

Breaking ranks: US Military vs The White House

Nothing in my life has been more frustrating than being led by incompetent leaders. This first part of a two part article from Asia Times illustrates just how maddening it is for the military to be bound to the will of an incompetent leader and how criminal it is that our fighting men and women have suffered so at their hands. For those who believe the surge has worked read the [article here](#) and count how many of our sons and daughters have paid with their lives for this arrogant folly.

“Don’t let the quiet fool you,” a senior defense official says. “There’s still a huge chasm between how the White House views Iraq and how we [in the Pentagon] view Iraq. The White House would like to have you believe the ‘surge’ has worked, that we somehow defeated the insurgency. That’s just ludicrous. There’s increasing quiet in Iraq, but that’s happened because of our shift in strategy – the ‘surge’ had nothing to do with it.”

In part, the roots of the disagreement between the Pentagon and White House over what is really happening in Iraq is historical. Senior military officers contend that the seeming fall-off in in-country violence not only has nothing to do with the increase in US force levels, but that the dampening of the insurgency that took hold last summer could have and would have taken place much earlier, within months of America’s April 2003 occupation of Baghdad.

Moreover, these officers contend, the insurgency might not have put down roots in the country after the fall of Baghdad if it had not been for the White House and State Department – which undermined military efforts to strike deals with a number of Iraq’s most disaffected tribal leaders. These

officers point out that the first contact between high-level Pentagon officials and the nascent insurgency took place in Amman, Jordan, in August of 2003 – but senior Bush administration officials killed the talks.

At the center of the dispute is the failure by Armani suited Washington bureaucrats to grasp the complexity and culture of the land they have invaded. Perhaps it is even a studied incompetence played out again and again by high ranking US officials from Donald Rumsfeld to Condoleeza Rice.

“We made the right contacts, we said the right things, we listened closely, we put a plan in place that would have saved a lot of time and trouble,” a senior Pentagon official says. “And every time we were ready to go forward, the White House said ‘no’.”

At the center of these early talks was a group of Iraqis led by Sheikh Talal al-Gaood, a Sunni businessman with close ties to Anbar’s tribal leaders. Gaood, who died of a heart ailment in March of 2006, was a passionate Iraqi patriot who feared growing al-Qaeda influence in his country. Speaking over coffee from his office in Amman in 2005, Gaood was enraged by the “endless mistakes” of the US leadership. “You [Americans] face a Wahhabi threat that you cannot even begin to fathom,” he said at the time, and he derided White House “propaganda” about the role of Syria in fueling the insurgency.

Gaood, looking every bit the former Ba’athist – complete with suspenders and Saddam Hussein-like mustache was particularly critical of what he called “the so-called counter-insurgency experts among Washington policymakers who think they know Iraq but don’t.” As he argued: “The guys who come through here, very educated, come in their brown robes and say they are going to Iraq to kill the Americans. They are not Syrians. They are Wahhabis. They are from Saudi Arabia. But if you talk to American officials, it is like they don’t

exist."

That might have been true for civilian policymakers, but it wasn't true for the military – who were beginning to take heavy casualties from armed insurgents in Sunni areas.

Personally, I would hate to see a military coup but maybe it is time if not for a revolution then at the very least a mutiny.

Jon Stewart on Bush's Saudi fishing expedition

Watch this first

Then read this account of the \$145B [economic stimulus](#) proposed by Bush. Then read how average [tax paying Americans subsidize](#) the very wealthy while sticking it to the working stiff.

Then read about the [\\$20B arms deal](#) with the Saudis and remember that US helicopters are being shot down over Iraq and Afghanistan with US made surface to air missiles purchased from the Tamil Tigers with opium money by the Taliban and others from previous US arms deals.

Finally, read [Robert Fisk's excellent perspective](#) on all the above

More on homeless veterans

It is crushing to read stories like this and to see what an [ungrateful nation](#) we really are. Worse, how we disregard our veterans is not recent occurrence but has been a blemish on our history since the revolutionary war. Today, perhaps because of the evolution of wars and the advent of improvised explosive devices and repeated deployments, veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan are becoming homeless at a much faster rate than Vietnam era vets.

