

# U.S. STRATEGY IN IRAQ

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PHOTO: SGT Lee Minyard, 15th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division, pulls security at a street corner during a patrol in Sadr City, 28 July 2005. (DOD)

**M**ANY OF OUR faculty and staff have asked me my views about the current situation in Iraq. A few students have also asked. So I thought I would take this opportunity, two days before Veterans Day, to provide you with some insights as seen from the perspective of a combat veteran who served as the commanding general of U.S. and allied forces in Kuwait. I also served as chief of war plans in the Pentagon and have spent considerable time studying national security affairs. My resume includes a fellowship at the National Defense University. So while it's true that everyone has opinions about Iraq, I would argue that not all of those opinions are equally well-informed.

This talk will address our strategy in Iraq. I won't talk about what the next steps should be, what the long-term prospects for peace in Iraq are, or how we can best get out of the quagmire we are in. Those might be other talks. For today I'm going to focus on strategy.

Let me begin by saying that most of our problems in Iraq stem from a flawed strategy that has been in place since the beginning of the war.

It's important that you understand what strategy is. In military terminology there are distinctions between strategy, operations, tactics, and techniques.

*Strategy* pertains to national decision making at the highest level. For example, our strategy in World War II was to mobilize the Nation, then defeat the Nazi regime while conducting a holding action in the Pacific, then shift our forces to destroy the Japanese Empire. Afterwards, our strategy was to rebuild both defeated nations into capitalistic democracies in order to make them future allies.

An example of an *operational* decision from World War II would be the decision to invade North Africa and then Italy and southern France before moving directly for the heart of Germany by coming ashore in northern France or Belgium.

*Tactics* characterize a scheme of maneuver that integrates the different capabilities of, for example, infantry, armor, and artillery.

A *technique* might describe a way of employing machineguns with overlapping fields of fire or of setting up a roadblock.

Our strategy in Iraq has been—

- Fight the war on the cheap.
- Ask the ground forces to perform missions that are more suitably performed by other branches of the American Government.
- Inconvenience the American people as little as possible.
- Continue to fund the Air Force and Navy at the same levels that they

have been funded at for the last 30 years while shortchanging the Army and Marines who are doing all of the fighting.

No wonder the war is not going well.

Let me explain how the war is being fought on the cheap.

From the very beginning, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, who thankfully announced his departure yesterday, has striven to minimize the number of Soldiers and Marines in Iraq. Instead of employing the Colin Powell doctrine of “use massive force at the beginning to achieve a quick and decisive victory,” his goal has been to “use no more troops than absolutely necessary so we can spend defense dollars on new technology.”

Before hostilities began, the Army Chief of Staff, [General] Eric Shinseki, testified before Congress that an occupation of Iraq would require hundreds of thousands of Soldiers. Shinseki made his estimate based on his extensive experience in the former Yugoslavia, where he worked to disengage the warring factions of Orthodox Serbians, Catholic Croatians, and Muslim Bosnians.

Shinseki also had available the results of a war game conducted in 1999 that involved 70 military, diplomatic, and intelligence officials. This recently declassified study concluded that 400,000 troops were needed on the ground to keep order, seal borders, and take care of other security needs. And even then stability would not be guaranteed.

Because of Shinseki’s testimony before Congress, Rumsfeld moved the general aside. In a nearly unprecedented move, to replace Shinseki, Rumsfeld recalled to active duty a retired general who was more likely to accept his theory that we could win a war in Iraq and establish a stable government with a small number of troops.

The Defense Department has fought the war on the cheap because, despite overwhelming evidence that the Army and Marine Corps need a significant increase in their size in order to accomplish their assigned missions, the civilian officials who run the Pentagon have refused to request authorization from Congress to do so. Two Democratic representatives, Mark Udall of Colorado and Ellen Tauscher of California, have introduced a bill into Congress that would add 80,000 troops to the end strength of the Active Army. Currently, this bill has no support from the Defense Department.

When I was commissioned in 1969, the Army was one and a half million. Despite the fact that we’re engaged in combat in Iraq, in Afghanistan, in the Philippines; committed to peacekeeping missions in Bosnia, Kosovo, and the Sinai; and on operational deployments in over 70 countries, our Army is now less than one third that size. We had more Soldiers in Saudi Arabia in the first Gulf War than we have in the entire Army today. In fact, Wal-Mart has three times as many employees as the American Army has Soldiers.

As late as 1990, Army end strength was approximately 770,000. With fewer than a half million today, defense analysts have argued that we need to add nearly 200,000 Soldiers to the active ranks.

Today, the Army is so bogged down in Afghanistan and Iraq that fewer than 10,000 Soldiers are ready and able to deal with any new crisis elsewhere in the world. And because the Army is so small, after only a year at home units are returning to Iraq for a second and even a third 12-month tour of duty.

Let me add a parenthetical note here explaining a difference between our services. Army tours of duty in Iraq are for 12 or 13 months. For Marines, it’s normally 6 months. For Air Force personnel, it’s typically 4 months. So when a Soldier says he’s going back to Iraq for his third tour, it means something totally different than when an Airman says the same thing.

Because the active force is too small, the mission of our National Guard and Reserve forces has been changed. Their original purpose was to save the Nation in time of peril. Today they serve as fillers for an inadequately sized active force. This change in mission has occurred with no national debate and no input from Congress.

