Odierno, commander of the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division (mechanized), was asked, "Aren't we just basically seeing an increasing amount of guerrilla warfare here? And to follow up... aren't soldiers really in greater peril now, because you basically have to go root these folks out, as opposed to during the combat phase when you used a lot of heavy armor and airpower to knock off the organized groups?"<sup>25</sup> Odierno's response is instructive because it reveals an unwillingness to see any evidence for the emergence of a new conflict:

... This is not guerrilla warfare; it is not close to guerrilla warfare because it's not coordinated, it's not organized, and it's not led. The soldiers that are conducting these operations don't even have the willpower. We find that a majority of the time they'll fire a shot, and they'll drop the weapon and they'll give up right away. They do not have the will. And in most cases, I'm not sure they really believe in what they're doing. And so, when I talk about organized guerrilla warfare, it's a very complex organization that plans very complex guerrilla operations. That is nowhere close to what we're seeing here in my AO (area of operations).<sup>26</sup>

The deteriorating conditions in Iraq explain why Gen. John Abizaid's appointment in July 2003 to replace Franks was greeted with real hope. Abizaid, an American of Lebanese ancestry who is fluent in Arabic, was popular with the Army's active and retired four-star generals. To the politicians, he seemed like the politically correct choice to pursue the Bush administration's objectives in Iraq at that point in time: public security, electrical power, and jobs for millions of young men without work.

However, other than publicly confirming in July 2003 that U.S. forces did in fact face a "classic guerilla-type campaign," he did not alter the deployment of U.S. forces or change military policies or tactics. He presided at meetings and exhorted everyone to turn as much responsibility as they could over to the Iraqis (despite the fact that Iraq's military, police, and administrative bodies had been disbanded), but he did not interfere with the conduct of operations on the ground in Iraq. His visits with Army division commanders and their staffs produced no new directions in tactics or behavior.<sup>27</sup>

Was there anything Abizaid could have done to change the course of events in Iraq? He could have insisted that the American military administration vacate Saddam Hussein's former palaces and make themselves less visible to an Arab population already deeply humiliated by the foreign military occupation. He could have withdrawn U.S. ground forces from vast areas of Iraq where there was no insurgency and the U.S. military presence was not needed. These forces could have been redeployed to Sunni Arab-dominated areas where the violence was increasing. There the troops could have isolated and secured the population from infiltration and intimidation by the insurgents.

Simultaneously, Abizaid could have systematically exploited the obvious fault lines within the growing insurgency, the lines between rival Sunni tribal leaders, "foreign fighters," and Ba'athist "diehards." He could also have made the case to the Arabs of Iraq and the rest of the Arab world that America's presence in Iraq was not imperial, but *temporary* – pointing out that as soon as Iraq's military and administrative structures were restored, American military forces would leave the country. Knowing that America intended to leave Iraq would have disarmed many Sunni Arabs who would otherwise fight to drive out American ground forces. Instead, Abizaid supervised the construction of a series of large bases indicating an American intention to stay indefinitely.

Four decades ago in Algeria, where the French refused to depart Algeria under any conditions, the Arab revolt against French rule gained popular support.<sup>28</sup> Despite the commitment of 400,000 French troops to suppress the revolt inside an Arab and Berber population of 10 million people, a population larger than Iraq's Sunni Muslim community, French forces could never do more than suppress the rebellion temporarily. Fighting broke out again like an ulcer the moment French troops left an area they had fought to secure.<sup>29</sup> In the end, the French abandoned Algeria. Surely, Abizaid was aware of this fact.

Abizaid could have intervened with his division commanders to halt the inhumane treatment of the Sunni Arab population and put an end to the counter-productive incarceration of thousands of military-aged males. Perhaps most important, knowing that a popular rebellion in the form of an insurgency can only be successfully suppressed by indigenous armed forces, Abizaid could have insisted that the Bush administration fund a program to shift the American military role from direct combat to training and material support for indigenous Iraqi forces.<sup>30</sup> Early in the life of the occupation, the Bush administration was prepared to spend whatever it took to succeed in Iraq. If strongly recommended by Abizaid, there is little doubt that funding for this purpose would have been forthcoming. Getting Iraq's former soldiers back in uniform as quickly as possible would have starved the insurgency of the manpower it needed to flourish.

