

Good Execution Can Compensate for Bad Policy: How the Generals are losing Iraq



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"Perhaps our diplomacy of the first five decades of this century, and our reactions to the very different problems that have assailed us since 1950, both reflect realities much deeper than our responses of either period: namely, the lack of any accepted, enduring doctrine for relating military strength to political policy, and a persistent tendency to fashion our policy towards others with a view to feeding a pleasant image of ourselves rather than to achieving real, and desperately needed, results in our relations with others."

George F. Kennan, *American Diplomacy*, University of Chicago Press: Chicago and London, 1984.



Where do the generals fit into the larger picture of responsibility for events on the ground in Iraq?

- **The President and the Secretary of Defense, subject to Congress, are responsible for broad policy - such as the decision to intervene in Iraq.**
- **However, the generals commanding forces in USCENTCOM are responsible not only for assisting in the details of policy, but, most important, for its execution.**
- **The commanding generals are the interface between policy and action. It is their job to make the broad policies work, to change them or to resign.**
- **Generals have both a moral and legal responsibility to give the best advice possible to the Secretary of Defense and the President - and to oppose any morally objectionable, illegal or fundamentally unrealistic orders up to and including resignation.**
- **Thus, the generals are principally responsible for the military debacle in Iraq.**

What is the situation on the ground today in Iraq and how did we get there?



In a letter to Major A. E. Percival, Major Bernard Montgomery wrote in 1923 about the British decision to remove its army from Ireland a year earlier:

“... I consider that Lloyd George was really right in what he did; if we had gone on we could probably have squashed the rebellion as a temporary measure, but it would have broken out again like an ulcer the moment we had removed the troops; I think the rebels would probably have refused battle, and hidden away their arms until we had gone...”

- Today, even the most vigorous NEOCONs say that the U.S. will draw down (if not leave) as soon as the “Iraqi” forces can handle things on their own. This is a replay of Nixon's Vietnamization scheme.
- However, Iraq’s Shiite-dominated government, army and security police will be unable to stand on their own militarily or economically, and will lean heavily on Iran for support.

Strategic Failures of General Officer Leadership:

“The root cause of terrorism is the U.S. military occupation.”

Robert Pape, author of *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*.

- **Failure to appreciate the Baathist enemy’s true weakness, to understand Arab expectations, to advance rapidly into Baghdad and Basrah, to seize key leaders and records and achieve psychological dominance due to poor professional and intellectual quality of senior military leadership. (Target set mentality/excessive violence)**
- **Ignored the criticality of preparing for conditions after Baghdad’s fall. Resulting 30 days of inaction was inexcusable. (Panama Looting Replay)**
- **Failure to insist on a unified command structure (Bremer? Sanchez? Abizaid?)**
- **Offered no resistance to the Iraqi Army/government disbandment decision. (Arabs must govern Arabs!)**
- **Demonstrated the intention to supplant the old dictatorship with a new American dictatorship.**
- **Opted for a static garrison “in your face” occupation creating resentment and leaving the initiative to the growing opposition to occupation fed by out-of-work former Iraqi soldiers.**

Operational Failures of General Officer Leadership:

- **Failure to react to both the Arab population's growing resentment and the insurgency by redeploying forces/changing tactics inside Iraq to cope with new conditions.**
- **Failure to communicate effectively with the Arab population. (Mixed messages.)**
- **Failure to appreciate armor and its critical role.**
- **Failure to protect the people who were willing to work with US Forces.**
- **Brutalized the Arab population under American control creating a rebellion against American military occupation.**
- **Fostered the emergence of a climate of hatred that led to wide-spread abuses including Abu Ghraib, then blamed enlisted troops.**
- **Incredibly slow to raise and train a new Iraqi Army while tolerating the emergence of new and stronger militias.**
- **Failed to secure lines of communication, borders and arms dumps.**
- **Continued misrepresentation to the American people of the true state of affairs on the ground in Iraq.**

Summary: It's about execution!

It is bitter to contemplate, but Americans 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 the problem; and,**
- **Third, the probability that future American military operations will fail if generalship of this poor quality persists.**

The WWII warfighting paradigm of conquest and occupation based on flooding the battlespace with American troops and firepower was irrelevant the day WW II ended.

Who commands counts! Accountability is key.

Reform codified in future national security legislation is vital!