

Baghdad is Surrounded: “The American Era in the Middle East has ended”

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Don Rumsfeld is not a good leader. In fact, he is a very bad leader. Leadership is predicated on three basic factors: Strong moral character, sound judgment, and the ability to learn from one’s mistakes. None of these apply to Rumsfeld. As a result, every major decision that has been made in Iraq has been wrong and has cost the lives of countless Iraqis and American servicemen. This pattern will undoubtedly continue as long as Rumsfeld is the Secretary of Defense.

Here’s a simple test: Name one part of the occupation of Iraq which has succeeded?

Security? Reconstruction? De-Ba’athification? Dismantling the Iraqi military? Protecting Saddam’s ammo-dumps? Stopping the looting? Body armor? Coalition government? Abu Ghraib? Falluja? Even oil production has been slashed in half.

Every facet of the occupation has been an unmitigated disaster. Nothing has succeeded. Everything has failed.

Everything.

Nevertheless, Rumsfeld assures us that “these things are complicated” and that we should just “Back off”.

It was Rumsfeld’s decision to replace America’s first Iraqi Viceroy, General Jay Garner after Garner wisely advised that we maintain the Iraqi military, leave many of the Ba’athists in the government (to maintain civil society) and convene leaders from the three main groups (Sunni, Shia and Kurds) to form a coalition government. This didn’t square with Rumsfeld’s plans to revolutionize Iraqi society and transform it into a neoliberal Valhalla; so Garner was unceremoniously dumped for Kissinger’s protégé, Paul Bremer.

Once Bremer was installed, things started heading downhill fast and have only gotten worse ever since.

Apart from the immense damage to Iraqi society, the enormous human suffering, and the massive loss of life; there is also the astronomical cost of the war which has been purposely concealed by the Defense Dept. Originally, the war was supposed to “pay for itself in oil revenues”. (according to neocon Paul Wolfowitz) That, of course, never happened but, the real costs appeared in this week’s Washington Post in an article by Jim Wolf called “Pentagon Expands War-funding Push”. The article states:

“With the passage of the fiscal 2006 supplemental spending bill, war-related appropriations would total about \$436.8 billion for Iraq, Afghanistan and enhanced security at military bases, the non-partisan Congressional Research Service said in a Sept 22 report....this is in addition to the more than \$500 billion sought by President Bush in his baseline fiscal 2007 national defense request.”

That’s right; we’re spending a whopping \$1 trillion a year for a war that we’re losing!

Still, don’t expect accountability from the Pentagon where taxpayer dollars are carelessly flung into the Mesopotamian black-hole with utter abandon. Heads never roll because no one in charge ever accepts responsibility for their mistakes.

So, “Back off”!

On another matter, an editorial appeared in Tuesday’s New York Times, “The Untracked Guns of Iraq” which stated:

“More than 500,000 weapons were turned over to Iraqi Ministries of Defense and Interior since the American invasion –including rocket-propelled grenade launchers assault rifles, machine guns and sniper rifles—only 12,128 were properly recorded. Some 370,000 of these weapons, some of which are undoubtedly being used to kill American troops, were paid for by U.S. taxpayers, under the Orwellian-titled Iraq Relief and Reconstruction Fund.”

In other words, we’re handing over state-of-the-art weaponry to the men who are killing American troops and, yet, no one is held responsible? How does that work? Apparently, the buck never stops at the Rumsfeld War Department; it just gets passed along until it lands on a swarthy-looking Middle Eastern fellow or perhaps a garrulous leftist railing against the war on his blogsite.

A growing number of establishment-elites are frustrated with Rumsfeld’s bungling and are ready for a change. But that doesn’t matter because the Sec-Def has the backing of powerful constituents in the banking, corporate and defense industries as well as neoconservative aficionados in many of Washington’s preeminent think-tanks. He also has Bush’s support, which is a mere formality since Cheney and Rumsfeld run the government anyway. The bottom line is, Rumsfeld is “here to stay”.

The real problem with Rumsfeld is that he is incapable of thinking politically, and it’s impossible to win in war unless one has clearly defined political objectives.

After 3 and a half years of violence and mayhem we still know as little about the Iraqi resistance as we did in March 2003. This is inexcusable. In addition, there’s been no attempt to engage the representatives of the resistance in political dialogue. How can we possibly reach a political solution without dialogue and negotiation?

It is shortsighted in the extreme to think that violence-alone can produce a victory.

It will not.

In war, violence is not an end in itself; it is a means to achieving a political goal. The over-reliance on military force, absent any communication or negotiation with the enemy, shows a fundamental misunderstanding of the purpose of warfare.