But little of substance changed and the Army's occupying forces settled into a routine of checkpoints, patrols, and raids designed to flush out the enemy with the means at hand. As in Vietnam, those means were primarily firepower. Simultaneously, the pursuit of Saddam and his lieutenants -- particularly in the areas under the control of Odierno, and Maj. Gen. Charles H. Swannack, Jr., commander of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division -- continued, on the assumption that Saddam somehow represented the center of gravity in what was now a rapidly growing insurgency. Because of their ruthlessness, these operations backfired, fueling the fires of rebellion inside Iraq's Sunni Arab community.<sup>31</sup>

In Abu Sifa, one sun-baked village north of Baghdad, the practice of arbitrarily imprisoning males cleared entire farming communities of fathers, sons, brothers, and cousins.<sup>32</sup> Barbara K. Bodine, a State Department official who served in Iraq for 12 months during 2003 and 2004, summed up the consequences of the clumsy, brutal occupation saying: "We underestimate our daily humiliation of Iraqis... We don't understand when someone kills a brother, it calls for revenge killing."<sup>33</sup>

The excessive use of force and the policy of treating any Arab suspected of opposing the U.S. military occupation as a "terrorist" had another unintended effect. Thousands of recruits and sympathizers joined the rebellion from inside and outside the country. Reacting to the discovery of foreign jihadists inside Iraq and compounding the misapprehension of the problem, military spokesmen in Baghdad and Washington argued that unrest in Iraq was now largely a function of external interference from Syria and Iran. This was never the case. It was always the intrusive U.S. military occupation that was the fundamental problem, but it was easier for the generals inside the Green Zone to blame foreign fighters for Iraq's turmoil instead of changing course and developing a new counterinsurgency strategy.<sup>34</sup>

The capture of Saddam Hussein in December 2003 gave the generals in CENTCOM an opportunity to trumpet victory. They did not mention that telephone service, and the availability of electricity and of cooking and heating fuels, were no better than they were before the occupation began. Criminality was on the rise and unemployment remained around 50 percent.<sup>35</sup> Something was terribly wrong.

### *Iraq Explodes*

In light of the widespread abuse meted out to Arab citizens of Iraq, including the hideous practices at the Abu Ghraib prison, for which no American officer has yet to be called to account, it was no surprise when al-Qaida's supporters, along with thousands of Iranian agents, streamed into Iraq to exploit the rapidly growing Arab hatred of American troops. Thanks to the new infusion of knowledge and expertise into the insurgent forces, Army and Marine Corps' Humvees, thin-skinned vehicles used for patrols along predictable routes, became easy targets for mines, roadside improvised explosive devices (IEDs), automatic weapons fire, and rocket propelled grenades.<sup>36</sup>

Despite the rising numbers of attacks on American soldiers and Marines in Humvees, Abizaid and Army Chief of Staff Gen. Peter Schoomaker let the numbers of armored fighting vehicles and tanks in Iraq decline.<sup>37</sup> In fact, Schoomaker ordered the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Armored Cavalry Regiment, both preparing to deploy to Iraq in the first months of 2004, to bring only one in six of their Abrams tanks and Bradley fighting vehicles. In light of American losses, senior Israeli defense officers advised using heavily armored vehicles and more tanks,<sup>38</sup> but the top U.S. generals persisted in arguing for presence patrols in wheeled vehicles.

The Army's general officers did not routinely accompany platoon and squad leaders on patrol to understand the environment and what was needed to survive in it, creating an unhealthy divide between senior leadership and the soldiers on the ground. Had the generals done so, they

would have known what a sergeant on patrol in Ramadi meant when he told a journalist, "You can have my job. It's easy. You just drive around all day and wait for someone to bomb you. Thing is, you have to hate Arabs."<sup>39</sup>

As it became more and more obvious that Saddam's capture in November 2003 was irrelevant to the course of the on-going rebellion against the American military occupation, Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, Wallace's successor at V Corps headquarters in Baghdad, tried to get his arms around the problem. But, like so many other officers and civilians inside Iraq's Green Zone, he was living in an unreal world. Sanchez, an officer whose thinking was rooted in sterile exercises and simulations of conventional Cold War conflict, could not grasp the complexities of Iraq's condition. In August 2004, more than 16 months after he assumed command, he remained wedded to a campaign plan for military operations that, according to officers in Sanchez's headquarters, "was totally nondescript. It had no concrete objectives."<sup>40</sup>

In April 2004 Iraq exploded in violent resistance. Things came to a head in Fallujah, a city of 300,000 not far from Baghdad that achieved rock star status in the Arab world for supporting relentless attacks on occupying American forces. Many American soldiers and Marines thought that Fallujah would become an object lesson for those in Iraq who directly challenged American military authority — a tailor-made opportunity to dominate the enemy psychologically. It also looked like a great opportunity for the generals in Baghdad, using heavy armor, which has proved decisively effective in urban warfare, to isolate, surround, and crush masses of enemy fighters, foreign and Iraqi, inside the city. But, it was not to be.

