

# Generals fall out over Rumsfeld

Clash over how to win wars, not stop them

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The stresses and strains within the Bush administration, the Pentagon and Congress have reached a new and unprecedented level of intensity. They come not only from the military's desperate position in Iraq but also from apprehension over reported plans for a new assault on another oil-rich country in the Middle East—Iran.

A number of retired generals, obviously speaking for many active-duty officers as well, have openly criticized Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and called for his resignation. As of April 19, they include three from the Marines—Gen. Anthony Zinni, who headed the U.S. Central Command in the late 1990s, Lt. Gen. Gregory Newbold and Lt. Gen. Paul K. Van Riper—plus four Army generals: Maj. Gen. Charles Swannack, who led the 82nd Airborne Division in Iraq; Maj. Gen. John Batiste, who commanded the 1st Infantry Division there; Maj. Gen. John Riggs and Maj. Gen. Paul Eaton.

These generals are not doves. They are for winning this and other wars for U.S. imperialist dominance in the world. But they have lost confidence in the Rumsfeld doctrine of doing it with a minimum of ground troops reliant on high-tech air power.

The intervention of the military brass into this political struggle has nothing progressive about it. Even the Washington Post, which also calls for Rumsfeld to step down, editorialized on April 18 that a military revolt “threatens the essential democratic principle of military subordination to civilian control.”

Rumsfeld is now fighting for his political life. On April 14, President George W. Bush had to interrupt his Easter vacation in Camp David with a public statement that the defense secretary “has my full support and deepest appreciation.” But the criticism continued.

The administration then rounded up its own military figures to put before the media, including Gen. Tommy R. Franks of the Army, who commanded U.S. troops in both Afghanistan and Iraq, and Gen. Richard B. Myers of the Air Force, former chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. So far, no high-ranking officer from the Air Force has spoken out against Rumsfeld, who promotes air power.

Rumsfeld has gone before the cameras to defend himself in what the New York Times (April 19) derisively referred to as “the Donny show” and “a daily ritual.” Almost every day, Bush has found it necessary to repeat his statements of support for Rumsfeld.

As commander-in-chief, Bush is of course ultimately responsible for Rumsfeld's decisions. He knows that if the leading executor of his administration's war policy goes down, he could be the next target.

In a further symptom of internal crisis, there has been a broad shakeup at the White House. Karl Rove, the “boy genius” who shepherded Bush’s political career from before he became Texas governor to the White House and ran Bush’s re-election campaign in 2004, has been forced out of his role as senior policy coordinator in the White House. Rove is reportedly implicated in the outing to the media of covert CIA agent Valerie Plame after she and her husband, former ambassador Joseph Wilson, wouldn’t verify bogus claims by the administration about Iraqi WMDs. Rove was once considered the third most powerful person in the White House.

Bush spokesperson Scott McClellan has also been forced to resign after almost three years on the job. He had the unenviable task of trying to deflect embarrassing media questions about the administration’s Iraq policy.

Had Rumsfeld’s strategy of “shock and awe” succeeded, none of this would be happening. But a prolonged resistance struggle is now deeply embedded in the Iraqi population. More and more Iraqis and U.S. troops are dying in a conflict that will not end as long as the occupation continues.

Washington has been spectacularly unsuccessful in stabilizing a neocolonial regime in Iraq. The very thing they totally disregarded from day one—the sentiment of the Iraqi people—has made it impossible to truly effect “regime change.” They have killed or captured the former leaders of Iraq, devastated much of the country, and instigated virtual civil war but they have not succeeded in establishing a puppet regime with the strength and authority to roll back the Iraqi commitment to self-determination born out of the 1958 anti-colonial revolution.

All this brings back memories of the Vietnam disaster, which ended only after the spread of the U.S. war to neighboring Cambodia and Laos, a militant anti-war movement in the streets and rebellions in hundreds of oppressed communities, and massive defections and mutinies among U.S. troops, who often refused combat and even attacked their officers in the field. The generals must fear this could happen again; Rumsfeld’s supporters accuse his critics of “politicizing the armed forces.”

While the noblest of motives are put forward to explain why an imperialist country like the U.S. goes to war, the real reason is always the same: to enhance the position of the corporate exploiters in the global struggle over markets and profits. The dissatisfaction being voiced over this war comes from two distinct sources.

There is the opposition from the masses of people, who are appalled at the suffering the occupation has caused and want to bring the troops home and stop the killing. Dissatisfaction with Bush’s performance is now at 60 percent in U.S. polls.

But there is also debate within the ruling class establishment over whether Rumsfeld’s war plans are leading to even greater defeats for the U.S.—by which they really mean for U.S. imperialist domination over the world.

At present, Iran is the focus of their fears. Even Sen. Richard Lugar (R-Ind.) has cautiously deviated from the White House and called for direct talks with Iran over its nuclear program. Lugar is head of the powerful Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Daniel Ellsberg of Pentagon Papers fame has called on military figures who disagree with

Rumsfeld not to resign but instead to leak to the public the latest plans for an attack on Iran. Ellsberg in 1971 was the Defense Department analyst who gave the New York Times 7,000 pages of top-secret documents that exploded many of the government's myths about the Vietnam War.

According to an article in the April 17 New Yorker magazine by investigative journalist Seymour Hersh, the plans to attack Iran from the air are massive, far advanced and include what seemed unthinkable when the Soviet Union existed: the use of tactical nuclear weapons. The first use of any nuclear weapons was long ago declared a crime against humanity by the UN General Assembly, but that world body has no teeth.

Many of those who feel that Rumsfeld's doctrine of relying on high-tech weaponry has failed in Iraq want more ground troops sent to the Middle East—as do leading Democratic Party politicians. And where will the troops come from? The specter of a renewed military draft lurks behind this debate.

The struggle to pull back imperialism altogether, bring the troops home and allow the people of the world to control their own destinies will come not from the military brass or either capitalist party, but from a powerful revival of the working-class and progressive movements here.

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