

Unsolicited Advice: A Response to Rumsfeld's October 16th Memo

By Col. Daniel Smith, USA (Ret.) | November 2003

(Editor's Note: In a memo dated October 16, 2003 distributed to his senior staff, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld raised a number of questions with respect to military transformation inspired in part by the conduct of the war on terror and the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq. Much media commentary focused upon the contrast between Rumsfeld's positive public pronouncements on military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq and his characterization of a victory in those countries as likely but only as a result of a "long, hard slog." Receiving less focus were his questions with respect to broader U.S. plans for military transformation in the context of the war on terror. FPIF analyst Dan Smith answers these questions, answers that Rumsfeld is unlikely to receive from his subordinates.)

TO: Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld
CC: Gen. Dick Myers, Paul Wolfowitz, Gen. Pete Pace, Doug Feith
FROM: Colonel Daniel Smith, USA (Ret.)
Senior Fellow on Military Affairs
Friends Committee on National Legislation
SUBJECT: Your October 16, 2003 Memo Re: Global War on Terrorism

A copy of subject Memo came to my attention even though I am not on the "To" or "CC" list. Obviously, you or a senior member of your staff anticipated that I would be able to provide a thoughtful, practical reply based on independent, unbiased research. My responses follow each of your queries.

Have we fashioned the right mix of rewards, amnesty, protection, and confidence in the U.S.?

No. Rewards are insufficient to accomplish one of the most basic requirements of post-conflict reconstruction: disarming the various factions and even individuals. The latter may be more significant in Iraq than in countries ravaged by civil war where large numbers of fighters are arrayed against each other in some form of military or paramilitary organization. When the leaders of the contending groups agree to end armed conflict, one of the goals is to disarm the fighters as part of the general demobilizing and reintegrating effort. But in Iraq, the conditions for demobilizing factions do not pertain.

This connects to three other problems: a lack of personal security for Iraqis, both private citizens and high-profile individuals assisting the CPA (although the latter, particularly members of the Governing

Council and state ministers, do have security details); the large numbers of weapons held by former Iraqi soldiers who simply melted away to their homes as the coalition armies advanced toward Baghdad; and the easy availability of weapons and ammunition in the large numbers of munitions dumps that are still not under coalition guard.

While the latter deficiency is slowly being remedied through contracts for securing and destroying excess and old munitions, until better and visible control is established, confidence in the U.S. will remain low. Incidents such as the October 26th rocket attack on the Al Rashid hotel, the multiple car bombings on October 27th, the downing of the Chinook helicopter November 2nd, and even the frequency of daily attacks against western military forces, civilian contractors, UN, ICRC, and other relief workers, feeds this lack of confidence.



What would help restore confidence that the U.S. means what it says about returning sovereignty quickly to Iraq—and at the same time put an “Iraqi face” on security—would be to recall Iraqi soldiers and officers up to and including lieutenant-colonel rank and reconstitute their old units through battalion level. Carefully vetted more senior officers could form an Iraqi Army Headquarters reporting to an Iraqi civilian authority operating under the Governing Council. A parallel procedure should be used to recall police units to operate under councils of elders and other local leaders.

The inescapable reality is that more professionally trained and culturally sensitive security people are needed quickly if the U.S. has any hope of retaining the neutrality of, let alone improved cooperation from, the general Iraqi population. Troops and police advisers from European countries may have the training, while those from Islamic nations would be more culturally attuned. But governments are not offering significant help to relieve U.S. forces.

Does DoD need to think through new ways to organize, train, equip, and focus to deal with the global war on terror?

Definitely. The first step is to declare the end of the global war on terror. Next, the Pentagon should shift from lead to supporting agency, with State becoming the new lead. Justice would assume a more prominent supporting role in keeping with the emphasis that terrorist incidents are criminal acts.