In a teleconference with Bush and Rumsfeld, Abizaid advised against an all-out assault on Fallujah, making the case that such an attack would jeopardize political stability throughout the country. Abizaid argued that it was not the destruction of the enemy in Fallujah and the indirect effort to educate others resisting the coalition that mattered. Rather it was to seize control of the city of Fallujah through other, less destructive means to show restraint by limiting collateral damage — and American casualties. Abizaid was unable to recognize when force can be used to psychologically dominate the enemy and when it needlessly empowers enemy resistance.

When Sanchez informed Mattis of the teleconference and the decision not to go into Fallujah, Mattis reacted by quoting Napoleon Bonaparte, "First we're ordered in, and now, we're ordered out. *If you're going to take Vienna, then, by God, sir, take it.*"<sup>41</sup> But Fallujah was not taken. Instead, former Republican Guard officers were sent in to organize a local force that never lived up to its obligations while fighting continued in other cities throughout the spring and early summer, and Marines and soldiers continued to die in and around Fallujah.

When Fallujah was finally seized, in November 2004, the operation was the ultimate expression of a reactive strategy. The town was never completely sealed off and, as in so many previous operations, most of the enemy were already gone when the generals' set-piece battle plan was set in motion. The taking of Fallujah after Bush's reelection in November 2004 was slow, deliberate, even incidental, almost unwanted, and only to be conducted with the minimum amount of force necessary to defeat the resistance that was standing between U.S. forces and control of the city.

Again, the widespread use of light infantry instead of heavy armor demonstrated that once the infantry on foot becomes involved in a symmetrical fight pitting AK 47 and rocket-propelled grenades against M16s, our soldiers and Marines take serious losses. These losses inevitably prompt the extensive use of destructive air and artillery strikes because light infantry lacks the protection, firepower and mobility to advance in the face of enemy fire without serious injury. As a result, Fallujah was destroyed. Ironically, the failure to use the right kind of force at the start— heavy armor--resulted in more destruction, and further alienation of Iraqis, than should have been



necessary.

***We've destroyed the Insurgency.... Again!***

After Fallujah's destruction, the generals in Baghdad claimed the back of the "insurgency" was "broken," but resistance to the American military occupation actually grew stronger, not weaker. Iraq's Arab insurgents or rebels learned from the first generation of foreign jihadists and domestic insurgents destroyed in the war and became far more sophisticated in terms of developing bombs, booby traps, IEDs and ambushes. The Sunni fighters and the Shi'ite militias both rearmed and reorganized, and due to the deepening hostility of all Muslims they had an inexhaustible supply of recruits.

The explanation most apparent to many observers in the military services for the many false claims of victory over the "insurgency" is that the top generals in Washington and CENTCOM, like their Vietnam era predecessors, were offering themselves up as media props for their misguided civilian masters in Washington. No general wants to be the first to raise his head out of the deepening trench of difficulties into which the military and the administration may be digging itself, and cry foul, especially when continuing to dig is rewarded with promotion. Under the Bush administration, it has always been easier for generals to move up than it is for them to speak up.

Lloyd George, Britain's World War I prime minister, observed that his commanding generals' official accounts of events at the front were anything, but accurate.

The reports passed on to ministers were, as we all realized much later, grossly misleading. Victories were much overstated. Virtual defeats were represented as victories, however, limited their scope. Our casualties were understated. Enemy losses became pyramidal. That was the way the military authorities presented the situation to ministers – that was their active propaganda in the press. All disconcerting and discouraging facts were suppressed in the reports received from the front by the War Cabinet – every bright feather of success was waved and flourished in our faces."

In the case of Lloyd George, he did notice and he did complain, rather than lead the deception.

