
National News

Pentagon vs. U.S. Soldier-Critics

High-ranking Pentagon officials are apparently unhappy with members of the 2nd Brigade of the Third Infantry Division, who told reporters from ABC's "Good Morning America" show exactly how they feel about being in Iraq, and whose officers now fear retaliation, according to the July 18 *San Francisco Chronicle*. One soldier had said he felt like he'd been "kicked in the guts, slapped in the face," by the on-again, off-again orders to send the units home, which are now apparently off once again. Another said Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld should quit. One officer said, "It was the end of the world. It went all the way up to President Bush and back down again on top of us. At least six of us here will lose our careers."

The ABC show followed, by two days, an equally bitter e-mail, allegedly from soldiers of the Third Infantry Division, saying, "Our morale is not high or even low. Our morale is nonexistent. We have been told twice that we were going home, and twice we have received a 'stop' movement to stay in Iraq."

While the complaints are being called "routine," other soldiers from other units are making the same complaints. One soldier told the *Chronicle*, "We liberated Iraq. Now the people don't want us here, and guess what? We don't want to be here, either. So, why are we still here? Why don't they bring us home?"

Iraq War a 'Flawed Strategic Judgment'

Retired U.S. Army General William Odom, who headed the National Security Agency during 1985-88, told CNN on July 20 that "I don't think it [Iraq] starts with an intelligence failure. I think it starts with a policy determination. To switch from, really, the war on terrorism against al-Qaeda, to a war

on Iraq, which was not at all amenable to al-Qaeda." Odom said there was "a determination to go ahead with that policy," adding that "intelligence was fitted to that." When asked about the President, the Vice President, the Secretary of Defense, and others "ignoring the intelligence they don't like and exaggerating the intelligence they do like," Odom called that "pretty much of an open-and-shut case."

As for weapons of mass destruction (WMD), Odom said that Iraq did not have any capability to produce a nuclear weapon within a short period of time. "I don't accept that chemical weapons are weapons of mass destruction," he continued. "Is an artillery round a weapon of mass destruction? I had much rather an artillery round with chemical weapons fall within 15 or 20 yards of me, than a high-explosive round. I could put on my gas mask and get away from the chemical. I would not be able to act fast enough to get away from high-explosive shrapnel. "Therefore, I think we're distorting the reality to an incredible degree to call chemical weapons weapons of mass destruction." As for biological weapons, "the jury is out on that," Odom said, because weaponizing and distributing biological agents is still "an open case."

Even if everything that the Administration said about the existence of WMDs were true, Odom stated, "I still think it was a deeply flawed strategic judgment to go to war with Iraq."

Justice Dept IG: 'Dozens' of Rights Abuses

The new internal report from the Department of Justice's (DOJ) Inspector General, made public July 20, identifies 34 cases since passage of the Patriot Act, in which Justice Department employees have been accused of serious civil rights violations involving enforcement of the anti-terrorism "Patriot Act," including accusations that Muslim and Arab immigrants in Federal detention centers had been beaten. Accused are employees of the several agencies under DOJ, including the Bureau of Prisons, the

FBI, Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), and the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS)—which was recently incorporated into the new Department of Homeland Security. The Inspector General said he received 1,073 complaints "suggesting a Patriot Act-related" abuse of civil rights; 272 fell within his jurisdiction, and 34 were substantiated "on their face."

Abuses ranged from physical beatings and verbal assaults to unauthorized searches. The report was submitted to the House and Senate Judiciary Committees on July 17, and was made available to the *New York Times* by Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.), the ranking Democrat on the House Judiciary Committee.

So far, 165 cities around the United States have adopted resolutions condemning the USA PATRIOT ACT and endorsing official non-cooperation with DOJ officials seeking to enforce it.

California: No Rereg, Just Recall

The California Senate bill to re-regulate electricity introduced by Sen. William Dunn, SB 888, was defeated in the Assembly Utilities and Commerce Committee on July 21, without a single vote in favor! The *Los Angeles Times* reported that major energy lobbyists held fundraisers for at least six of the Democratic Party Assembly members on that Committee. These fundraisers included one for Sarah Reyes, the Committee's chairman, the night before the Committee held its hearing on the bill. The sponsors of the Reyes' fundraiser, which was called "Chocolate Decadence," included Pacific Gas & Electric and Sempra Energy—two of the three major utilities in the state—and the chief lobbyist for energy pirate Calpine Corp.

Meanwhile, the state's budget deadlock continued, with no motion from either Democrats or Republicans to get a breakthrough. Each day, funds for some program are cut, with a number of day care centers in L.A. County the latest to feel the budget ax. The

next major deadline is Aug. 15, at which point 180,000 state employees will have their wages cut to the Federal minimum wage.

