

# Rumsfeld's New Model Army

By Conn Hallinan | November 4, 2003

War is the ultimate test of reality and illusion.

On the eve of World War I, the French General Staff was convinced victory would go to the attacker, that massed soldiers marching together into battle could overcome technology with courage and élan. German machine guns and artillery swiftly shattered that illusion, along with several hundred thousand young Frenchmen.

Today, the United States is engaged in a very similar application of theory and warfare, albeit the opposite of the one the French tried.

Even the final victory in Iraq was not exactly a triumph for the “revolution.” It wasn't swift moving, light troops that took Baghdad and Basra, but the conventional, tank-heavy U.S. 3rd Infantry Division, and the British 7th Armored Division. In short, the “old model army.” Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's military is a swift moving, micro-chipped, killing machine, where electronics turn night into day, and satellites and laser-guided weapons slice and dice enemy armor and artillery. President George W. Bush called it a “revolution,” that has “shown that an innovative doctrine and high-tech weaponry can shape and then dominate an unconventional conflict.”

Has it? With the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq under our belt, isn't it time to tote up the bill and separate reality from illusion?

On the plus side for the “revolution,” we won. On the minus side, it was hardly a fair fight. In Afghanistan it was the 21st century verses the 12th, and we're not out of the tunnel yet. Iraq had a 20th century army, but one hollowed out by a decade of sanctions and with little loyalty to the brutal dictatorship it served. And that war, too, is far from over.

## Military Transformation

The latest “revolution” in warfare, the brainchild of the late Air Force Col., John Boyd, goes by the name “transformation” and combines high tech and maneuverability. Its model was the German Blitzkrieg. But Rumsfeld's New Model Army is discovering that the very instruments that make it so invincible on a conventional battlefield are of little use in the non-conventional war the Bush administration finds itself embroiled in. As long as the enemy was the Iraqi army, the “revolution” works just fine. It has done less well against roadside explosives, ambushes, and suicide bombs.

Part of the problem is the “transformation” army itself.

The U.S. military looks increasingly like a temp agency on steroids: a massive organization of part-time workers armed with the latest in firepower.

Since Sept. 11, 2001, some 292,000 National Guard and reserve troops have been called to active duty, and more than 190,000 are still serving. The Pentagon just announced a further call-up of 30,000. Reserve and National Guard units now make up 46% of the military.

Reserves have always been an important component of the U.S. military, but they are only supposed to be called up in times of national emergency. From World War I to Gulf War I—75 years—they were called up nine times. In the past 12 years they have been mobilized 10 times.

Normally such troops work behind the front lines and serve for shorter periods than regular troops. However, under “transformation,” their deployment has been stretched to 12, and sometimes 15 months. And the front line in Iraq and Afghanistan is anyplace a soldier happens to be.

## Temping in the 21st Century Army

The thinking behind all this is simple math: reserve and Guard troops are much cheaper than regular troops. As Christopher Caldwell at the *Weekly Standard* notes, “it is hard not see a similarity between the army's shift to part-time soldiering and businesses preferences for part-time vs full-time labor.”

“Transformation” has essentially shifted much of the financial burden for maintaining permanent troops to the families of the reserves. Most joined up for the educational grants and small stipends that comes with the job. But reserves are suddenly finding themselves locked into open-ended deployments in very dangerous places. “Weekend warrior, my ass,” one sign spotted in Baghdad read. Reservists also charge that they are given second-rate equipment in the field, including inadequate body armor.

The toll on these temps has been considerable. According to the British newspaper, *The Guardian*, 75% of the 478 troops shipped home from Iraq for mental health reasons were reservists.

Wounded reservists returning from Iraq complain they have been “warehoused” at Fort Stewart, Ga. in barracks without showers or bathrooms and sometimes wait weeks to see a doctor.

Inadequate medical care—another way the New Model Army is trying to save on personnel costs—has touched a raw nerve among veterans as well, many of whom are par-

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tially or fully disabled from Gulf War Syndrome. Veterans' groups charge that almost 150,000 vets from Gulf War I have been waiting more than six months to see a doctor, and the wait for a specialist is up to two years.

Those numbers are likely to climb because soldiers in Iraq today are being exposed to many of the battlefield toxins that felled some 118,000 veterans in the first Gulf War.

The Syndrome has been linked to some 345 tons of Depleted Uranium Ammunition (DUA) used in the 1991 conflict. According to the London *Express*, the Americans and the British used between 1,100 and 2,200 tons of DUA, much of it in urban areas during the recent war. Radiation 1,000 to 1,900 times normal has been detected in four locations in Baghdad.

The situation is "appalling," according to Professor Brian Spratt, chair of the Royal Society, Britain's leading scientific body. "We really need someone like the UN Environmental Program or the World Health Organization to get into Iraq and start testing civilians and soldiers for uranium exposure."

Such testing is unlikely because the Department of Defense denies that DUA poses any health risks.

## Cost-Cutting at the Pentagon

While spending on high-tech whiz-bangs is at an all time high, the administration has steadily shaved the cost of personnel.

A recent Pentagon attempt to cut active duty pay was defeated by congressional outrage, but the administration is still attempting to disqualify some 1.5 million veterans from eligibility for disability benefits. The Pentagon has also resisted the Retired Pay Restoration Act that would correct an anomaly that reduces military retirement pay by the amount veterans draw in disability. The measure would level the playing field between Civil Service retirees and 670,000 vets caught in this bureaucratic oddity, but the Pentagon has resisted it as a "budget buster."

Besides increasingly relying on temp soldiers, the "transformation" army is also trying to apply private industry practices to public service. Rumsfeld is seeking the right to hire, fire, and promote some 700,000 civilian Pentagon employees on "merit" alone, free of government employment regulations. "The risk that this system will be politicized and characterized by cronyism in hiring, firing, pay promotion, and discipline are immense," says Bobby Harnatge, president of the American Federation of Government Employees.

While the manpower crisis on the ground is bad—there are just not enough troops available to match the administration's imperial sprawl—it is likely to get a whole lot worse. A recent poll by the military newspaper, *Stars and Stripes*, found that only 49% of the reserves intend to re-enlist.

So is this blind folly? Or does "transformation" offer an unseen benefit?

"The arguments in support of technological monism echo down the halls of the Pentagon," Major General Robert Scales (Ret.) told the House Armed Service Committee Oct. 21, "precisely because they involve the expenditures of huge sums of money to defense contractors."

In the 2002 election cycle, U.S. arms corporations' political action committees spent \$7,620,741, two-thirds of which went to the Republican Party. "Transformation" might not work well once the initial "shock and awe" of battle is over, but it can be a formidable re-election machine.

When the "Young Turks" of the French Army adopted the doctrine of *élan*, they were certain it was a formula for victory. The battle of the Marne convinced them otherwise, and the French abandoned the tactic. Of course the French General Staff wasn't running for office.

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