Elections in Iraq eventually provided a diversion of sorts, prompting the Bush administration to argue that as democracy took hold in Iraq, the insurgency would weaken because al-Qaida and the opponents of the country's government had nothing to offer Iraqis or the people of the Middle East. The Bush administration's message lost steam as it became clear that tribalism, sectarianism and corruption were the real determining factors in the outcomes of Iraq's elections. As the sectarian violence of February 2006 showed with a vengeance, Iraq is fragmenting into three, distinct states; a fact that journalists visiting Kurdistan or Basrah could easily recognize.<sup>42</sup>

To Casey and his commanders in the fall of 2005, it was obvious that American interests in Iraq could not easily recover from the serious mistakes of the first 18 months or the unchanging climate of mutual hatred between Americans and Arabs. But American casualties had to be reduced or political support at home for the continued occupation would fail. The decision to keep the majority of American ground forces inside the large fortified bases established during the last three years of the occupation became critical. But, in the space between the bases, conditions were beyond the control of U.S. forces. And the effort to train indigenous Iraqi police and military forces, which started in earnest much too late, proceeded far too slowly. The circle was now complete.<sup>43</sup> The American occupier always had other interests and concerns, both domestic and

foreign, while the Arab insurgents had only one focus: drive the U.S. forces out and resist Shi'ite domination.<sup>44</sup>

Nearly three years into the fight for Iraq, during the fall of 2005, Abizaid's advice to Congress to "stay the course" began to fall flat. His mantra that, "Since Desert Storm in 1991, U.S. forces have not lost any combat engagement in the region at the platoon-level or above,"<sup>45</sup> was not convincing. It is a fact that American soldiers and Marines inflicted many more casualties on the Arab insurgents, but it is the insurgents who control events by virtue of the fact that they initiated most of the contacts, and their attacks have not diminished; they have expanded.

Like Lyndon Johnson's generals during the Vietnam era, Bush's generals are politically skilled, energetic officers whose briefings can be impressive, but their leadership in war arouses no faith. In modern conflict, trends outweigh episodes or individual battles in their importance, and the trends are bad.<sup>46</sup> By the time Gen. George Casey arrived in Baghdad in November 2004 the Army generals' fight was not simply with a resilient opponent in central Iraq. Casey and his generals were also fighting to prop up not only a failed strategy but also a blinkered civilian leadership in Washington. It remains a sad commentary on the generals that they have shown so little spine in the face of a disastrous occupation and an incompetently run war.

### *Imposing Accountability*

Long periods of peace during the Cold War cultivated a bureaucratic mindset inside the Department of Defense, a mentality that is at odds with winning wars that require creative thinking and aggressive action. The resulting tendency is to promote those officers to high rank with whom the four-star generals at the top are comfortable, officers much like the four-stars themselves. These rising officers exhibit good bureaucratic skills with an over-riding instinct for personal self-promotion and they reap the rewards for "going along."<sup>47</sup> Such officers are only as good as the tactical doctrine they know, because they have learned not to ask what else might work. They are obviously not good enough.

Americans should reflect on the fact that U.S. military performance for over half a century has not been the mythic success that the generals encourage the public to believe. America's war on the Korean Peninsula ended in a stalemate. America lost in Vietnam. Grenada was an operational embarrassment in a fight with almost no enemy at all. Panama can be called a success despite its flaws, but it could not have been a failure given the weakness of the Panamanian Defense Force. Military incompetence enabled terrorists to drive U.S. troops out of both Lebanon and Somalia. The severely deteriorated situations in Haiti, Bosnia and Kosovo are scarcely tributes to the generals' skills in peace support operations. The 1991 Gulf War was a grossly exaggerated victory, characterized by very little direct fire ground combat, against a weak and demoralized enemy. America's intervention in Afghanistan and its 2003 invasion of Iraq were both carried out against far weaker enemies to the point where there was almost no serious opposition by conventional forces.

What is needed is a selection system for promotion to flag ranks that tests competence in training and deployments and that holds officers accountable for their performance in military educational institutions and certainly on the battlefield.

Leo Strauss, a leading American political philosopher and early advocate for neo-conservative thinking confronted similar challenges at the University of Chicago from professors who contended that "all points of view are equal... and that anyone who argues for the superiority of a distinctive moral insight, way of life, or human type is somehow elitist or antidemocratic- and hence immoral."<sup>48</sup> The university professors who opposed Strauss, like the generals, were comfortable with the ambiguity of cronyism and the opportunity to advance individuals on the basis

of loyalty alone, not performance. In the profession of arms, a profession that involves life and death decisions, competence, not cronyism, must be king.

