

Bushed Army

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The following article indirectly indicates that an attack on Iran followed by the use of nuclear weapons is imminent. The lunatic neo-cons like their historical Nazi counterpart will persist in their nihilistic pursuits till the bitter end.

Rather than face the reality that the Bush regime has been the most criminally incompetent in U.S. history, the neo-cons now grab at nuclear straws in the hope that the radioactive last resort will save them from the ignominy they deserve.

The most reviled government in the world is also the most inept. Perhaps a clear message from an ally -- the arrest and subsequent trial of an original member of the coalition of the willing, John Howard of Australia -- may inspire a similar response in America and the UK. The people of Australia may finally overcome the cringe that has haunted the nation since the needless slaughter at Gallipoli.

Arresting the prime minister John Howard for his part in an illegal invasion that resulted in a holocaust for the innocent civilian population of Iraq may have a sobering effect on people everywhere. Regardless of the garb, position or office, a criminal remains a criminal!

John Howard, Alexander Downer and Philip Ruddock are war criminals and no amount of spin or denial will change the historical fact. Their immediate arrest may serve to awaken civilised people everywhere and prevent a nuclear catastrophe. [Ed.]

Courting the soldier vote during the 2000 presidential campaign, the candidate made this simple promise: "Help is on the way." Throughout the 1990s, Republicans had regularly lambasted the Clinton administration for misusing America's military and for failing to show soldiers proper respect. Electing George W. Bush was supposed to fix that.

The electoral strategy paid off handsomely: the absentee votes of soldiers helped Bush carry Florida and claim the Oval Office. Yet rather than delivering help, the Bush administration has since subjected the Armed Forces of the United States to sustained abuse. The scandal at Walter Reed is not some isolated blemish on an otherwise admirable record. It is emblematic of the way that this administration has treated soldiers.

Granted, President Bush never passes up the chance to pose with the troops or express his warm regard for those who serve and sacrifice. But to judge by results rather than posturing, no commander in chief in American history has cared less about the overall health of America's Armed Forces.

President Bush will hand over to his successor an Army and Marine Corps that are badly depleted and verging on exhaustion. The real surge is not the one that involves sending more U.S. troops to Baghdad. It is the tidal wave of unsustainable demands that are now engulfing America's ground

forces.

Last year retired Gen. Colin Powell declared that the Army is “about broken.” A growing chorus of other senior officers, active and retired, has chimed in, endorsing Powell’s view. Unless the Bush administration finds ways to ease the strain, retired Gen. Barry McCaffrey recently told a Senate committee, “The Army will unravel.” Lt. Gen. Clyde A. Vaughn, chief of the Army National Guard, complains, “we have absolutely piecemealed our force to death.”

There is plenty of evidence to support these gloomy assessments. Only a third of the regular Army’s brigades qualify as combat-ready. In the reserve components, none meet that standard. When the last of the units reaches Baghdad as part of the president’s strategy of escalation, the U.S. will be left without a ready-to-deploy land force reserve.

The stress of repeated combat tours is sapping the Army’s lifeblood. Especially worrying is the accelerating exodus of experienced leaders. The service is currently short 3,000 commissioned officers. By next year, the number is projected to grow to 3,500. The Guard and reserves are in even worse shape. There the shortage amounts to 7,500 officers. Young West Pointers are bailing out of the Army at a rate not seen in three decades. In an effort to staunch the losses, that service has begun offering a \$20,000 bonus to newly promoted captains who agree to stay on for an additional three years. Meanwhile, as more and more officers want out, fewer and fewer want in: ROTC scholarships go unfilled for a lack of qualified applicants.

To sustain the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Pentagon has resorted to a variety of management techniques, all of which have the effect of increasing the strains on the force and watering down its quality. In April, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates ordered the standard combat tours of Army units extended from 12 months to 15. More time in the combat zone means less time to refit and retrain between tours and to reconnect with families.

As the Army depletes its inventory of equipment—some \$212 billion worth has been destroyed, damaged, or just plain worn out—the best of what’s left ends up in Iraq and Afghanistan. One consequence is that units preparing to deploy don’t have the wherewithal needed to train. As military analyst Andrew Krepinevich told the Senate Armed Services Committee, “The Army is forced to play a shell game with its equipment.” The problem is especially acute in National Guard and reserve units, some now being activated for second combat tours.

There’s also a second shell game. The Army is incrementally easing its recruiting standards, enlisting thousands of volunteers that the service would previously have classified as unfit. Last year, the Army raised its maximum enlistment age from 35 to 40 and then to 42. The percentage of high school drop-outs entering the force has reached its highest level since 1981. The number of “CAT IV’s”—potential recruits scoring at the lower end of the military’s standardized aptitude test—has also spiked. Perhaps most troubling is the increase in “moral waivers” issued to would-be recruits with criminal records, a history of drug use, and the like. Between 2005 and 2006, the number of waivers that the Army issued to convicted felons jumped by 30 percent.

Once you get in, there’s next to no chance of washing out. Whereas in 2005, the graduation rate in Army basic training was 82 percent, the following year it rose to 94 percent—a clear indication that training standards are eroding as the war drags on. Similarly, re-enlistment criteria are becoming more lax. The Pentagon proudly reports that each of the services continues to meet its re-up goals (helped, of course, by the offer of generous bonuses that are tax-free if the soldier re-enlists while overseas). By comparison, it does not broadcast the fact that the services meet those goals by permitting those with disciplinary infractions and mediocre records of performance to re-enlist.

Secretary Gates has announced plans to expand both the Army and the Marine Corps. That expansion will be modest—fewer than 100,000 overall—and it will occur over a five-year period, providing no meaningful relief to the troops currently headed back to the war zone for their second, third, and even fourth tours. Almost certainly, recruiting those additional troops will mean an even greater degradation of enlistment standards.

President Bush has nicked and dined the nation's fighting forces to the verge of collapse. Even today he remains oblivious to the basic problem that his administration has confronted for the past four years—too much war and too few soldiers.

The president's attitude seems to be: sure, the military is overstretched, but let's see if we can stretch it just a little bit more. Perhaps he figures that when the rubber band breaks, dealing with the consequences will be someone else's problem. It's almost enough to make one nostalgic for Bill Clinton.

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