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Politically Correct War

U.S. military leaders deny reality

By Ralph Peters

Have we lost the will to win wars? Not just in Iraq, but anywhere? Do we really believe that being nice is more important than victory?

It's hard enough to bear the timidity of our civilian leaders - anxious to start wars but without the guts to finish them - but now military leaders have fallen prey to political correctness. Unwilling to accept that war is, by its nature, a savage act and that *defeat is immoral*, influential officers are arguing for a kinder, gentler approach to our enemies.

They're going to lead us into failure, sacrificing our soldiers and Marines for nothing: Political correctness kills.

Obsessed with low-level "tactical" morality - war's *inevitable* mistakes - the officers in question have lost sight of the strategic morality of winning. Our Army and Marine Corps are about to suffer the imposition of a new counterinsurgency doctrine designed for fairy-tale conflicts and utterly inappropriate for the religion-fueled, ethnicity-driven hyper-violence of our time.

We're back to struggling to win hearts and minds that can't *be* won.

The good news is that the Army and Marine Corps worked together on the new counterinsurgency doctrine laid out in Field Manual 3-24 (the Army version). The bad news is that the doctrine writers and their superiors came up with fatally wrong prescriptions for combating today's insurgencies.

Astonishingly, the doctrine ignores faith-inspired terrorism and skirts ethnic issues in favor of analyzing *yesteryear's* political insurgencies. It would be a terrific manual if we returned to Vietnam circa 1963, but its recommendations are profoundly misguided when it comes to fighting terrorists intoxicated with religious visions and the smell of blood.

Why did the officers in question avoid the decisive question of religion? Because the answers would have been ugly.

Wars of faith and tribe are immeasurably crueler and tougher to resolve than ideological revolts. A

Maoist in Malaya could be converted. But Islamist terrorists who regard death as a promotion are not going to reject their faith any more than an ethnic warrior can - or would wish to - change his blood identity.

So the doctrine writers ignored today's reality.

Al Qaeda and other terror organizations have stated explicitly and repeatedly that they're waging a global jihad to re-establish the caliphate. Yet the new manual *ignores* religious belief as a motivation.

The politically correct atmosphere in Washington deems any discussion of religion as a strategic factor indelicate: Let our troops die, just don't hurt anyone's feelings.

So the doctrine writers faked it, treating all insurgencies as political. As a result, they prescribed an excellent head-cold treatment - for a cancer patient. The text is a mush of pop-zen mantras such as "Sometimes doing nothing is the best reaction," "The best weapons do not shoot," or "The more force used, the less effective it is."

That's just nutty. Should we have done nothing in the wake of 9/11? Would everything have been OK if we'd just been nicer? What non-lethal "best weapons" might have snagged Osama bin Laden at Tora Bora, where the problem was too little military force, not too much violence?

Should we have sent *fewer* troops to Iraq, where inadequate numbers crippled everything we attempted? Will polite chats with tribal chiefs stop the sectarian violence drenching Iraq in blood?

On the surface, the doctrine appears sober and serious. But it's morally frivolous and intellectually inert, a pathetic rehashing of yesteryear's discredited "wisdom" on counterinsurgencies and, worst of all, driven by a stalker-quality infatuation with T.E. Lawrence, "Lawrence of Arabia," who not only was a huckster of the first order, but whose "revolt in the desert" was a near-meaningless sideshow of a sideshow.

Lawrence is quoted repeatedly, with reverence. We might as well cite the British generals of the Great War who sent men over the top in waves to face German machine guns.

You can trust two kinds of officers: Those who read a great deal and those who don't read at all. But beware the officer who reads just a little and falls in love with one book. A little education really is a dangerous thing.

The new manual is thick - length is supposed to substitute for insight. It should be 75 percent shorter and 100 percent more honest. If issued to our troops in its present form, it will lead to expensive failures. Various generals have already tried its prescriptions in Iraq - with discouraging results, to put it mildly.

We've reached a fateful point when senior officers seek to evade war's brute reality. Our leaders, in and

out of uniform, must regain their moral courage. We can't fight wars of any kind if the entire chain of command runs for cover every time an ambitious journalist cries, "War crime!" And sorry: Soccer balls are no substitute for bullets when you face fanatics willing to kill every child on the playing field.

In war, you don't get points for good manners. It's about *winning*. Victory forgives.

The new counterinsurgency doctrine recommends forbearance, patience, understanding, non-violent solutions and even outright passivity. Unfortunately, our enemies won't sign up for a replay of the Summer of Love in San Francisco. We can't treat hardcore terrorists like Halloween pranksters on mid-term break from prep school.

Where is the spirit of FDR and George C. Marshall, who recognized that the one unbearable possibility was for the free world to lose?

We discount the value of ferocity - as a practical tool and as a deterrent. But war's immutable law - proven yet again in Iraq - is that those unwilling to pay the butcher's bill up front will pay it with compound interest in the end.

The new counterinsurgency doctrine is dishonest and cowardly.

We don't face half-hearted Marxists tired of living in the jungle, but religious zealots who behead prisoners to please their god and who torture captives by probing their skulls with electric drills. We're confronted by hatreds born of blood and belief and madmen whose appetite for blood is insatiable.

And we're afraid to fight.

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