For as long as the United States has sent its young men “and later its young women” off to war, it has watched as a segment of them come home and lose the battle with their own memories, their own scars, and wind up without homes.

The Civil War produced thousands of wandering veterans. Frequently addicted to morphine, they were known as “tramps,” searching for jobs and, in many cases, literally still tending their wounds.

More than a decade after the end of World War I, the “Bonus Army” descended on Washington “demanding immediate payment on benefits that had been promised to them, but payable years later” and were routed by the U.S. military.

And, most publicly and perhaps most painfully, there was Vietnam: Tens of thousands of war-weary veterans, infamously rejected or forgotten by many of their own fellow citizens.

Now it is happening again, in small but growing numbers.

The pattern of self-destructiveness that permeates combat veterans is much more understood now. Medically, it is recognized that high levels of stress hormones shrink the hippocampus and impair the veterans memory and ability to focus, both crucial to maintaining a job. Today, in addition

to PTSD many veterans suffer from traumatic brain injury (TBI) from IEDs which lead to many of the same behavioral and cognitive difficulties that complicate holding a job. Yet, it is happening again, just like other wars we are casting our veterans to the wind.

People who have studied postwar trauma say there is always a lengthy gap between coming home “the time of parades and backslaps and “The Boys Are Back in Town” on the local FM station” and the moments of utter darkness that leave some of them homeless.

In that time, usually a period of years, some veterans focus on the horrors they saw on the battlefield, or the friends they lost, or why on earth they themselves deserved to come home at all. They self-medicate, develop addictions, spiral down.

How “ or perhaps the better question is why “ is this happening again?

“I really wish I could answer that question,” says Anthony Belcher, an outreach supervisor at New Directions, which conducts monthly sweeps of Skid Row in Los Angeles, identifying homeless veterans and trying to help them get over addictions.

“It’s the same question I’ve been asking myself and everyone around me. I’m like, wait, wait, hold it, we did this before. I don’t know how our society can allow this to happen again.”

America should be ashamed of the way they treat their veterans and we should all be walking the river banks and offering to help them where we can. Read the whole article [here](#)

It is rural America fighting in Iraq

This is old news but well worth revisiting. Julian Delasantellis has written an [in depth article](#) relating to unit cohesion amongst today's military compared to the revolving door, individual troop deployments of Vietnam. This was explained in detail in Jonathan Shay's book, *Achilles in Vietnam*.

So who actually is in the US military in Iraq? A 2007 article in the Financial Times of London described the new dynamic of military demographics in the Iraq War:

The Pentagon does not disclose the socio-economic background of the 25,000 US soldiers who have been killed or wounded in Iraq. But a breakdown of their ethnicity and states of origins shows they are overwhelmingly white and from small towns in the interior states of mid-America and the South... a military sociologist at Northwestern University, says the divorce between the social origins of most US army personnel and the character of the population as a whole is greater than ever.

More than this, he explores the political divide between urban and rural America and notes that while it was urban America that came under attack, rural America is dying for it.

And in the ultimate display of patriotism, pride and support for the Iraq War, red-state rural America sent their sons and daughters to fight and die in it.

Why? Was it that red-state America possessed some special insight or wisdom concerning the nature of the threat, the enemy the nation faced in Iraq and the rest of the Muslim world, what the neo-conservatives call "Islamofascism?"

Or was it that red-state America's embrace of the war was due to a much simpler causation? Was it that it knew that much of blue-state America didn't support the war, that, like a desperate lover trying to prove his worth over a romantic rival, by supporting the troops and the war, by righting the perfidy committed by the treasonous metropolis in not "supporting the troops" in Vietnam, (which I wrote about in my June 6, 2007, ATol piece, Yes, Rambo, you get to win this time.) rural America could prove that it was the genuine repository of the American ethos and its values, the true home of the American spirit?

It is always a wonder to me how people can ultimately vote against their own interests, perhaps Delasantellis' article gives some insight into that process.

Wives and mothers of wounded pay huge price

Finally some mainstream media coverage of what is little talked about regarding our wounded veterans. From [CNN](#). though this link will expire 1/28/08. Military families bear a heavy load, give up jobs, lose homes and sacrifice their own health to care for their damaged veterans. This is a national shame that so few share in the sacrifice. It is a national shame that so few suffer for so many and have no where to turn for help.