An article by Dahr Jamail "US Military adopts Desperate Tactics" (IPS) illustrates this point:

"Increased violence is being countered by harsh new measures across the Sunni dominated al-Anbar province west of Baghdad. Thousands have been killed here by the Multi-National Forces (MNF) and Iraqi allies, and the situation is getting worse every day.....We have no role to play because the Americans always prefer violent solutions that have led from one disaster to another," said on member of the Fallujah city council.

Here again, we see that "overwhelming force" without clearly defined political objectives just generates more violence. It is entirely futile, and yet, the policy remains unchanged.

Rumsfeld flattened Fallujah nearly 2 years ago thinking that the destruction of the city of 300,000 would "send a message" to the Sunnis; convincing them that it was useless to resist. His action, which was enthusiastically applauded by right-wing pundits and politicians in America, produced exactly the opposite response. The resistance is now stronger than ever, the attacks on American troops have increased dramatically, and al-Anbar province is no longer under U.S. control.

Anyone with even a superficial understanding of psychology could have predicted the outcome, but Rumsfeld blundered on with his iron-fisted tactics regardless of the facts.

Rumsfeld's over-reliance on force has spread turmoil throughout the Sunni-heartland making it virtually ungovernable. The sectarian violence is now so bad that a leaked-Pentagon report prepared by the US Central Command says the country is in a state of "chaos". This is the logical corollary of the Rumsfeld approach and it is unlikely to change.

For American troops in Iraq, there is a worse scenario than chaos; that is defeat. Patrick Cockburn's 11-1-06 article "Baghdad is under Siege" in the UK Independent provides the chilling details of an armed Iraqi resistance which has now cut off supply lines to the capital and threatens to make America's ongoing occupation impossible. Cockburn says:

"Sunni insurgents have cut the roads linking the city to the rest of Iraq. The country is being partitioned as militiamen fight bloody battles for control of towns and villages north and south of the capital....The country has taken another lurch towards disintegration. Well armed Sunni tribes now largely surround Baghdad and are fighting Shia militias to complete the encirclement. The Sunnis insurgents seem to be following a plan to control all approaches to Baghdad."

Baghdad is surrounded and the predicament for American troops is increasingly tenuous. The battle is being lost on all fronts. So, what is Secretary Rumsfeld's response to these new and urgent developments?

Rumsfeld held a press conference in which he blasted his critics for "focusing too much on the bad news coming out of Iraq" and announced the launching of a new public relations campaign which will attempt to elicit greater support for the ongoing occupation. The Pentagon plans to "develop messages" to respond to the negative news-coverage and, as Rumsfeld said, "correct the record."

"Correct the record"? Is the Pentagon planning to "repackage" the war even while the Resistance is tightening its grip around the capital?

What type of madness is this? This is not the behavior of serious men. This is just more of

the same “faith-based,” public relations hucksterism which leads nowhere. The worsening situation in Iraq will not improve by ramping-up the propaganda-machine, appealing to American chauvinism, or attacking critics of the war. This is real life; not some skit that’s been choreographed to dupe the Washington press corps. We need leaders who are capable of grasping the situation in realistic terms and initiating political dialogue with the warring parties. All the cheerleading and yellow ribbons in the world will not create a viable solution for the impending catastrophe.

The American people are way ahead of Rumsfeld on the issue of Iraq. Nearly 70% now believe that the war was a “mistake” and a clear majority is looking for candidates who will support a change in policy. A poll conducted by the New York Times/CBS News on 11-2-06 shows that “a substantial majority of Americans expect Democrats to reduce or end American military involvement in Iraq if they win control of Congress.” That tells us in stark terms that the public wants to “get out now”. The November 7 midterms will be a referendum on Bush’s “war of choice” and a flat rejection of the conflict which Rumsfeld so desperately wants to popularize. So far, the Democrats are showing substantial leads in all the polls.

The media has been a steadfast ally to the Bush troupe and given them a “free pass” throughout the conflict. They successfully drew an Iron Curtain around Iraq and kept the public from knowing about the 650,000 men, women and children were savagely butchered in Bush’s Petrol-War. Despite their best-efforts, however, public opinion has shifted away from the present policy and the American people are looking for an end to the fighting.

Rumsfeld’s plan for “a new kind of war” that depends on high-tech, laser-guided weaponry, massive counterinsurgency operations, and a submissive “embedded” media has fallen on hard times. The tremors can already be felt from Baghdad to Washington D.C. As Richard Haass, President of the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) said in the November issue of Foreign Affairs, “The American era in the Middle East, the forth in the region’s modern history, has ended.” All that’s left is to sweep up the pieces of a failed policy and head home.

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