

Rumsfeld Agonistes

The slings and arrows of six generals sting Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. The SecDef may not suffer real anguish, but they put him on political defense. That's 'gotta' hurt Rummy given his management style and success. I served with two of the six generals, three of seven if you include GEN (RET) Wes Clark. The valid criticisms are lost in the political fight. But, truth is the first casualty of war, isn't it?

Here are the truths as I know them. FYI.

The Democrats and their propaganda organ, the Mainstream Media, are using these guys. Our enemies in wartime are pleased to hear the dissent from the military. The Republicans reflexively attack the messengers. We will hear dueling Greek choruses of Generals. At the end of the day, Rumsfeld will stay for political reasons alone.

The criticisms aren't payback for transforming the Army. Nice cliché, but false. A third of the Generals are Marines, not Army. Moreover, the Army began the process of Transformation in the 1990s with the Army After Next wargames and the 'Digitization' Process which paid off in OEF and OIF.

The initial mistakes in OIF can be blamed on GEN Tommy Franks, because he was the responsible officer. But, I'm confident that Rumsfeld's influence was culpable. The Chief of Staff, Army, and the Vice-Chief warned about too few troops. Rumsfeld went beyond ignoring them to impugning them. Other detailed mistakes, too numerous for this piece, were part of Rumsfeld's insistence on proving his theories of how to fight. The collapse of Iraq made Rumsfeld look brilliant. In fact, the enemy's weaknesses were greater and compensated for the weaknesses of Rumsfeld's pet theories. As little as its' worth, I wrote about mistakes (all op ed references are at <http://www.americancivilization.net/reading.html>) as they happened in 2003 with 'Criticize This'.

Likewise, dissolving the Iraqi Army can be blamed on Ambassador Bremer. Yet, the fundamental mistake - to not understand what kind of war we were getting into - was Rumsfeld's failure.

Rumsfeld pushed for plans to have U.S. troops leaving within weeks of destroying the Iraq Government. What folly. The Army War College knew we had to prepare for an Occupation. So did I when I wrote 'The Long Hard Peace' during major combat operations. These criticisms were in the context of fully supporting the war (see 2003 columns 'Give War a Chance', 'This New Kind of War', '9-11-2103', and 'Unnecessary Wars or Not').

Rumsfeld's restructuring of the Army basing is not the cause of the generals' complaints. Even though the draw down in Europe is too severe. The state of the art training facilities in Germany support four to six brigades far better than the lonely two brigades scheduled to be left in country (see 2004 column 'Rebasing the Legions').

I don't know many particulars on Rumsfeld fiddling with the conduct of the war, other than putting pressure to hurry up and field Iraqi units before they were ready. His name-calling of the enemy suggested he didn't get the nature of the conflict (see 2004 columns 'Army Is Right', 'Battle of Fallujah', 'War Is Peace', 'Why Corporal Pat Tillman Died', 'Why Soldiers Go Wild'). I have tremendous confidence in GEN John Abizaid and some of the other commanders I know, like former OEF/OIF Division commanders Petraus, Olsen, Chiarelli, Metz and others.

The U.S. is imposing its will in the War as best it can. I put it into my contextual understanding in 2005 with 'Iraq is a Battle Not a War' as well as other op eds ('America's Place in the World', 'America's Munificent Army', pieces on WW IV Strategy, Operations and Tactics). And, I stated point blank 'Rumsfeld Is McNamara'.

In September 2005 I wrote about MG (RET) Paul Eaton's retirement in 'Old Glory Over Katrina'. I'm very pleased that Paul is speaking out now. I'm not surprised that it is done from the retired rolls. General Officers got to be generals by being successful in a culture that rewards loyalty and caution. Retiring in protest isn't an American military tradition. The exceptions prove the point.

Two criticisms of Rumsfeld remain hidden.

Rumsfeld gutted the power of the Chiefs of Staff and Service Secretaries to pick the top officers – the 3 and 4 star flag officers. Rumsfeld's hand picking the top military leadership exceeds the bounds of civilian control to internal interference. Rumsfeld has the legal authority, but does he have the moral and military standing to do so? Not if he doesn't understand the nature of war. Not if he is fixated on reducing the size of the Army – no matter what.

Rumsfeld came into his second stint as Sec Def determined to make the Army smaller. Wonder weapons from the air and space should replace boots on the ground. Ground truth intervened to stop him temporarily. So, the Army today plans to be cut 30,000 active duty soldiers as soon as the drawn down from OIF happens. Utter nonsense. The Marines won't be cut because they are so much better at politics.

Neither of these criticisms has a voice. Frankly, today's tempest will matter little in the conduct of a greater war which will last generations. As Rumsfeld said himself, no one is indispensable. But, the generals' complaints should be sifted for elements of truth and wisdom – born of selfless service. For what it is worth.

James Atticus Bowden