

Perpetual War Wrecking U.S. Military: Return It to Engineering Principles

by Carl Osgood

The tortured “debate” of announcements and denials and qualifications in early April, over whether more American forces can or will now be added to the 135,000 already in Iraq, and from where they will come, points to the extremely stretched condition of the U.S. armed forces, engaged in increasingly Vietnam-like wars. More than overstretching is hurting the American forces; they need to return to their founding, West Point “corps of engineers” principles, in order to survive as forces actually securing the strategic defense and national security of the United States.

The founding of the U.S. Military Academy, at West Point, New York in 1801, was a watershed event in American history. With its creation, nation-building, based on engineering principles, was institutionalized as the mission of the U.S. military establishment. In the decades prior to the Civil War, and afterwards, as well, graduates of West Point fanned out across the country to build the canals, waterways, and railroads that bound this nation together. The engineering curriculum at West Point also became the model for the establishment of engineering schools all over the country—a curriculum based on the principle of strategic defense as elaborated by the great French military engineer Lazare Carnot.

Like the Roman Legions

U.S. Presidential candidate Lyndon LaRouche, during a March 30 interview with Arkansas radio host Lee Tibler, commented that Carnot’s orientation “was an approach that was adopted by our military, in West Point, particularly from the time of Monroe and John Quincy Adams. . . . And we based our policy on the engineering approach, which was defined by Carnot, et al., from the Carnot-Monge tradition. So, our military training at West Point, and later, when Annapolis was built on the basis of having a naval equivalent of West Point, [was based] on engineering. So, our military officers were largely trained as engineering officers whose ability to deal with logistics was considered as the basic, ongoing, day-to-day task, under which you get a high-quality military, intellectually high-quality.”

But today, instead, under Vice President Dick Cheney’s perpetual wars and Donald Rumsfeld’s supposed “military transformation,” the U.S. military is being turned into something more akin to the Roman Legions. LaRouche explained

that the process began deliberately at the end of World War II, when Allen Dulles, from his OSS station in Bern, Switzerland, began recruiting Nazi SS officers to work for Western intelligence agencies. “The intent of this group (which Dulles was a part of), was to set up a copy of the Roman Legions; recruiting people of all nationalities into a kind of mercenary force, a killer mercenary force, used with imperial intent, to become what is called the ‘Allgemeine SS,’ a universal SS for world empire.”

In his days as Secretary of Defense under the first President Bush (1989-93), Dick Cheney resumed that process by instituting the privatization of military logistics—of which the company he would soon head, Halliburton, was and is a major beneficiary. That farming-out of logistics and other military functions to private corporations, along with the present Secretary of Defense’s much-ballyhooed “military transformation” policy, have joined together in the form of Cheney’s perpetual-war policy, to wreck the U.S. Army, in particular.

‘A Train Wreck’ on Budget

Evidence of the effects of this wrecking operation was presented at a number of Congressional hearings the last week in March, showing the overstretch of the Army, especially the National Guard and Reserves, and the quandary Congress is in, trying to balance the demands of Rumsfeld’s transformation and the demands of the war in Iraq.

A March 31 hearing of the Total Force Subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee was started by Subcommittee chairman Curt Weldon (R-Penna.), who complained that the Pentagon is handing Congress competing requirements. “We are in the midst of a massive train wreck,” he warned. “We did not modernize during the ’90s, and we have major programs about to come on line that we can’t fund.” He warned that if the Army’s Future Combat System runs into the same types of development problems that have plagued the Air Force’s F-22 fighter plane—which, after 18 years, is only now beginning to overcome its software problems—then cost overruns could consume the entire Army budget.

Addressing the Bush Administration, Weldon said, “You have to help us get these programs under control, with costs

that are acceptable and realistic, so that we can meet the warfighting needs of our soldier in 20 years, while not overstepping the needs of our soldiers currently in Iraq and Afghanistan, today.”

One issue that has been raised repeatedly by members of Congress over the past several months, is the disparity in treatment of soldiers, between the active-duty Army on the one hand, and the Reserve and National Guard on the other. The chairman of the Reserve Forces Policy Board, Albert C. Zapanta, minced no words during the March 31 hearing: “An often-heard comment from our mobilized RC [reserve component] members has been one of inequitable treatment, such as billeting or personal protective equipment and organizational clothing,” he said. “This second-class treatment shows a level of insensitivity that must be changed to ensure our Guard and Reserve members serve equally with their active-duty peers.”