Al Qaeda has been dealt a blow and the regime that was most visible in its support of global terror, the Afghan Taliban, has been replaced. This is not to say that those Taliban and al Qaeda loyalists still at-large pose no residual threat, either to Afghanistan or, through other, loosely affiliated groups, to other governments. But these groups seem less interested in pressing a global jihad than in achieving specific goals within the countries in which they are operating. (This is true even in Iraq, where the U.S. presence acts as a magnet for jihadists.) They of course will always accept money, equipment, and training from any source, al Qaeda or not.

At least part of the current U.S. dilemma stems from an inability to see simultaneously the two levels of terror in the 21st century. The administration’s emphasis on “global war” masks the reality that all terrorist acts are local. This suggests that the effort to stop or at least control acts of violence directed against non-combatants should remain at the local—or no more than a regional—context. Were this done, DoD would be able to re-form its plans and organization to support the police and justice systems when these civilian-oriented agencies determine they do not have the resources to track, apprehend, or where necessary, fight and defeat those committing acts of terror. Such cases generally will occur in failed or failing states.

This is a key point, for it goes right to the central questions of why military forces are needed and how they should be employed to achieve the stated goals.

In the ideal world, disputes and misunderstandings would be resolved without recourse to the threat of or actual use of armed conflict. In the obvious absence of this ideal, military organizations exist to provide the same sense of security from external attack that police forces provide on the national and local levels. This deterrent/defensive orientation is reinforced by various international conventions that seek to regulate and minimize war’s effects. More significantly, the UN has as its primary mission “to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war,” a continuing endeavor that involves first and foremost employing non-military measures.

The UN Charter does acknowledge that some threats to international peace and security will not be remedied by non-violent interventions. This reality points to the question of how military force should be used. The UN Charter calls for Member States “to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security” so as “to ensure, by the acceptance of principles and the institution of methods, that armed force shall not be used, save in the common interest” as this is determined by the UN Security Council. Thus, in addition to their deterrent role, which contributes to avoiding the scourge of war, armed forces acting under UN mandates engage in peacekeeping, peace monitoring, and peace making, roles that

enhance international security through cooperative actions in support of international law.

Currently in the U.S. military, there is a mismatch between the demands inherent in these roles and resources and capabilities to implement these roles. The Pentagon—and the entire U.S. government—seems trapped organizationally and conceptually in what might be termed the “cold war time warp.” Tanks and armored troop carriers, the mainstays of classic warfare, send all the wrong signals to populations whose main security concerns are looting, murders, kidnappings, robberies, and car bombs.

Ironically, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have slowed efforts to transform the U.S. military into a lighter, more agile, and flexible force that could effectively participate in UN peace operations, including stabilization of failed states. Changes that have been made include:

- the Army’s shift to the Stryker Brigade Combat Team, a new combat grouping that relies on speed and agility to perform its mission;

- the Air Force plan to organize wings that mix various aircraft types (as well as Reserve and active duty component personnel), giving combatant commanders the full range of capabilities in one well-trained operational package; and

- the Navy’s new “sea base” proposal and existing cooperative engagement capability (CEC) system are prototypes for what could be a shared joint command and total battlespace awareness system.

The one area that ultimately has to remain globally centralized is intelligence collection, analysis, and dissemination, with the latter being tailored for and directed to commanders at all levels from unified combatant commanders to platoon level. This structure must truly be “all source” both in terms of collection methods and sources, including open source information. Moreover, given the power inherent in organizations charged with interpreting and disseminating information on which national policy is based, continuous review of intelligence activities and the rationale supporting intelligence community conclusions is required.

Are the changes we have and are making too modest and incremental? My impression is that we have not yet made truly bold moves, although we have made many sensible, logical moves in the right direction, but are they enough?

In two words, “Yes” and “No.”

Changes to date have been too slow in reacting to the post-1991 and then post-September 11th, 2001 security environments. This is not just a DoD problem, where it is particularly evident in the training and equipping of ground forces. Primarily, needed changes in overall U.S. national security (foreign and defense) policy have been too slow, resulting, since 1991, in a general failure to organize international backing to slow, stop, and eliminate the root causes for continued violence in the developing world that then generates unilateral or multilateral interventions. In short, the U.S. has not placed enough weight behind the fundamental concept of war prevention—unless one believes (illogically) that making war prevents wars.