In retrospect, appointing Mattis to assume command of the ground force after the fall of Baghdad would have helped immeasurably. He was not only aggressive in combat, but he had also taken the trouble to study the British and French experience with counter-insurgency and stability operations. Immediately advancing Mattis to three stars, something Marshall and Patton would surely have done, would have sent a powerful signal that professional competence and character under fire trump all other considerations in wartime. Unfortunately, the civilians in charge bowed to service parochialism and appointed an Army general, because Army troops constituted the majority of the ground force and because the civilians were unfamiliar with how ground forces should fight and how generals should command them.

Today, Winston Churchill is remembered for readiness in wartime to reverse course, to replace ineffective military commanders, to change tactics, and adopt new, more promising strategies. He believed that results, not sentiment, counted most in war.

Frustrated with the miserable performance of British generals in the opening battles of World War II, Churchill told Sir John Dill, chief of the Imperial General Staff, "We cannot afford to confine Army appointments to persons who have excited no hostile comment in their careers... This is a time to try men of force and vision and not to be exclusively confined to those who are judged thoroughly safe by conventional standards."<sup>49</sup>

Today, there is no one holding elected or appointed office on the American political scene like Churchill and no political "constituency" for excellence in generalship. There needs to be – and it should not be a party matter - because the consequences of mediocre generalship are serious.

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**ENDNOTES**

- <sup>1</sup> George Packer, *The Assassin's Gate: America in Iraq*, New York, NY: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2005, page 446.
- <sup>2</sup> Greg Jaffe and Yochi J. Dreazen, "As Bush Pledges To Stay In Iraq, Military Talks Up Smaller Force: Some Top Brass Say Troops May Be Fueling Insurgency; Two Political Tests Ahead," *Wall Street Journal*, Oct. 5, 2005, page 1.
- <sup>3</sup> Ellen Knickermeier, "Baghdad Neighborhood's Hopes Dimmed by the Trials of War," *Washingtonpost.com*, 27 September, 2005. The new ABC-Time Oxford Research International poll conducted in Iraq during December 2005 states: "There's other evidence of the United States' increasing unpopularity: Two-thirds now oppose the presence of U.S. and Coalition forces in Iraq, 14 points higher than in February 2004. Nearly six in 10 disapprove of how the United States has operated in Iraq since the war, and most of them disapprove strongly. And nearly half of Iraqis would like to see U.S. forces leave soon." See Anthony Cordesman's "The True Meaning of the Iraqi Election: A 'Trigger,' Not a 'Turning Point,'" Report for Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, D.C., Dec. 14, 2005, page 5.
- <sup>4</sup> Seymour M. Hersh, "Up in the Air. Where is the Iraq war headed next?" *New Yorker*, issue of Dec. 5, 2005. Hersh claims that the generals are, "... deeply frustrated, but they say nothing in public, because they don't want to jeopardize their careers. The Administration has "so terrified the generals that they know they won't go public.""
- <sup>5</sup> Michael Howard, *The Franco-Prussian War*, London, UK: Methuen, 1981, pages 15-19. The French Army from 1830 to 1870 was an army with a reputation for excellence against enemies far weaker than itself. But victory over Arabs, Berbers, Russians and Mexicans, enemies whose administration, training and small unit leadership was demonstrably worse than the French Army's, provided all the justification that was needed to halt reform and let the generals preserve a system that for all its faults still worked well enough. When war came with Prussia, however, the same generals exalted in the French press for their brilliant leadership in previous campaigns, shocked the French nation by surrendering their forces to the competent and effective Prussians in the space of only a few months. The French generals were quite capable of defeating weak enemies, but they were incapable of defeating a competent adversary.
- <sup>6</sup> George F. Will, *Restoration: Congress, Term Limits and the Recovery of Deliberative Democracy*, New York, NY: The Free Press, 1992, page 108.
- <sup>7</sup> T. Harry Williams, *McClellan, Sherman and Grant*, Chicago, Illinois: Ivan R. Dee, publisher, 1991, (first published in 1962), page 42.
- <sup>8</sup> Mackubin Thomas Owens, "With Eyes Wide Open: A Strategy for War with Iraq," *National Review Online*, Aug. 14, 2002. The demand for perfect information is reinforced by the mistaken notion that "knowledge is a weapon" and the fanatical assertions about the feasibility and necessity of "information dominance" through "net-centric operations." Knowledge is not a weapon. Weapons are weapons. Knowledge is what allows the soldier to aim the weapons he has at the right targets. Both are necessary, as are armor, firepower and mobility to survive and respond to the unexpected, which is what any enemy wants to achieve – especially if he has inferior forces.
- <sup>9</sup> Elaine M. Grossman, "Inside the Command Center: Decision to hasten ground attack into Iraq presented new risks," *Inside Defense*, March 18, 2004, page 1.
- <sup>10</sup> Rick Atkinson, Peter Baker and Thomas E. Ricks, "Confused Start, Decisive End; Invasion Shaped by Miscues, Bold Risks and Unexpected Successes," *Washington Post*, April 13, 2003, page A01. U.S. intelligence eavesdroppers reportedly detected 50 cell phone calls in the target area as the Apaches approached, a crude but apparently efficient Iraqi early-warning system. A thrown master switch in one town shut off all the lights, a signal for a barrage of fire that threw up a wall of lead.
- <sup>11</sup> Rick Atkinson, Peter Baker and Thomas E. Ricks, "Confused Start, Decisive End; Invasion Shaped by Miscues, Bold Risks and Unexpected Successes," *Washington Post*, April 13, 2003, page A01.