The chaos is likely to escalate, as the forces attempting to recall Gov. Gray Davis have, as of July 23, put the recall on this November's ballot. While the Dems remain unified in their commitment to put no candidate on the recall ballot—thereby making the vote on whether or not to recall Davis the sole issue—it is expected that bad actor Arnold Schwarzenegger will decide within days if he will be a candidate to replace Davis.

The recall vote places two lines on the ballot. The first will say, "Should Governor Davis be recalled?" The second line asks, "If he is recalled, who should replace him?" with a list of choices. To be included on the list, one need only pay \$3,500 and file with the Secretary of State.

Michigan Shows Economic Crisis Worse

The core industrial state of Michigan has reached an official jobless rate of 7.2%, indicating actual joblessness there is far worse. The official number of unemployed stands at 368,000 in the state. Over the last 12 months, the number of unemployed has increased by 17%, or 54,000 persons. The auto sector alone has cut 10,000 jobs in a year.

The policy reaction is accelerating corporate cuts. Ford implemented massive cuts earlier this year to keep its second-quarter earnings decline to "merely" 27% over same time year earlier. Some \$900 million in spending cuts throughout state and local governments, and public universities, go into effect with the Sept. 1, 2004 fiscal year, despite a \$700 million windfall Federal infusion of aid.

The state is raising fees of all kinds in an attempt to plug the unpluggable—under current depression conditions—budget hole. Hikes cover all range of fees, from state park entry to drivers' licenses, rising by 10-75%.

In addition, state workers are facing

\$250 million in cuts in their wages and benefits.

The Detroit Medical Center, which operates two key city hospitals, is teetering on the edge of shutdown, typifying the emergency status of key service institutions throughout the state. A \$50 million emergency infusion was promised by Democratic Gov. Jennifer Granholm in mid-July, as a "bridge" to help stabilize the Medical Center, which is losing \$5 million a month. But that only raises the question of what happens in 5 months—the end of the "stabilization" period? While scenarios are floated, staff are leaving the Medical Center's two city facilities—the Detroit Receiving Hospital and the Hutzel Women's Hospital. They are targeted for 1,000 layoffs, and potential shutdown.

'Support to Terrorism' Charges Thrown Out

Federal charges against the lawyer for imprisoned Sheik Omar Abdel Rahman were tossed out on July 22 by a Federal judge, who ruled they were unconstitutionally vague and revealed a lack of prosecutorial standards.

Prosecutors had charged attorney Lynne Stewart, 62, of passing messages between her client, Sheik Rahman, and Egyptian terrorists. Rahman is serving a life sentence for conspiring to blow up the World Trade Center and the United Nations building. The judge's opinion stated that the indictment in this case threatened to criminalize the "mere use" of telephones. "The government's evolving definition," the judge wrote, "reveals a lack of prosecutorial standards that would permit a standardless sweep that allows policemen, prosecutors, and juries to pursue their personal predilections."

A Justice Department spokesman said on July 23 that DOJ lawyers are still reviewing the ruling, which limits application of a statute criminalizing provision of material support for terrorists—which statute predates 9/11. He said he believed the judge had not thrown out the material support statute altogether.

Briefly

FED GOVERNOR Ben "Bubbles" Bernanke proclaimed on July 23 that the Federal Reserve could cut interest rates all the way to zero. Bernanke, speaking to the Economics Roundtable of the University of California at San Diego, said the central bank "should be willing to cut the funds rate to zero, should that prove necessary," ostensibly to prevent a fall in inflation. Should still more stimulus be needed, he added, the Fed would use "non-traditional" methods, such as buying long-term bonds.

KILLINGS of American troops in Iraq increased in the days after the assault which killed Saddam Hussein's two sons in Mosul on July 22. The U.S. Central Command stated that two more American soldiers died in an attack July 23, and that three GIs were killed July 24 when a troop convoy from the 101st Airborne Division came under rocket-propelled grenade and small arms attack near Mosul.

U.S. HOUSE vote on June 23 rolled back the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) ruling, issued June 2, allowing media companies to own TV stations serving up to 45% of the country's viewers. The vote on the appropriations bill with an amendment blocking the key changes in the ruling, was 400-21. While FCC chairman Michael Powell remained defiant, Rep. David Obey (D-Wisc.), the sponsor of the original amendment in the Appropriations Committee, declared victory—but admitted there will still be a fight to keep the language in the bill over a threatened Presidential veto.

NEWT GINGRICH is being asked to resign from the Pentagon's Defense Policy Board. Rep. Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.) is calling on Gingrich to "do the right thing now" and resign from the DPB, because of his "McCarthy-like attacks" on the State Department. If Newt doesn't voluntarily step down, the President, the Secretary of Defense, and the Secretary of State should demand his resignation, Van Hollen said on July 21.