The demise of the state in the internecine warfare that engulfed the republics of the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s was a harbinger of the challenges that were emerging around the world in the post-cold war era. But the assaults by various factions on human security, human rights, and civil liberties that drew condemnation and eventually military intervention in Southeast Europe were not connected (or not publicly connected) to the same plight of millions on other continents. Only when a particularly significant atrocity such as the mass killing of Tutsis and moderate Hutus in Rwanda became known was there international intervention—and by then the intervention (including military assets) invariably would be directed toward the need for immediate humanitarian relief.

Even in the current general context of peaceful competing nation-states, the vast majority of countries find it prudent to retain national military establishments. And while the primary purpose of regular military units remains “to kill people and destroy things,” an emerging, equally important requirement in the post-cold war and post-September 11th, 2001

environments is the ability to act quickly, under the aegis of the UN (or a regional security organization and, in extremis, unilaterally until the UN Security Council acts) to preclude or halt war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity. A further emerging need is for a stand-alone, international civilian police formation, modeled on the Italian *carabinieri* that can be dispatched under UN auspices to help provide physical security for a threatened population and to contribute to reconstituting local police and other traditional security structures.

A bold move by DoD would be the conversion of one or two current active duty ground divisions into a “heavy” *carabinieri* force to be used in situations such as Iraq today where heavy armored divisions lack the proper equipment and psychological orientation for interacting with and gaining the trust of key segments of the Iraqi population. These U.S. forces are, to borrow a phrase, “fit to kill,” but for the most part this is not the orientation that will be effective in either Afghanistan or Iraq. The U.S. should also press other countries to create similar forces to allow for true multinational operations under the UN.

Creation of these self-sustaining units is not the only possible move, but it would provide the president with an option to employ regular military formations in those situations where the display of raw military power would send the wrong message to a population that needs the reassurance of physical security and eventual justice.

Today, we lack metrics to know if we are winning or losing the global war on terror. Are we capturing, killing, or deterring and dissuading more terrorists every day than the madrassas and the radical clerics are recruiting, training, and deploying against us?

Focusing on the madrassas and other institutions that promote narrowly focused viewpoints, whether directed against the U.S., the West, their own government, or international organizations, misses the crux of the problem. (Were this a problem in auto mechanics, the solution to eliminating harmful emissions will not be found at the output end—the tailpipe—but at the input—the engine combustion

chamber.) It misses because the real problem is the repression of human and civil rights and liberties, often in the name of “security,” in countries whose regimes have been supported or condoned by the U.S. and other western nations.

The question does pertain to the problem only to the extent that any narrowly focused system of instruction invariably demands that its interpretation of life be accepted unequivocally. As a result, those who hold that valid alternative systems and explanations exist are easily demonized and become marked for extermination.

Changing this system per se is not within the capability of DoD. Killing or capturing those who commit terrorist acts cannot be used as a metric of success, as demonstrated by the “promotion” of mid-level al Qaeda operatives when senior persons are caught or killed. As the Pentagon learned in Vietnam, body counts are essentially meaningless when the number comprising the enemy force cannot be ascertained.

What is within DoD’s purview is ensuring that statements or actions by Pentagon civilians, uniformed persons, or individuals working under contract to the Pentagon avoid denigrating other cultures and belief systems and respect the customs and traditions of indigenous peoples with whom there is contact. Examples of unhelpful incidents include the president’s July 3rd, 2003 “Bring them on” challenge, remarks by LTG Boykin, and the detention of three elderly Iraqi women in an apparent attempt to force the surrender of one of the women’s son suspected of attacking U.S. forces in Iraq.

In Iraq itself, two provisional metrics might be the level and trend in the number of terror incidents and the geographic spread (or contraction) of the attacks. On a wider, regional scale, the number and extent of attacks that occur or that are thwarted could also be a rough metric. Over the mid-term, valid metrics of success include: tax collections flowing to the central government, a steep and sustained drop in assassinations of mayors and Iraqi police, and the number and geographic spread of government-paid teachers.

