

Army War College Talk, 3 April 2007, by LTG (Ret) John H. Cushman

JCS Chairman Pace has said that the plan for Iraq “was developed by military officers, presented by military officers, questioned by civilians as they should, revamped by military officers, and blessed by the senior military leadership.”

That given, there is general agreement that it was the worst planned military operation at least since the Spanish-American War, which debacle among other reforms led to the creation of the Army War College.

After the abortive Iran Rescue Mission of April 1980, Admiral James L. Holloway conducted a sort of after action review, or AAR. He wrote...

"We were chartered by the Joint Chiefs to do an essentially forward-looking, no-holds-barred assessment of the attempted rescue operation. Our purpose was to independently appraise the rescue attempt so we could recommend improvements in planning, organizing, coordinating, directing, and controlling any such operations in the future... Our group consisted of six flag and general officers representing all four Services."

Admiral Holloway's effort is evidently not being duplicated for Iraq, so for purposes of discussion today I am going to summarize my own one man AAR.

The role of the U.S. military under the President and Secretary of Defense has been spelled out in the 1986 Gold-water-Nichols Act, now Title 10, U.S. Code, which says that...

...there is a Joint Chiefs of Staff made up of a Chairman, Vice Chairman, and the four Service Chiefs, that all members of the JCS are military advisors to the President, the National Security Council, and the Secretary of Defense, and that the JCS Chairman is the principal military adviser, responsible for (quoting):

Assisting the President and the Secretary of Defense in providing for the strategic direction of the armed forces.

Providing for the preparation and review of contingency plans...

and that, quoting again from Title 10...

The commander of a combatant command is responsible to the President and to the Secretary of Defense for the performance of missions assigned to that command.

In the Iraq planning, what did America have a right to expect of the JCS Chairman, General Richard Myers, and the commander of U.S. Central Command, General Tommy Franks?

Clausewitz wrote: “The first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish ... the kind of war on which they are embarking.”

To understand the situation into which the United States was entering was one clear demand on the JCS Chairman and the CENTCOM commander.

But Generals Myers and Franks, and the other most senior four-star officers involved, had another obligation: to be forthright in advising their civilian leaders.

The Secretary of Defense was Donald Rumsfeld. A strong, activist, even brutal, manager with firm convictions, he came into his position determined to take full charge of the Department of Defense.

He saw that Goldwater-Nichols had made the Secretary of Defense, under the President, the direct commander of the combatant unified and specified commands, and he began to wield that authority as no Secretary of Defense had done before.

Eighteen days after the announcement that Vice-Chairman Myers would replace General Hugh Shelton as Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, 9/11 occurred and the United States was at war.

Mr. Rumsfeld's immediate priority was to deal with Afghanistan. On October 7, U.S. bombers began hitting Taliban sites and soon the Northern Alliance forces accompanied by our special operations forces began to move, with precision air support. Reinforcing Marine and Army units had by end-December caused the Taliban to withdraw from Kandahar and Bin Laden's forces to retreat into mountains in eastern Afghanistan. Afghan delegates meeting in Bonn had chosen Hamid Karzai to head an interim government.

And Secretary Rumsfeld had already told General Franks to get back to him with a plan for Iraq.

Cueing on the success in Afghanistan, Mr. Rumsfeld wanted a plan for Iraq that -- taking full advantage of technology, and employing surprise, firepower and speed of maneuver -- would quickly defeat the Iraqi forces, weakened since 1991, and bring down Saddam Hussein. He was determined to keep the land forces small with lean logistics. No larger than needed to defeat the Iraqis and topple the regime, they could be quickly reduced.

In general agreement, General Franks saw the Secretary of Defense as his next higher commander. Dealing directly with him and with the JCS Chairman and Joint Staff, he essentially ignored the Service chiefs. In iteration after iteration the two principals pro-

duced such a plan. But its detail went only as far as that -- defeat the Iraqis and topple the regime.

CENTCOM did little post-hostilities planning; Mr. Rumsfeld's key principals had told General Franks to “leave Phase IV (the post-Hussein-defeat phase) to us.” Mr. Rumsfeld himself waved off help offered by the State Department.

When Service unification took place in 1947 the United States Army had a long-standing capability and institutional memory for postwar governance of a defeated enemy. Recently demonstrated in Germany and Japan, that tradition was in 2002 a distant memory.

So when National Security Council principals and staffers grappled with issues of Iraq's postwar governance and reconstruction, it was no longer obvious that such an endeavor would surely entail a comprehensive theater post-hostilities plan for the defeated Iraq. Quite the opposite, a long occupation with a heavy American footprint was not visualized; the United Nations would be engaged, other coalition members would participate, and Iraqis themselves would quickly take over.