<sup>12</sup> Elaine Grossman, "Marine general: Iraq war pause could not have come at worse time: Mattis believed Marines vulnerable to attack," *Inside the Pentagon*, Oct. 2, 2003, page 1.

<sup>13</sup> Megan Scully, "Analysts: Army Would Play Pivotal Role In Conflict With Iraq," *Inside the Army*, Aug. 19, 2002.

<sup>14</sup> 3 Light Armor Battalions, 1 Infantry Company, 1 Artillery Battery and supporting aircraft.

<sup>15</sup> General Tommy Franks with Malcolm McConnell, *American Soldier*, New York: Harper Collins, 2004, page 370. In the book McConnell wrote for Franks, he cites Franks as anticipating "up to 90 days of decisive combat operations."

<sup>16</sup> Elaine Grossman, "Marine general: Iraq war pause 'could not have come at worse time: Mattis believed Marines vulnerable to attack," *Inside the Pentagon*, Oct. 2, 2003, page 1.

<sup>17</sup> See Jason Vest's article, "How the Pentagon sent the army to Iraq without a counterinsurgency doctrine," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, July/August 2005.

<sup>18</sup> Strongly recommend that the reader consult *Operation Iraqi Freedom: Third Infantry Division (mechanized) After Action Report*, Final Draft, May 12, 2003. Centralized control over supply at division and higher levels left the combat units with too little of what they needed. Trucks had largely been eliminated from much of the structure – and logistics C2 was not touched at all. All of this was sold through National Training Center experience (where an army of contractors made it work) and business management techniques that in no way considered a complex, noncontiguous battlefield and corps- and army-size operational battlespace – much less a thinking and lethal enemy. In other words, logistics transformation very consciously followed a business model rather than a combat model. Sad to say you could get promoted by being "efficient" and saving money and be long retired before a war got people killed.

<sup>19</sup> Jon Lee Anderson, *The Fall of Baghdad*, New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2004, page 250.

<sup>20</sup> Mark Fineman, Warren Vieth and Robin Wright, "Dissolving Iraqi Army Was Costly Choice. The masses of enlisted men could have been used for reconstruction and security. Now the U.S. faces terrorism and building a new force." *New York Times*, Aug. 24, 2003, page 5.

<sup>21</sup> Sources wish to remain anonymous.

<sup>22</sup> Rashid Khalidi, *Resurrectin Empire: Western Footprints and America's Perilous Path in the Middle East*, Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 2004, page 55.

<sup>23</sup> Stryker McGuire and Rod Nordland, "The Decent Thing. America's tough tactics have miffed the British, who have a softer post-conflict style," *Newsweek*, May 24, 2004.

<sup>24</sup> Scott Wilson, "U.S. Troops Kill 2 Iraqis After Ambush. Baath Loyalists Hinder Efforts In Fallujah." *Washington Post*, May 23, 2003, page 13.

<sup>25</sup> *Official Transcript*, Department of Defense Office of Public Affairs, June 18, 2003.