The subject of inadequate stocks of protective equipment for soldiers serving in Iraq (such as body armor and armored humvees), was also the subject of another hearing on April 1 of the Tactical Air and Land Forces Subcommittee, where Rep. Jim Cooper (D-Tenn.) expressed disbelief that the “greatest nation on Earth” would send its soldiers into battle without all of the equipment they needed for their own protection.

The disparity in treatment between the active-duty and the reserves also has made itself felt in healthcare, although the active-duty Army is having major problems there, as well. On March 30, members of the Army Reserve and the National Guard testified to the National Security Subcommittee of the House Government Reform Committee that problems of troops in medical hold, first exposed last fall, have in no way been solved.

When the story first broke, most of the soldiers in medical hold at Fort Stewart, Georgia were reservists who had been medically disqualified from deployment. Since then, the majority of soldiers in that status has shifted to those returning from Iraq for medical reasons. Specialist Timothy McMichael, who has been in a medical-hold status at Fort Knox, Kentucky, told the Subcommittee that the barracks to which medical-hold soldiers were assigned, were buildings that should have been condemned—or perhaps *had been* condemned, but they didn’t know for sure.

Retired First Sergeant Gerry Mosely, an Army Reservist who did deploy to Iraq, reported that pre-deployment medical screenings of soldiers were wholly inadequate, and that many were deployed with known health conditions that would be worsened by deployment. He said he personally knew of soldiers who were deployed with conditions including hearing loss, insulin-dependent diabetes, Tourette’s syndrome, serious allergies requiring refrigerated medication, severe cardiac disease, and unrepaired hernia.

He told of one soldier in Iraq who had been complaining of bloody, painful urination, but his commander was told

at the field clinic that the soldier was malingering (feigning illness to avoid duty) and should be court-martialed. “That soldier has just returned from Walter Reed Medical Center,” Mosely reported, after “having a cancerous bladder and prostate gland removed,” again raising the issue of pre-deployment screening. “How could the Army miss such an advanced cancer prior to deployment?” Mosely asked.

‘They Have To Keep More Bodies in Theater’

Articles on April 3 in two British newspapers, the *Guardian* and the *Independent*, added more details to the picture described by Mosely and McMichael. The sending of sick soldiers to Iraq is being attributed to the overall stress on the force: There simply aren’t enough people to do the job that’s being demanded of the Army. Stan Goff, a veterans’ activist, told the *Guardian*, “This is a particularly stressful time for the military, because they have been committed far, far beyond their capability. The numbers are becoming more and more important. They have got to keep more bodies in theater.”

Meanwhile, the load on the military and veterans’ health-care system is skyrocketing, as a result of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. The *Guardian* reports that 15,000 soldiers have filed disability claims, 12,000 have sought care in Veterans’ Administration facilities, and about 4,600 have sought psychological counselling. And, of course, the Bush Administration has refused to ask for the additional monies required to care for the troops that fought for it.

All of this, which is probably only the tip of the iceberg, is going on without even taking into account that the Iraq occupation itself is a disaster.

LaRouche Sums Up

In summing up his military policy, LaRouche said, in the Arkansas interview, “Get our military out of there! Get them back to the States. Go through a reconstruction of our military, based on a strategic defense conception. Go back to integrate the development of our military, as some people in the Congress are also thinking, on the basis of something like the CCC”—the Roosevelt-era Civilian Conservation Corps—putting the unemployed back to work, giving them training and education, “to make them into something.”

“My view is,” LaRouche continued, “let’s get back to our tradition, of a high-grade, highly educated, scientifically oriented military where you train people; they’re delighted to be in, say, two-year service, in training, as reservists; *proud* to be part of that, proud to be part of our National Guard; proud to be people who have engineering capabilities, who turn out, when the Governor has an emergency on his hands. *That* kind of people. We want people who are in the military, *not* as against the population. We want people to see the military as part of the population, and to be *part of it*. That way, the people, then, are implicitly, spiritually, and otherwise, controlling their own military.”