Does the U.S. need to fashion a broad, integrated plan to stop the next generation of terrorists? The U.S. is putting relatively little effort into a long-range plan, but we are putting a great deal of effort into trying to stop terrorists. The cost-benefit ratio is against us! Our cost is billions against the terrorists' costs of millions.

See first paragraph in above answer. An integrated U.S. plan would include a large-scale foreign education effort, including re-opening U.S. cultural centers throughout the world and using U.S. government-funded foreign broadcast and other information media to discuss and explain the foundational principles underlying the U.S. system of governance. Other, complementary programs might include increased opportunities for foreign students to study in the U.S. and changes in U.S. trade policies and foreign aid (including debt cancellation) that would help create conditions for improving the living conditions in developing countries.

Not to be overlooked is the reciprocal necessity to educate U.S. officials and ordinary citizens about non-Western cultures. This suggests that any U.S. effort would be more effective were it part of a broader, multilateral, multicultural strategy to break down barriers between peoples, which those who practice terror try to exploit.

The rationale for this admittedly long-range plan is to undercut the narrow and frequently complete misunderstanding (or purposeful misinterpretation) of the principles of democracy—its rights, privileges, and responsibilities. The objective should not be to convince but to sow the seeds of inquisitiveness and a desire to learn more about what, in a number of countries, is an alternative to current conditions. This would be a less costly alternative in blood and treasure to trying to prevent terrorist attacks through military action or to the need to rebuild societies destroyed by warfare. It would also serve to close the gap between the rhetoric of U.S. policy “intentions” and the programs and activities that are actually implemented (e.g., rhetoric of multilateralism versus unilateral action).

Do we need a new organization?

No, at least not a new superstructure. Recombining existing organizations to produce truly joint forces that can react to imminent threats in support of UN principles and creation of a stand-alone *carabinieri* police contingent may be warranted. But as indicated previously, what would be most useful is a large increase in “soft power” capabilities the U.S. could bring to bear.

How do we stop those who are financing the radical madrassa schools?

This is a development, not a “security,” question. DoD's contribution to this effort, which properly belongs to the State Department and the Treasury, would be information gleaned through communications intercepts and exploitation of documents and computer files that come into DoD's possession.

Other than information, DoD's role would seem to be to avoid giving new cause for individuals to provide funds in reaction to something said or done by Pentagon representatives.

Is our current situation such that “the harder we work, the behinder we get”?

In a sense, Yes. The insistence on dominating the security, political, and economic reconstruction of Iraq leads to unintentional cultural gaffes and operational mistakes that inhibit the development of trust between U.S. personnel and the indigenous population. A more prominent role for the State Department among U.S. agencies and for the UN among international and intergovernmental agencies would relieve the pressure on DoD to implement programs with which it has little modern practical experience. Granted, such a reorientation would entail increased coordination, but it would free DoD to concentrate on what it does best—developing better security through training indigenous forces and, where necessary, taking direct action against those committing terrorist acts. Such a shift would also lead to greater participation by Iraqis in overall decisionmaking.

It is pretty clear that the coalition can win in Afghanistan and Iraq in one way or another, but it will be a long, hard slog.

Agreed. The question is: will the U.S. prevail “badly”? That is, will the long-term end state of the Afghan and Iraqi people be better than it was in the 1990s before the Taliban and Saddam Hussein regimes were ousted? Unfortunately, the early results are mixed, particularly given the low level of international financial support evinced at recent donor conferences (\$4.5 billion for Afghanistan and \$13 billion for Iraq).

Perhaps a more important question is: Will the U.S. and the world be safer as a result of these two (and potentially other) interventions? History will be the judge, but at the moment, the weight of criticism suggests that these two interventions have increased U.S. insecurity, endangered global instability, and increased terrorist recruitment.

Does CIA need a new finding?