Among the family members who stay for the long haul, about half are wives and half are mothers.

Markelz said it's especially hard on the wives of guardsmen

and reservists and on the middle-aged mothers of soldiers – women who had well-established civilian lives away from the typically nomadic life of active military families.

“They didn’t sign up for that,” she said.

Read the article before it expires [here](#)

(hat tip/AK)

Military families voicing more disapproval

From [USAToday](#)

Among military families, 55% disapprove of Bush’s performance compared with 64% of Americans without relatives in the service in the latest USA TODAY/Gallup Poll. Men in military families are more approving of Bush (47%) than female relatives (36%).

“The numbers really aren’t much of a surprise,” says Joyce Raezer, executive director of the National Military Family Association. “They show that the military is in many ways a reflection of the country as a whole, not an isolated subculture, as some would portray it.”

Energy, copper, magnets and China, again!

As the developer of a [high efficiency wind turbine and high bandwidth direct drive DC generator](#), I pay close attention to the price of copper and magnets as they are crucial to creating energy. Previously I [wrote](#) how China having 98% of the world's neodymium reserves holds the market on high gauss magnets. The Department of Defense has been tasked with determining whether US reliance on China for crucial components is putting our national security at [risk...](#)

China dominates the market for production of certain high performance magnets (primarily rare earth and aluminum-nickel-cobalt magnets) that are important to defense applications such as radar systems, submarine valves, missiles, military aircraft, inertial devices, and precision-guided weapons. Domestic production of these magnets has declined over the past decade. However, DoD demand for these magnets is less than 0.5% of worldwide demand, and the Department is able to access the high performance magnets it requires from domestic sources. The Department is examining whether there is any likely future risk to the domestic high performance magnet industry that would require DoD action.

While the official response from DoD is that the military is able to obtain all magnets from domestic sources, those domestic sources must still obtain those magnets from China, Now China has scored another energy coup with an investment by China Metallurgical Group's \$4 billion investment in one of the world's largest copper [fields in Afghanistan](#).

The project involves US\$4 billion in investment by China Metallurgical Group, which will be by far the biggest foreign investment in Afghanistan and is estimated to provide

employment for 10,000 people. Significantly, the project includes the development of a railway system linking Afghanistan to China. (Nepal also has sought the extension of China's railway system from Lhasa to Kathmandu.)

China's present and projected power consumption needs can easily explain why they are intent upon maintaining a ready supply of materials necessary to meet those needs. How this effects the US' equally voracious energy appetite is unclear but this appears to me to be yet another consequence of our foreign policy failures in the Middle East and puts Afghanistan back on the front burner

Oregon National Guard deploying back to Iraq and Afghanistan 2009

Obviously, if we are scheduling deployment of National Guard units back to Iraq as far ahead as 2009, there are not plans to end that occupation any time soon. Read it [here](#)

US hand in nuclear arsenal

Arms sales are a tricky business and will often come back to haunt you. Take for example, US made surface to air missiles now being used against our own forces in Afghanistan. The road they traveled to come into the hands of the resurgent Taliban

is not so long, nor so hard to trace. Pakistan and its nuclear arsenal, some 120 weapons has the [US and Russia and Germany and many more for that matter written all over it.](#)

Globalization, what a concept. You can get a burger prepared your way practically anywhere in the world. The Nike Swoosh appears at elite athletic venues across the United States and on the skinny frames of T-shirted children playing in the streets of Kolkata. For those interested in buying an American automobile, a word of warning: it is not so unusual to find more "American content" in a Japanese car than one built by one of Detroit's Big Three.

So don't kid yourself about the Pakistani bomb. From burgers to bombs, globalization has had an impact. Pakistan's nuclear arsenal – as many as 120 weapons – is no more Pakistani than your television set is Japanese. Or is that American? It was a concept developed in one country and, for the most part, built in another. Its creation was an example of globalization before the term was even coined.

Given the governmental security crisis in Pakistan and al Qaeda's foothold, it seems that the threat of nuclear arms falling into the wrong hands is greater in Pakistan than in Iran.