

The following text may be printed, copy/pasted, or downloaded and emailed.

## **The Generals Go After Rumsfeld; They're Right, But Wrong**

Editorial  
The Philadelphia Inquirer  
April 19, 2006

It is a shame that a number of high-ranking, retired military officers have felt the need to take their case for removing Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld to the media.

Our Founding Fathers were right to set up firm civilian leadership of the nation's military; it's an important principle of our democracy.

That's why, however much you agree with the retired generals' critique of Pentagon blunders in Iraq, there's something discomfoting about their anti-Rummy campaign.

But the far greater discomfort lies in how the Bush administration, with Rumsfeld at the Pentagon's helm, has conducted the U.S. mission in Iraq so badly and blindly.

As this space has said before, Rumsfeld should go.

The testimony of the generals underscores why Rumsfeld should go, but it is not in and of itself a reason. That would set a disturbing precedent; the next time around, it might be the generals who are wrong and a defense secretary who is right.

Rumsfeld should go because he invaded Iraq without a decent plan for the aftermath. His disdain for nation-building clashed with the reality that deposing Saddam Hussein would leave a governance vacuum for the United States to fill.

Rumsfeld apologists fall back on the alibi that war always produces surprises. But much of what has gone wrong was predicted by many experts, inside and outside government. Plans and precedents existed for how to deal with the challenges. For example, the U.S. military had just learned valuable lessons about peacekeeping in the Balkans in the late 1990s. Rumsfeld ignored all that.

Rumsfeld should go because, on his watch, U.S. troops brought unimaginable shame to our nation by torturing terrorist suspects in Iraq's Abu Ghraib prison and at Guantanamo Bay.

That abuse, captured in photographs shown around the world, has eroded America's moral standing, especially among moderate Muslims, which in turn erodes our national security. Rumsfeld enabled the torture scandal by errors of commission and omission.

Rumsfeld should go because he sent U.S. soldiers to war without equipping them sufficiently.

And Rumsfeld should be replaced because of the atmosphere he has created in the Pentagon, a stifling one that mirrors the worst tendencies of the Bush administration.

Many officers, some who want to remain anonymous, describe a Pentagon where dissent is discouraged. Some seem to believe they risked their careers by criticizing, even privately, their bosses' plans.

The book *Dereliction of Duty*, by active-duty Col. H.R. McMaster, castigates the Vietnam-era Joint Chiefs of Staff for their acquiescence in the mistakes of President Johnson and his defense secretary, Robert McNamara.

Should the generals now speaking out in retirement have done more while in positions of command to change the Iraq strategy? That's a fair question.

Even in hindsight, it's hard to tell whether speaking up more loudly inside Rumsfeld's Pentagon, or even resigning in public protest, would have done much to change the policies of this very stubborn administration.

Another question hovers over the revolt of the generals. Where the heck has Congress been? If the leadership on Capitol Hill had been more interested in what was best for Iraq and for this nation, and less in covering for a bumbling president of the same party, maybe the simmering concerns of military leaders could have been aired long before now.

What is best for this nation now would be a new secretary of defense, one with less baggage and defensiveness who can push more effectively the changes in strategy needed to make the best of the Iraq mess.