What is happening in Iraq because of the Vietnam experience Ã¢â‚¬â€œ Part I

Description

I wrote an earlier post on the winning of hearts and minds, and it included some information about some small Ã¢â‚¬Å“nation buildingÃ¢â‚¬Â• efforts at the village level by some Marines. There was also some references to the way the composition of the makeup of regular versus reserve/national guard units was modified in the period between Vietnam and Gulf War I.

This afternoon, I was toying with the thought that something very unique is going on a half a world east of me, but I believe it is more off cycle, that I hope becomes a trend.

My basic thought is we have, quite by accident, built a military well suited to nation building. The concept of the re-mixing of logistics to combat unit ratios between active duty and the Ã¢â‚¬Å“citizen soldierÃ¢â‚¬Â• components after Vietnam is described by Col. Harry Summers, Jr. in Ã¢â‚¬Å“On Strategy: Gulf War.Ã¢â‚¬Â• Harry describes how the middle grade combat leaders from that War moved into assignments where they had the opportunity to recompose how we manned our armed forces, to ensure they, and their juniors marched to the next war with Ã¢â‚¬Å“the will of the peopleÃ¢â‚¬Â• in their corner.

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The concept of having an active duty organization that could march quickly into battle, but only for short periods, needed rapid augmentation by reserve and National Guard units right away, if there was a sustained conflict. Ã¢â‚¬Å“Round outÃ¢â‚¬Â• units, such as the 2/263rd Armored Battalion from the South Carolina National Guard would provide the 3rd battalion to bring the 2nd Armored Division to full strength. Military police, engineer, chemical and quartermaster corps units would have to come along to provide vital logistical and combat support functions. People in these units would be your banker, lawyer, sheriff, hardware store owners, etc, from cities and towns all across the nation. In other words, just about every one of us would have a personal connection to someone who would be sent out in the name of the people of this United States. It was, quite frankly, pure genius. This concept was to solve a problem real warfighters in the late 60Ã¢â‚¬â„¢s and 70Ã¢â‚¬Ëœs had to contend with. From their pain and anguish, a plan was conceived and executed.

Not only was this idea right on target to tie our military to the general civilian population for support for a war, it has the added, and I would argue, subconscious, benefit of placing a Ã¢â‚¬Å“governor Ã¢â‚¬Å“ on the emotions of this Nation. The mere fact we may consider entering our military into a conflict, they are not as they were during the Vietnam era, a sub-class of people who were poor or too stupid to hold a real job, but they are who we live alongside. It was too easy to emotionally discard the people who defended us when they were drafted into service. With this new force makeup, it is our sons and daughters, sisters and brothers, friends and neighbors at stake. If the cause is important, we will acquiesce to their deployment, and most unfortunately, the death and injury to some of them. Conversely, if thatÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s too great a risk for what is at stake, then our voices will be raised in protest.

In Gulf War I, the designed benefit of connection to the will of the people played out. Ã¢â‚¬Å“WeÃ¢â‚¬Â• went forward and pushed an invader out of a sovereign nation. Not only did the country rally behind

the troops, when some of them were killed by Ã¢â‚¬Å“friendly fireÃ¢â‚¬Â• (most people who have been in combat will argue that there is no such thing- any fire is unfriendly when itÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s coming at you!) It was the public sentiment that helped spur on the budgeting and development of better communications and identification equipment and procedures.

IÃ¢â‚¬â„¢ll stop here, and soon post my analysis of an added, third benefit of this force structure Iâ€™m sure wasnâ€™t foreseen decades ago, as this plan was forming.

Part II is here.

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