Real post-hostilities planning did not begin until Mr. Rumsfeld two months before the invasion named retired Army lieutenant general Jay Garner to take charge of an Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance. Garner would work, not for the Commander CENTCOM but for the Secretary of Defense. This divided in-theater command would be an invitation to failure.

By then the Joint Chiefs of Staff and General Franks had had two opportunities to understand the situation.

In mid-November 2002 seventy national security experts and Mideast scholars met for two days at the National Defense University to discuss Iraq after Saddam. Their workshop report said that the “primary post-intervention focus of U.S. military operations must be on establishing and maintaining a secure environment” and that absent a realistic and comprehensive civil-military plan the outcome would be short-term success but long-term failure -- “and the resulting chaos and crises that would attend such a failure.”

And, in December 2002, a joint and interagency days-long workshop here at the Army War College considered the same matter. From its report: “In recent decades, U.S. civilian and military leadership have shied away from nation-building. However... [i]f this nation and its coalition partners decide to undertake the mission to remove Saddam Hussein, they will also have to be prepared to dedicate considerable time, manpower, and money to the effort to reconstruct Iraq after the fighting is over. Otherwise, the success of military operations will be ephemeral, and the problems they were designed to eliminate could return or be replaced by new and more virulent difficulties...”

“Iraq presents far from ideal conditions for achieving strategic goals. Saddam Hussein is the culmination of a violent political culture that is rooted in a tortured history.

"Ethnic, tribal, and religious schisms could produce civil war or fracture the state after Saddam is deposed. The Iraqi Army may be useful as a symbol of national unity, but it will take major reeducation and reorganization to operate in a more democratic state.”

The report said: “The U.S. Army has been organized and trained primarily to fight and win the nation's major wars. Nonetheless, the Service must prepare for victory in peace as well.”

Neither of these two efforts seems to have influenced the Joint Chiefs of Staff or Central Command as they planned for Iraq.

General Garner and his staff deployed to Kuwait just days before D-Day, March 20, 2003. As operations began, the troops were not told what to do when the Iraqi Army was defeated. Post-hostilities operational concepts were not developed and made known. Plans for constituting key ministries of a post-Hussein Iraqi national government and for putting in place provincial governments were unformed. Provisions ensuring that there would be an Iraqi army and police force did not exist. Psyops plans and capabilities were rudimentary at best.

And so we went to war. With Turkey unwilling to accept U.S. forces for a thrust from the north, coalition land forces attacked from Kuwait; air bombardment began. American troops were at the outskirts of Baghdad within two weeks. A week later the Iraqi armed forces and government had collapsed; Saddam's statue was pulled down April 9.

The predicted chaos ensued. As national police melted away, law and order ceased to exist. By April 12 looting had become serious in the major cities. In Baghdad, most government and public buildings, and Iraq's National Museum and major hospitals, were plundered; virtually nothing of value remained. Violence broke out throughout the country. Sunnis and Shias clashed, and scattered attacks began on coalition forces.

As coalition forces redeployed, Anbar Province in western Iraq, the heartland of Sunni-ism and Baathist support, was only sparsely covered by American troops. Secretary Rumsfeld questioned the need for the 1st Cavalry Division and did not call it forward. At first visualized as attacking from Turkey, the 4th Infantry Division arrived through Kuwait only in mid-April. Already inadequate, the full suite of planned troops was not on hand when Jay Garner and his team finally moved to Baghdad April 18.

On April 24, Secretary Rumsfeld informed General Garner that former diplomat L. Paul Bremer would come to Iraq as presidential envoy. Arriving in Baghdad May 12, Bremer

created the Coalition Provisional Authority, and on May 16 he issued Regulation Number 1, stating that "The CPA shall exercise powers of government temporarily."

Bremer would direct "all U.S. Government programs and activities in Iraq, except those under... the Commander, U.S. Central Command." The divided on-scene authority for security and reconstruction in Iraq that had existed since the invasion began was thus set in concrete. With poor coordination between the two authorities, unity of effort suffered.

On May 16 Mr. Bremer issued Order 1, removing all Baath party members from office. Surprising the U.S. military chain of command, on May 23 he issued Order 2, dissolving the Iraqi army. An uncoordinated insurgency had already begun; with disaffected former Iraqi soldiers and officials now joining, it metastasized under increasingly competent direction. Phase IV was off to a very bad start, and you all know the rest of the story.

Think about this, you students and faculty members of the Army War College:

Given that the President judged that the United States might go to war in Iraq and that in time he took it to war, what responsibility and accountability does the United States professional military establishment, and specifically its four-star Army officers in key positions at the time, bear for this very bad start?

When one considers the fundamental responsibility of the military professional, especially one of very senior rank, the failure of the key military four-stars, first, to appreciate the inadequacies in post-hostilities planning and, second, to stand their ground over divided command in immediate post-conflict Iraq is profoundly troubling.

It was their responsibility to have understood both their duty and the lessons of history and of war and to have withstood the pressure to commit, or permit, grave lapses in preparation for the war's second phase.

