

What Soldiers Cannot Do

Speaking to “a boisterous and supportive crowd” at Fort Irwin, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld confidently predicted, “The U.S. military is not

going to lose a battle or a war over there.”

Rumsfeld is right. But he could say the same of Vietnam. In not a single major engagement did the North Vietnamese defeat the U.S. military. Yet we lost South Vietnam as decisively as the French lost the North in 1954, though the French army had been forced to surrender at Dienbienphu—and ours was undefeated.

Even though the U.S. military is not going to lose a battle, that is not decisive as to whether we are going to win this war—that is, leave behind a nation united, democratic, and pro-American. If Iraq has demonstrated anything, it is the limits of military power.

In conventional war, America is invincible. With our stand-off missiles, the one-shot, one-kill weapons of our tanks, laser-guided bombs, and the ability of U.S. soldiers to put precision fire on enemy targets, no army on earth can stand up in fixed battle against ours. Sending the U.S. military against the Iraqi army was like sending the Pittsburgh Steelers against P.S. 39.

But the world knows this. And unlike the Taliban, who tried to defend hilltops against a Northern Alliance supported by American air power, the Iraqis ceded the battlefield. They waited for us to become an occupying power and then they emulated the Apache, using mobility, stealth, surprise, and terror to fight a new war. Unfortunately, there are thousands of these Apache, they are 5,000 miles away, and they live on land no American covets.

To the enemy, victory does not require a Dienbienphu with U.S. generals surrendering to insurgent commanders. That is not going to happen. Victory means merely when we go home, they survive as the most effective fighting force left behind.

Here we face a paradox. While our war in Iraq is killing and capturing the enemy, it is also training the enemy for the war that comes after our departure. We are teaching them how to fight the greatest army on earth, excellent training for when they have to fight the Iraqi army.

And there is in history no assurance of the ultimate victory in which Rumsfeld has such confidence. Since 1945, insurgencies have inflicted repeated defeats on occupying powers with superior armies. The French army was never defeated in Algeria, but after eight years of fighting, de Gaulle quit.

Reagan saw nothing in Lebanon worth a war, and after the *New Jersey* shelled Lebanon in reprisal for the massacre our Marines, we went home. After eight years and 15,000 dead, the Russians gave up in Afghanistan.

Israel surrendered southern Lebanon after Hezbollah raised the price too high in blood. While the latest intifada was a disaster for the Palestinians, it was a victory for Hamas, whose fighting and dying displaced the PLO in the hearts of the people.

In set-piece battles, the Afghans could never have stood up to the Russian army, nor Hezbollah to the Marines, nor Hamas to an IDF that had routed Syrian,

Jordanian, and Egyptian armies in every conventional war they fought. But all persevered and all won.

How do the Americans win in Iraq? We are not like these other nations, we contend. Unlike Israel, we do not covet land Arabs call their own. Unlike the French and Russians, we are not an imperial power. Our fighting forces, Rumsfeld told the troops at Fort Irwin, “are engaging the terrorists over there where they live, so we don’t have to engage them over here.”

But prior to our invasion, no terrorist attack on U.S. interests involved any Iraqi, and not one suicide-bomb attack was traced to Saddam. Iraq is the central front in the War on Terror only because the U.S. invasion made it the central front.

As in Vietnam, the U.S. military can prevent any defeat in Iraq, but it cannot win the war unless it can annihilate this insurgency. And again, it cannot do that because, paradoxically, the U.S. military presence in Iraq is itself a cause and recruiting agent of the insurgency. The more of them we kill, the more we create.

When the Weimar government, facing runaway inflation in 1923, stopped paying its war debts and the German miners went on strike, the French army marched into the Ruhr. “You cannot dig coal with bayonets,” someone observed.

Digging coal is one of the occupations for which armies are not trained. Among the hidden perils of Iraq is that, as in Vietnam, the U.S. military will succeed in what it has been trained to do—winning battles—but fail at what not even the finest army is trained to do, creating a friendly nation out of an alien, indifferent, or often hostile population in an occupied land. ■

[divide and don't conquer]

Splitting Islam

A Shi'ite-Sunni strategy for surviving the War on Terror

By James Kurth

THE UNITED STATES now faces a widespread, long-term, and potentially catastrophic threat from Islamism, and the terrorist bombings since 9/11 indicate that this threat is becoming global in scope. Moreover, as the earlier U.S. struggle with communism, another hostile global ideology, suggests, the threat may persist for several generations. And as the accelerating spread of nuclear technology portends, the stakes of this threat may involve the nuclear destruction of one or more of America's great cities and perhaps even the very functioning of American society itself.

The current insurgency in Iraq, largely drawn from or supported by the Sunni population, is providing inspiration and training for Islamist insurgents elsewhere. Conversely, the global network of Islamist terrorists, which is also largely composed of extremist Sunnis, has been energized and legitimized by the insurgency in Iraq. The result is a global Islamist insurgency directed at the United States, its allies, and the West more generally. The folly of recent U.S. administrations, and most especially that of President George W. Bush, has placed us in this dangerous condition. But now that we are there, the central question is how can we get out?

Proposed solutions vary in a way that is familiar and predictable, that is, according to the different ideological

positions of their proponents, with the usual suspects being liberals, traditional conservatives, and neoconservatives.

Liberals are most numerous in public-policy discussions, and so the most common proposed solutions are theirs. They usually involve some sort of technical—really tactical—measure, such as improved intelligence, enhanced inspections in airports and seaports, and, recently, bag checks in subways and monitoring of fuel trucks. These measures do not require any changes in something as important as U.S. foreign policy or as fundamental as the presence in America of alienated and hostile immigrants from Muslim countries. Liberals commonly think that deep social and political conflicts can be solved by quick and superficial policies designed and implemented by sophisticated experts and officials (the liberals themselves). Of course, with Islamist terrorism a quick fix can always be out-waited by the terrorists, and a superficial one can always be outflanked by them.

Other proposed solutions seek to change American foreign policies that have so antagonized many Muslims, be it U.S. support of Israel and authoritarian regimes in the Muslim world or now military operations in Iraq. Such proposals for changing foreign policy are often put forward by traditional conservatives. They are also put forward by

career officials and professionals in foreign policy—especially those who are safely retired. Indeed, the Bush administration and the neoconservatives themselves have embraced the idea, although not the actual practice, that the United States should stop supporting dictators in the Muslim world. Of course, they are not about to change the other U.S. foreign policies at issue—support of Israel and military operations in Iraq.

Even if U.S. foreign policies were changed, however, the global Islamist insurgency very likely would continue. Al-Qaeda and its affiliated groups would certainly take credit for driving the U.S. to abandon its course, and they would probably be encouraged and energized to go on to new and more radical objectives, such as eliminating any Western presence in the Muslim world while enhancing and expanding the Muslim presence in the West.

Of course, the solution offered by the Bush administration and the neoconservatives is, in its own way, also a radical one. They sought not just to change U.S. foreign policy, but to change the nature, or at least the culture, of the Middle East and the Muslim world more generally. They wanted to “drain the swamp” that sustained Islamist terrorists by bringing liberal democracy, free markets, open societies, and human rights to Muslim countries. Neoconservatives