



Forlorn Hope

During the Napoleonic era, the British Army stormed many fortresses. Always leading the doomed charge into the breach was a unit known as the Forlorn Hope. Modern conventional troops are treated as a Forlorn Hope. They are sacrificed on the altar of political correctness. Beware the revenge of the crusaders.



Fire the Generals !

by Douglas Macgregor, PhD (an Excerpt)

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American failures in Iraq are often blamed on the White House and the civilian leadership of the Pentagon. The top military leadership deserves just as much of the blame.

When Gen. George Casey took over as commander of U.S. and coalition forces in Iraq during July 2004, he asked his staff in Baghdad to set up a meeting with the headquarters' counterinsurgency expert. His request was met with silence. Incredible as it may seem, after fighting what American military authorities had been calling an insurgency for over a year, the Army's headquarters in Baghdad had no experts on counter-insurgency operations.

A year later, Casey returned to Washington and told members of the Senate that more American troops would hurt, not help, matters in Iraq. He insisted that the large American military presence in the country "feeds the notion of occupation" and actually

extends "the amount of time that it will take for Iraqi security forces to become self-reliant."² Even in areas of the country where American forces were showered with flowers when they arrived in April 2003, they are now under attack.

In war, military strategy is supposed to reduce the probability of armed conflict, to persuade those who might fight not to fight, and when necessary, to win at the least cost in lives and treasure in the shortest possible time. In Iraq, America's top generals achieved the opposite outcome. Meanwhile, many of today's top generals are repeating the Vietnam pattern of speaking critically of the Pentagon's leadership in private, while eagerly accepting public praise and promotion from the secretary of defense for deferring to him in everything.

American soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines are rightly lauded by the American public for their courage and sacrifice in the fight for Iraq, but the high quality of American soldiers and Marines at battalion level and below cannot compensate for inadequate senior leadership at the highest levels in war. Today, the senior leadership of the U.S. armed forces in general and, the U.S. Army in particular, is overly bureaucratic, risk averse, professionally inadequate and, hence, unsuited to the complex military tasks entrusted to them. The Bush administration has a preference for compliant, sycophantic officers who are fatally dependent on the goodwill of the secretary of defense and the president who promoted and appointed them.

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

The Roots of the Problem

Finding generals who are competent and ethical practitioners of war -- officers who will communicate to their civilian superiors the truth of what is really happening and what actions and resources are required for success -- has never been easy. In American history, armies and their generals have been treated as afterthoughts, producing a pattern of emergency improvisation in wartime to replace generals who could not shake the habits and mindset of an unprofessional garrison army culture.

President Abraham Lincoln struggled with such incompetents for the first two years of the Civil War until he found someone who won battles. The man was Ulysses S. Grant, an officer no one in the Army's command hierarchy wanted. Long before America entered World War II, Gen. George C. Marshall, an officer who had waited 36 years for promotion to flag rank, ended his first year in office as Army chief of staff in 1940 by retiring 54 generals. After the Japanese attacked

Pearl Harbor, Marshall continued to replace hundreds of generals and colonels, elevating men like James Gavin, a captain in 1942, to brigadier general and division commander in 1944. When Gen. Matthew Ridgway assumed command of the Eighth Army in Korea, he was no less ruthless than Marshall had been with commanders in the field who did not measure up.

So, what has changed? Why, after three years of inconclusive action in Iraq, have none of America's top generals been fired?

One reason is the absence of capable enemies to fight.⁵ Since 1990, America's enemies have had no navies, weak air forces, weak to non-existent air defenses, and incompetent armies that lacked both the will and the training to fight effectively. Our superb combat soldiers and Marines easily overpowered their enemies regardless of what decisions or actions the senior military leadership took. Emergency improvisation was not needed.

The inevitable consequence of this situation is that there is no political constituency for excellence in generalship; no politician who will galvanize public opinion

and demand results from generals. Consequently, while Americans can force the removal of homeland security officials from office or specify with great precision the intellectual and professional attributes of a Supreme Court justice, they don't make similar judgments about generals. They don't make judgments because, for the most part, they don't know what generals are supposed to do in war or peace.

In war, this condition is dangerous because the nation's three- and four-star generals are the key figures who interface between policy and action. They decisively shape and implement the military component of national strategy that is consistent with American policy goals, ensuring that results are attained within the framework of the mission, and taking into account intangibles such as the reputation of the American people. They determine the metrics that measure success or failure, and they create the command climate that motivates subordinate commanders to take prompt action to overcome any and all difficulties.

Two important corollaries must be mentioned. In war, for generals to succeed, they must be men of character and integrity, accepting risk and uncertainty as the unchanging features of war. They must also demonstrate a willingness to stand up and be counted, to put country before career and, if necessary to resign. Generals also must be students of their profession and of their enemies. They must be able to put themselves in the position of their enemies, avoid rigid adherence to ideas and methods that are ineffective, and adopt what works while concentrating their minds on the essential tasks. These attributes have been largely absent in the U.S. senior ranks, both on the road to Baghdad and in the occupation of Iraq that followed.

Macgregor is vastly understating the problem. America's generals are criminally unsuited for winning wars.

Breaker McCoy