We have fought the war on the cheap because we have never adequately funded the rebuilding of the

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Iraqi military or the training and equipping of the Iraqi police forces. The emails I receive from Soldiers and Marines assigned to train Iraqi forces all complain of inadequate resources, because they are at the very bottom of the supply chain and the lowest priority.

We have fought the war on the cheap because we have failed to purchase necessary equipment for our troops or repair that which has been broken or has worn out in combat. You've all read the stories about Soldiers having to purchase their own bulletproof vests and other equipment. And the Army Chief of Staff has testified that he needs an extra \$17 billion to fix equipment. For example, nearly 1,500 war-fighting vehicles await repair in Texas, with 500 tanks sitting in Alabama.

Finally, we are fighting this war on the cheap because our defense budget of 3.8 percent of gross domestic product is too small. In the Kennedy administration it averaged 9 percent of GDP. The average defense budget in the post-Vietnam era, from 1974 to 1994, was about 5.8 percent of GDP. If we are in a global war against radical Islam—and we are—then we need a defense budget that reflects wartime requirements.

A second part of our strategy is to ask the military to perform missions that are more appropriate for other branches of government.

Our Army and Marine Corps are taking the lead in such projects as building roads and sewage treatment plants, establishing schools, training a neutral judiciary, and developing a modern banking system. The press refers to these activities as nation building. Our Soldiers and Marines are neither equipped nor trained to do these things. They attempt them, and in general they succeed, because they are so committed and so obedient. But it is not what they do well and what only they alone can do.

But I would ask, where are our Department of Energy and Department of Transportation in

restoring Iraqi infrastructure? What's the role of our Department of Education in rebuilding an Iraqi educational system? What does our Department of Justice do to help stand up an impartial judicial system? Where is the U.S. Information Agency in establishing a modern equivalent of Radio Free Europe? And why did it take a year after the end of the active fighting for the State Department to assume responsibility from the Department of Defense in setting up an Iraqi government? These other U.S. Government agencies are only peripherally and secondarily involved in Iraq.

Actually, it would be inaccurate to say that the American Government is at war. The U.S. Army is at war. The Marine Corps is at war. And other small elements of our armed forces are at war. But our government is not.

A third part of our strategy is to inconvenience the American people as little as possible.

Ask yourself, are you at war? What tangible effect is this war having on your daily life? What sacrifices have you been asked to make for the sake of this war other than being inconvenienced at airports? No, America is not at war. Only a small number of young, brave, patriotic men and women, who bear the burden of fighting and dying, are at war.

A fourth aspect of our strategy is to fund Navy and Air Force budgets at prewar levels while short-changing the Marine Corps and the Army that are doing the fighting.

This strategy, of spending billions on technology for a Navy and Air Force that face no threat, contributes mightily to our failures in Iraq.

Secretary Rumsfeld is a former Navy pilot. His view of the battlefield is from 10,000 feet, antiseptic and surgical. Since coming into office he has funded the Air Force and the Navy at the expense of the Army and Marines because he believes technological leaps will render ground forces obsolete. He assumed that the rapid victory over the Taliban in Afghanistan confirmed this belief.

For example, the Defense Department is pouring billions into buying the newest fighter aircraft, at \$360 million each, to take on a nonexistent enemy Air Force.

But, for pilots like Rumsfeld and Air Force General Richard B. Myers, his former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, war is all about technology. It's computers, it's radar, and it's high-tech weapons.

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***...our strategy has been produced by men whose view of war is based on their understanding of technology and machinery, not their knowledge of men from an alien culture and the forces that motivate them.***

Technologists have a hard time comprehending the motivations of a suicide bomber or a mother who celebrates the death of her son in such a way. It's difficult for them to understand that to overcome centuries of ethnic hatred and murder it will take more than one generation. It's hard for them to accept that for young men with little education, no wives or children, and few job prospects, war against the West is the only thing that gives meaning to their lives.

But war on the ground is not conducted with technology. It is fought by 25-year-old sergeants leading 19-year-old Soldiers carrying rifles, in a dangerous and alien environment, where you can't tell combatants from noncombatants, Shi'ites from Sunnis, or suicide bombers from freedom-seeking Iraqis. This means war on the street is neither antiseptic nor surgical. It's dirty, complicated, and fraught with confusion and error.

In essence, our strategy has been produced by men whose view of war is based on their understanding of technology and machinery, not their knowledge of men from an alien culture and the forces that motivate them. They fail to appreciate that if you want to hold and pacify a hostile land and a hostile people you need Soldiers and Marines on the ground and in the mud, and lots of them.

In summary, our flawed strategy in Iraq has produced the situation we now face. This strategy is a product of the Pentagon, not the White House. And remember, the Pentagon is run by civilian appointees in suits, not military men and women in uniform. From the very beginning, Defense Department officials failed to appreciate what it would take to win this war.

The U.S. military has tried to support this strategy because they are trained and instructed to be subordinate to and obedient to civilian leadership. And the American people want it that way. The last thing you want is a uniformed military accustomed to debating in public the orders of their appointed civilian masters. But retired generals and admirals are starting to speak out, to criticize the strategy that has produced our current situation in Iraq.

But, if we continue to fight the war on the cheap, if we continue to avoid involving the American people by asking them to make any sacrifice at all, if we continue to spend our dollars on technology while neglecting the Soldiers and Marines on the ground, and if we fail to involve the full scope of the American Government in rebuilding Iraq, then we might as well quit, and come home. What we have now is not a real strategy—it's business as usual. **MR**

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