

Iraq War Used To Push Military Transformation?

by Carl Osgood

An Oct. 2 hearing of the House Armed Services Committee provided evidence that, so far, the only lessons from the Iraq war that the Pentagon will discuss openly, are those that deal with the ongoing utopian “transformation” of the U.S. military. Testifying was Adm. Ed Giambastiani, commander of U.S. Joint Forces Command, which was tasked by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld with conducting the operational level “lessons learned” study. Giambastiani told the committee that his team’s focus was the “joint level of warfighting.” That is, the level of then-Central Command chief Gen. Tommy Franks’ headquarters and its interaction with component command headquarters and their conduct of the military operation that was carried out from March 20 to May 1.

Left out of the parameters established by Rumsfeld, was any consideration of the strategic implications of the Iraq war, including the implications of the pre-emptive war policy of the Bush Administration. Also left outside was the transition to the disastrous post-invasion phase of the operation, in which three to six American soldiers are being killed per week, even six months after President Bush declared the end of major combat operations. This kind of evaluation is tantamount to declaring that the 1939 Nazi invasion of Poland was a successful operation, without considering the strategic implications of the decision to invade.

So, the focus of Giambastiani and his team, led by Brig. Gen. Robert Cone, was on the implications of transformation on military operations. Giambastiani described what he called “a new joint way of war,” which leverages “on four key dimensions of the modern battle space: knowledge, speed, precision and lethality.” He gave, as an example, the tight integration of special operations forces with the conventional forces. “The net result,” he said, “is that we not only had precision munitions launched from the air and ground, but also precision decisions to direct our smart weapons by the combination of both conventional forces and special forces, working jointly with all our armed forces.”

Giambastiani made clear that the conclusions and recommendations of the JFCOM study will be fed into the process of forming the Fiscal 2005 defense budget, as they have briefed dozens of top officials at the Pentagon, including those who write the annual defense planning guidance, which provides the framework for formulating the defense budget, as well as the regional combatant commanders. He indicated that while the services agree with a lot of the “lessons learned” findings,

“they don’t agree with what potentially would be some of our recommendations.” To overcome that potential resistance, Giambastiani reported that he has been working with Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Peter Pace, on “transformation change packages,” a set of recommendations which are then tracked through the system “so that they get embedded in policy changes, guidance changes, planning, programming and budgeting.”

Criticisms came only in the two areas of fratricide prevention (friendly fire incidents) and reserve mobilization and deployment. On the reserves, Giambastiani told the committee that “We had some difficulty with some of our units, because we had to alert them at such a late time. . . . We had to use gear from another unit to train that particular unit, and then send them forward.”

The ever-parochial members of Congress zeroed in on both issues—more so on the reserves. But Rep. Ike Skelton (D-Mo.) brought the room to total silence, when he demanded to know what advice Giambastiani was giving Central Command on how to win the guerrilla war now ongoing in Iraq. “I don’t tell them what to do to win the guerrilla war,” Giambastiani replied.

The Real ‘Lessons Learned’ Report

Meanwhile, the “lessons learned” report that everyone wants to get their hands on has been unattainable, thus far, except for a leak in the *Washington Times* on Sept. 3. According to the *Times*, that classified report, dubbed “Operation Iraqi Freedom: Strategic Lessons Learned,” and prepared for the Joint Chiefs of Staff by the Joint Staff, is highly critical of the planning process leading to the war, especially the planning for the post-invasion phase, called Phase IV. “Late formation of DoD [Phase IV] organizations limited time available for the development of detailed plans and pre-deployment coordination,” the report allegedly says. “Command relationships (and communications requirements) and responsibilities were not clearly defined for DoD organizations until shortly before [Operation Iraqi Freedom] commenced.”

Needless to say, Democrats in the Congress have been hot to get that report, but have been rebuffed at every turn. A group of Democrats, led by Rep. Robert Wexler (D-Fla.) sponsored a resolution of inquiry demanding that the Pentagon make available to the Congress the Joint Staff report, as well as documentation on the planning for Iraq reconstruction. But the resolution was defeated in committee, and will not go to the House floor unless House Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.) decides to let it. The *Washington Times* then reported, on Oct. 3, that the Pentagon initially replied to the Sept. 3 story, that the report “reflected the military’s tradition of being “brutally honest” so mistakes are not repeated in future operations. But since then, the spin has apparently changed to cast doubt on the accuracy of the leak. The *Times* has now been told, “It’s only a draft.”