

A needed military commandment: Thou shalt not be sitting ducks

Every day our senses are rattled by news of more American servicemen, British soldiers and innocent Iraqis being murdered by terrorists from all over the world now converging on Iraq with a vengeance. The terrorists have a specific location and focus now, where they can kill Americans and those who cooperate with the heroic efforts to bring some kind of peace and order to that country.

In the words of James Rubin, a former State Department spokesman, the situation in Iraq is "chaos," and today we have concluded the worst week of terrorist acts yet in both Afghanistan and Iraq. As I write, we are picking up the pieces of the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad, which was bombed this morning. This follows the sabotaging of Baghdad's water and electrical supply, the bombing of the Jordanian embassy and blowing up of yet another oil well.

It's clear that whatever faulty plan there was for post-war nation-building is not working. The terrorists, like a disturbed hornet's nest, are more angry, violent and active than ever. Rubin says our plan to rebuild with Iraqi support has failed, that everything still falls on the shoulders of our military.

As we daily sacrifice human lives for this ill-fated plan, billions of American dollars are siphoned out of our country, leaving us with a weakened economy and our own infrastructure increasingly vulnerable to terrorist attacks. If terrorists had nothing to do with the "largest black-out in American history" this last week, it surely must have given them a good idea. Apparently this huge electrical grid system has shown signs of weakness for years and nothing has been done because of lack of state and federal funds. As the richest country in the world, we are allowing our obsession with the Middle East to ruin our own economy and weaken our defenses here. It's an outrage.

There have been several articles written about this country's role in the world, one

long treatise in Atlantic Magazine and a short essay in Time Magazine. Both authors believe that because we are the leader of the "free" world, we have a responsibility to bring some order to the rest of the world. There was so much good stuff in the Atlantic Magazine article it is hard to review, but it is called, "Supremacy by Stealth, Ten rules for managing the world." The sentence that stood out to me is the suggestion that our military adopt a new commandment, "Thou shalt not be sitting ducks." Why would we house a huge concentration of our soldiers in one encampment or building, for example, as we did in Beirut, Lebanon in the 1980's? The author, Robert Kaplan, also says the day is over when we can barge into a country with armies, tanks and guns blazing and accomplish anything.

Charles Krauthammer of Time Magazine says that without anyone paying attention, the Pentagon is dismantling huge military bases and operations from locations that are meaningless in today's world and countries where we are not wanted. "Why, after all, are we in Germany 60 years after the fall of the Nazi regime and more than a decade after the fall of the Soviet Union?" He says we are in a revolution of two parts, first, leaving places where we are not wanted, (old Europe) and being welcomed in places like Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania, "which have a living memory of tyranny and a deep understanding of American's role in winning their liberty."

The second part is "leaving places that mark the battle lines of a long dead war." Krauthammer says we are dealing with a nebulous core of terrorists who are mobile, nimble and undeterrable. "This requires a new strategy," he says, "small bases in new places, some simply forward staging areas with supplies awaiting the arrival of highly mobile troops in an emergency. Our response should not be a sitting-duck standing army but a quick and light air-sea reaction force." He calls this "empire-lite."

Kaplan's theory is that military career

men can be most effective working their way into a society and gaining the trust of local officials and leaders. He says that by the 1990's our Air Force had a presence of some sort on six of the world's continents. "Long before 9/11 the Special Forces were conducting thousands of operations a year in a total of nearly 170 countries with an average of nine "quiet professionals" (as the Army calls them) on each mission."

Kaplan says that mid-level, civil-affairs career officers can accomplish great things by their individual relationships in foreign countries and their resourcefulness at solving local problems. These can be non-commissioned master-sergeants and chief warrant officers to colonels and they regularly respond to requests for help by other countries without Pentagon direction or a war declared. Kaplan says we don't utilize our United States citizens with Middle East backgrounds and native language skills, which our soldiers and representatives sorely lack.

Kaplan says that for the military to promote Democracy, recognize that "Third world military men are more likely to listen to American officers who brief them about human rights as a tool of counterinsurgency than to civilians who talk about universal principles of justice." He suggests that instead of a big military force, we make more headway with unconventional warfare, aggressive intelligence operations and Special Forces training units, combined with a domineering foreign policy.

"So how are we to change the tide of destruction in Iraq? Kaplan concludes, "By sustaining ourselves first, we will be able to do the world the most good." Let's get out of Iraq, at least ostensibly, and watch sadly as they replace Saddam Hussein with someone more brutal than he!

Caroline Porter is a freelance writer from Galesburg who can be reached at cporter@galesburg.net. Other columns are online at www.thezephyr.com.

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