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US Military Collapsing Under Weight Of Iraq Wreck It And Run

By William S. Lind

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Among the many unhappy developments in U.S. industry in recent decades has been the advent of "wreck it and run" management.

A small coterie of senior managers takes over a company and makes a brilliant show of short-term profits while actually driving the business into the ground. They bail out just before it crashes, cashing in their stock options as they go, and leave the employees, ordinary stockholders and customers holding an empty bag.

It is increasingly clear that under Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, the U.S. armed forces have also been taken over by "wreck it and run" management. When Rumsfeld leaves office, what will his successor inherit?

-- A volunteer military without volunteers. The Army missed its active-duty recruiting goal in April by almost half. Guard and Reserve recruiting are collapsing. Retention will do the same as "stop loss" orders are lifted.

The reason, obviously, is the war in Iraq. Parents don't want to be the first one on their block to have their kid come home in a box.

-- The world's largest pile of wrecked and worn-out military equipment (maybe second-largest if we remember the old Soviet Navy). I'm talking about basic stuff here: trucks, Humvees, personnel carriers, crew-served weapons, etc. This is gear

the Rumsfeld Pentagon hates to spend money on, because it does not represent "transformation" to the high-tech, videogame warfare it wrongly sees as the future.

So far, deploying units have made up their deficiencies by robbing units that are not deploying, often National Guard outfits. But that stock has about run out, and some of the stripped units are now facing deployment themselves, minus their gear.

-- A military tied down in a strategically meaningless backwater, Iraq, to the point where it can't do much else. A perceptive reader recently wrote to me that "China has the luxury of the U.S. inflicting grievous wounds, economic and military, on itself from our commitment to spread 'democracy' ... Although the Iraqi insurgents may have the limited purpose of ending an occupation, other global actors can sit back and watch us bleed ourselves slowly to, at least, a weakened state. From that point of view, the last thing these other actors wish to see is either a victory or a quick defeat. Instead, events are proceeding nicely as they are." Exactly correct, and those other actors include al-Qaida.

-- Commitments to hundreds of billions of dollars worth of future weapons programs that are militarily as useful as zeppelins but less fun to watch. If the Army had its Future Combat System, a semi-portable Maginot Line that will cost more than any Navy or Air Force program of equal uselessness, in Iraq or Afghanistan today, would it make any difference? No. Maybe FCS really stands for Funnels Cash System.

-- A world wary of U.S. intentions and skeptical of any U.S. claims about anything. In business, goodwill is considered a tangible asset. In true "wreck it and run" fashion, Rumsfeld & Co. have reduced the value of that asset to near zero. A recent survey of the German public found Russia was considered a better friend than the United States.

-- Finally, the equivalent of an unfavorable ruling by a bankruptcy judge in the form of a lost war. We will be lucky if we can get out of Iraq with anything less than a total loss.

Earlier this week, I attended the funeral and burial of one of the United States' real military heroes at Arlington cemetery. Col. David Hackworth would not have sat silent, as our current senior military leadership sits, while "wreck it and run" civilian management drove America's armed forces into the ground.

Rumsfeld & Co. will bear primary responsibility for the disaster, which will no doubt disturb them greatly as they enjoy their luxurious retirements. But our senior generals and admirals are the equivalent of the board of directors, and they would have some difficulty convincing Hack that they were just the piano players in the affair.

(William S. Lind, expressing his personal opinion, is director for the Center for Cultural Conservatism for the Free Congress Foundation.)

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