

The Army Is Right

Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld said he never thought, a year ago, that they would need so many troops in Iraq as they do today. Too bad he didn't listen the U.S. Army. Too bad too few leaders understand the Army. If only the Army had the institutional self-confidence it earns, the Army story would growl like John Wayne, 'Now, Listen and Listen Tight. The Army is Right.'

The Army was right about how many troops to invade and occupy Iraq. 200,000 soldiers (>130,000) on the ground since Day One was the Army Chief of Staff's answer. He was rebuked and ridiculed by the civilian leaders, the technocrats. The Greek Chorus of Pundits who rush to the Defense of Bush like it's the Defense of the Nation winced at the word 'Occupation'. But, it was Army generals - Lucius D. Clay and Douglas MacArthur - who wrote the book on Post-WW II occupation. The Army on the ground kept the shield to protect and grow Korean democracy. Iraq is an occupation.

The Army knows when you have enough to make and keep the peace (Bosnia and Kosovo) and not enough (Somalia). An extra 2 divisions would have protected the main supply routes to prevent ambushes like Jessica Lynch's debacle. Later, more hotspots like Fallujah would have had troops on hand to keep armed mobs, militias, and 'armies' off the streets. Openly parading their arms, the factions gained credibility with their population that pushed up the confidence enough to directly challenge the Coalition Authority.

And, of course, the commanders will say they have enough troops when the boss says so. Rumsfeld reportedly micro-managed the deployment of forces like MacNamara. Plus, the generals saw him dump the Service Chief and Secretary of the Army in a heartbeat. When it comes time to take down and govern the rabble in the rubble in Iraq or Syria, listen to the Army.

The Army was right about keeping the Iraqi Army together. The Army War College and LTG (RET) Garner recommended keeping the Iraqi Army together. Approximately 40,000 out of 440,000 Iraqis opposed our invasion. The 400,000 kept as units could have been duly sorted and weeded for Baathist bad guys. The Iraqi's could have helped with law and order in the crucial early days. The decision to disband, dishonor and impoverish almost half a million armed men was based on ideology not pragmatism. Maybe next time the Air Force and Navy won't bomb the intelligence service headquarters to bits, so we can get their records intact.

The Army is right about Land Warfare. The Army is the master of Land Warfare. Since the end of WW III (The Cold War), the Army made hard open inquiry about the future its forte. The Louisiana Maneuvers, the Battle Labs, and the Army After Next programs lead to the design of the forces - technology, organizations and operations - that will come together as the Future Combat Systems. They were aimed at 2012, but the Chief of Staff, GEN Schoomaker, is making the change, known as Transformation, boldly today.

The Army's Transformation takes the intellectual high ground. The Army figured out how to fight against any possible any, in any terrain or city at any level of intensity. This isn't boutique war expertise. It's a blanket understanding of the right mix of changes.

The Army is right about its Transformation. Future Combat Systems may have to pay the bills for the Iraq War II. Too bad. If just the new C4I-ISR (Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance), Logistics and Robotics happen, then the Army will be better than any other Land Force in the world for another 30 years plus.

The Army will be more right – if it grows. The Army needs to start building another 60,000 soldiers now. 100,000 more would be better. It is expensive but there is no better investment. No war plane or ship can do what the 100,000 soldiers may be called to do in the long, long WW IV (Global War against Islamists Terrorists).

Army will be right if the Nation understands. The American People care when the Army bleeds. Even if it is all volunteer, the soldiers of the Army National Guard and Reserves touch every state. Fighting the wars on the edge of the American Empire needs to have a reason worth dying – like Manifest Destiny. Call it our Munificent Destiny to fight the hostiles, Islamists, in their hell hole countries to keep the stability and peace in the Civilized Free World. The soldiers will do their duty, but their families must believe they serve a purpose worth precious blood and terrible pain.

We should listen to America's Army when we go to war.

James Atticus Bowden

James Atticus Bowden has specialized in inter-disciplinary long range 'futures' studies for over a decade. He is employed by a Defense Department contractor for the Future Combat Systems. He is a retired United States Army Infantry Officer. He is a 1972 graduate of the United States Military Academy and earned graduate degrees from Harvard University and Columbia University. He holds two elected Republican Party offices in Virginia.