Not being privy to classified information about the content of current findings and Executive Orders, this is difficult to answer. However, from what has been reported by the media in terms of the reaction to September 11th, 2001 (e.g., the USA PATRIOT Act), the reported activities of CIA operatives in Afghanistan and CIA presence in Iraq, and information contained in government documents such as the unclassified National Intelligence Estimate of October 2002, it would appear the CIA has sufficient leeway to carry out its mandate. In fact, some revisiting of legislative changes may be in order, particularly if abuses are discovered in the exercise of new authorities.

Should we create a private foundation to entice radical madrassas to a more moderate course?

No. This idea suggests—and would be seen as confirmation of—an insensitive mirror-imaging of U.S. consumerism and lust for material riches. While a few madrasa majority must be regarded as principled believers in what they preach and teach. Attempts to

bribe them would more likely inflame already existing passions.

A better course is making available through alternative means information about democracy, human rights, and civil liberties.

What else should we be considering?

Worldwide, the Pentagon should proceed with plans to restructure forces and re-base units. Specifically, Germany-based ground units should be brought back to the U.S. A six-month schedule of unit rotation for training with European allies should be inaugurated, with equal time given to warfighting and peacekeeping (Chapter VI and Charter VII) operations. Re-basing USAF combat wings should also be considered. Naval deployments (carrier battle group and amphibious ready group) should be made on the basis of anticipated or existing conditions where a U.S. presence would contribute to reducing tensions or for scheduled training with allied navies rather than by rote schedule.

Plans for reconfiguring U.S. ground forces in East Asia should be further developed. As diplomatic progress is made in resolving the issue of North Korean nuclear weapons, plans for re-positioning U.S. forces in Korea (including eventual withdrawal) and then in Japan can be implemented.

To head off the rise of new anti-U.S. sentiment (or further inflaming existing sentiment), the Pentagon should curtail economic and military aid to countries with repressive regimes or countries in which the military effectively controls the powers of the state.

Transfers of arms, spare parts, and ammunition to repressive regimes should be stopped. DoD should throw its weight behind an Arms Trade Treaty that would bind all countries from supplying such regimes with arms and armaments. These measures, addressing the “supply-side” of the arms trade, would not solve the problem of spending scarce resources on weapons, but would make acquiring weapons more difficult.

DoD could continue training, as part of a multilateral, UN sanctioned program, select units controlled by regional security organizations to perform peace-

keeping missions when authorized by the Security Council. Africa presents a viable prototype for this activity.

Finally, in addition to forgiving loans for non-military needs in developing countries, the U.S. should strike a bargain with developing countries that owe money to the U.S. for past purchases of military equipment: the debt will be apportioned over a number of years, with a percentage of the debt and interest forgiven each year, on condition that the sums forgiven are applied to basic human needs and services benefiting the people of the debtor nation—e.g., health clinics, schools, fresh water developments, improved sanitation, etc.

(Dan Smith is a military affairs analyst for Foreign Policy In Focus (online at www.fpif.org) is a retired U.S. army colonel and Senior Fellow on Military Affairs at the Friends Committee on National Legislation.)

Copy of the October 16th memo

<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/policy/dod/rumsfeld-d20031016sdmemo.htm>

Published by Foreign Policy In Focus (FPIF), a joint project of the Interhemispheric Resource Center (IRC, online at www.irc-online.org) and the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS, online at www.ips-dc.org). ©2003. All rights reserved.

Foreign Policy In Focus

“A Think Tank Without Walls”

Established in 1996, Foreign Policy In Focus is a network of policy analysts, advocates, and activists committed to “making the United States a more responsible global leader and global partner.” For more information, visit www.fpip.org.

Recommended citation:

Col. Daniel Smith (Ret.), “Unsolicited Advice: A Response to Rumsfeld’s October 16th Memo,” (Silver City, NM & Washington, DC: Foreign Policy In Focus, November 2003).

Web location:

<http://www.fpip.org/papers/rumsfeldqa2003.html>

Production Information:

Writer: Col. Daniel Smith (Ret.)

Editor: John Gershman, IRC

Layout: Tonya Cannariato, IRC

p. 8

www.fpip.org

A Think Tank Without Walls