<sup>26</sup> *Official Transcript*, Department of Defense Office of Public Affairs, June 18, 2003.

<sup>27</sup> Bing West, *No True Glory: A Frontline Account of the Battle for Fallujah*, New York, NY: Bantam Books, 2005, page 24.

<sup>28</sup> Bard E. O'Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism: Inside Modern Revolutionary Warfare*, Washington, D.C.: Brassey's (US), Inc. 1990, pages 80-81.

<sup>29</sup> Andrew Scott with Donald Clark, R. Bruce Ehrman, John W. Salmon, Jr., Harold Shill and Frank Trapnell, *Insurgency*, Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1970, page 116.

<sup>30</sup> Amatzia Baram, "Who are the Insurgents? Sunni Arab Rebels in Iraq," *Special Report by the United States Institute of Peace*, April 2005.

<sup>31</sup> Adam Zagorin, "A Pattern of Abuse: A Decorated Army Officer Reveals New Allegations of Detainee Mistreatment. Did the Military Ignore His Charges?" *Time*, Sept. 23, 2005. Also, see Joe Klein, "Saddam's Revenge," *Time*, Sept. 26, 2005. Also, "A Year of Crucial Missteps," *Time*, Sept. 16, 2005.

<sup>32</sup> Jeffrey Gettleman, "As U.S. Detains Iraqis, Families Plead for News," *New York Times*, March 7, 2004, page A4.

<sup>33</sup> Bradley Graham and Walter Pincus, "U.S. Hopes to Divide Insurgency," *Washington Post*, Oct. 31, 2004, page A29.

<sup>34</sup> James Risen and David E. Sanger, "G.I.'s and Syrians in Tense Clashes on Iraqi Border," *New York Times*, Oct. 15, 2005, page A3.

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<sup>35</sup> Adriana lins de Albuquerque, Michael O'Hanlon and Jelly Associates, "OP-CHART: Military and Economic Trends in Postwar Iraq," *Wall Street Journal*, Feb. 11, 2004, OP/ED page.

<sup>36</sup> Hal Bernton, "Lack Of Vehicle Armor Keeps Troops On Edge," *Seattle Times*, Oct. 21, 2004, page 1.

<sup>37</sup> Aleksandar Vasovic, "U.S. Forces Adapt to Environment in Iraq," *Associated Press* via *Washington Times*, Dec. 23, 2003, page 2.

<sup>38</sup> Arie Sullivan, "IDF to US: Use More Armor in Iraq," *Jerusalem Post*, Sept. 14 2003, page 1.

<sup>39</sup> John Koopman, *McCoy's Marines: Darkside to Baghdad*, St. Paul, MN: Zenith Press, 2004, page 299.

<sup>40</sup> Elaine Grossman, "Measuring Casey's progress: Until Last Month, Iraq Campaign Plan Lacked Specific Benchmarks," *Inside the Pentagon*, March 31, 2005, page 1.

<sup>41</sup> Bing West, *No True Glory: A Frontline Account of the Battle for Fallujah*, New York, NY: Bantam Books, 2005, page 121.

<sup>42</sup> Associated Press, "Sunni, Secular Parties Join In Distrust Of Vote Results," *USA Today*, Dec. 22, 2005, page 4. Edward Wong, "Turnout in the Iraqi Election is Reported at 70 Percent," *New York Times*, Dec. 22, 2005, page 1.

<sup>43</sup> Greg Jaffe and Yochi J. Dreazen, "As Bush Pledges To Stay In Iraq, Military Talks Up Smaller Force: Some Top Brass Say Troops May Be Fueling Insurgency; Two Political Tests Ahead," *Wall Street Journal*, Oct. 5, 2005, page 1.

<sup>44</sup> Suggested to the author in remarks by Steve Daskall.

<sup>45</sup> General John Abizaid, Commander, U.S. Central Command in remarks to the students and faculty of the Naval War College, Dec. 2, 2005.

The audience comprised primarily War College students who are mid-grade/senior military officers.

<sup>46</sup> "Iraq Civil War Could Have Domino Effect," *Associated Press*, Oct. 26, 2005.

<sup>47</sup> Leslie Wayne, "US: Former Pentagon Officials Find Wealth with Contractors," *The New York Times*, June 19, 2005, page 3.

<sup>48</sup> James Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2002, page 26.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, page 63.