For General Franks the moment of truth should have come no later than January 2003 when the Secretary placed Jay Garner in charge of postwar Iraq. General Franks should have immediately recognized that this would result in a divided command for the post-hostilities phase, that that phase was crucial for successful mission accomplishment of his command, and that it was time for him to take a stand.

At that moment he could have met with Mr. Rumsfeld to tell him that he intended to make Army general John Abizaid, his newly arrived Arabic-speaking deputy commander, responsible for Phase IV, which would begin seamlessly with the defeat of Hussein's army. As Franks' deputy, Abizaid would take over Garner's operation and become the temporary military governor of Iraq.

Learning from post-WWII experience in Germany and Japan, General Franks could have told the Secretary that General Abizaid would plan a coordinated military/civilian post-

hostilities operation, based on the solution applied by General Creighton Abrams that was successful -- but too late -- in the Vietnam War.

In any case, General Franks should in the interest of unity of command have insisted that the Secretary assign him the post-hostilities mission. Coordinated civil-military planning could have produced a seamless transition, in-pocket plans for troop security of key ministries and facilities, the immediate rebuilding of an Iraqi army and police, restoration of essential services, and a strong psyops message directed at reassuring the Iraqi people -- along with a continued rooting out of the Saddam loyalists.

Compared to what did transpire, there surely would have been a more favorable outcome in the early months of the war, and Iraq would be in better shape today.

If the Secretary had said 'No,' General Franks should have asked to be relieved of command.

So here are the conclusions of my one-man AAR...

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff failed in that he did not comprehend the nature of the war that the United States was about to enter and the grave deficiencies in the Secretary of Defense's guidance for its post-hostilities phase, or, if he understood all that, in that he did not forcefully make known his objections to the Secretary of Defense and if necessary to the President.

The Commander CENTCOM failed in the same way, and in that he did not offer an alternate plan that met the situation within resources reasonably available.

The other members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff failed in that they either did not comprehend the nature of the war and the deficiencies in guidance, or understanding them did not forcefully make known their objections.

What do you think of my case?

If you agree that the four-stars failed, why do you think that was? And what should be done to see that it does not happen again?

* * * * *

Notes for the discussion period

A viewpoint: The failure was of the National Security Council, which for the President should have coordinated the overall Iraq effort. (But the law says that the JCS Chairman is the principal military advisor to the NSC, and that all JCS members are NSC advisors. We are talking here of their professional responsibility.)

Driving the post-regime-change planning was the fixation of Cheney, Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, and Feith, based in large part what was being told them by Chalabi and other expatriate Iraqis, that post-liberation Iraq would largely take care of itself and that US troops could be quickly withdrawn. (A rule: commanders must take into account the possibility that favorable assumptions may not materialize and must plan accordingly to insure success.)

As the JCS and Franks worked the problem, the Service chiefs were cut out. (But Goldwater-Nichols gives JCS members other than the Chairman direct access to the President.)

This was above all an Army matter. The Navy-oriented Secretary Rumsfeld was no great fan of the Army to begin with. Crusader... Shinseki... (Army leaders should have known better and should have stood their ground.)

The overbearing and strong-minded Rumsfeld micromanaged troop flow; he took over Phase IV and made the flawed decision to give that to Garner, thus splitting command. (Officers must stand their ground. David Fraser's Alanbrooke tells how the WWII CIGS to Churchill stood up to a demanding civilian chief.)

General Franks and other senior military leadership came up as Vietnam lessons were forgotten and Cold War attention returned to defeating a Soviet-style enemy. (What are the lessons here for our schools systems and for officer development of insight?)

Among other qualities, intellectual curiosity and wisdom in senior officers are much to be desired; they were lacking here. (How can these qualities be recognized in senior officers' selection processes?)

Tests on standing one's ground come early, and they continue as an officer grows in rank. (How can this attribute be fostered in the officer corps? Under what circumstances should a senior military officer ask to be relieved?)

Beginning in May 2003, momentum and the fruits of victory were lost. Would a plan that placed Phase IV under CENTCOM and that used all US forces reasonably available (employed along the lines of how the 101st Abn Div operated around Mosul) along with

a full fledged psyops effort aimed at all Iraqis, have produced a satisfactory outcome in Iraq?

Answer: A coherent, adjust-as-it-goes, blunder-free effort might well have produced by end-2004 the promise of a reasonably successful eventual result in Iraq

The big decisions (e.g., disestablishing the military, deBa'athification, governance) needed to be sorted out and agreed on. Also needed were: a true concept for the way ahead in all the "lines of operation," organizations lined up to pursue them and resourced accordingly, etc.... Iraq is so complex that it could never have been easy -- though we clearly could have done a vastly, vastly better job of anticipating, planning, organizing, deciding, and resourcing.