

Tuesday, August 21, 2007

On Iraq: Trust Airborne Troops or Brookings Institution Think Tank Weenies? I'll Go With the Airborne Troops, Thank You Very Much.



Who do you trust to tell the truth about Iraq, the combat veterans who have been there and done it, and speak up when they see the situation in Iraq being FUBAR'd (fucked up beyond all repair), or a couple of penny loafer wearing think tank weenies from the Brookings Institute who played tourist in Iraq?

This past Sunday, the New York Times published a scathing op-ed entitled *The War As We Saw It*, written by combat veterans of the 82nd Airborne, serving in Iraq *right now*. Their picture on the situation in Iraq was the polar opposite of a piece written last month, entitled *A War We Just Might Win*, by a couple of Brookings Institution "scholars," Michael O'Hanlon and Kenneth Pollack, who took a short, safe, guided tour of Iraq and then pronounced their optimism.

Who should we trust? For my money, I agree with Paul Rieckhoff over at Military.com. I'll trust the Airborne troops, thank you very much. As Rieckhoff puts it, "right now, we need their experience and opinions. These guys spent a year in Iraq, not eight days, which is why they can read between the lines on Pentagon statistics."



Tucker Carlson discussed this "unusual" situation (of enlisted combat troops speaking up) with Ret. Col Jack Jacobs. Tucker doesn't like it at all, not one little bit. What a surprise. Tucker starts his broadcast by noting that "these are **not** retired generals, **not the ones you see on television**. These are active duty enlisted men."

Oh, the horrors! These aren't our black turtleneck wearing paid ex-military neocon "analysts." These

are just dirty, grimy **grunts** who may not have even gone to college (gasp!) and certainly have not even been through the makeup department! Goodness, I need another latte! Watch Tucker get his gentrified panties all in a wad:

Tucker Carlson is "uncomfortable with it" because he thinks that enlisted combat troops speaking up, on their own initiative, somehow violates the separation between active duty troops and politics. Tucker, who never spent a second in the military, nonetheless tells us with authority that "service members kind of act out the policies of the U.S. government, right or wrong, but they don't comment upon them, because you want civilian control of the military."

Tucker Carlson is an idiot. As if a few enlisted men speaking out, rather than just being good, silent cannon fodder while the brass smiles and tells us all is well, is somehow an attempt by the military to subvert civilian control. Funny how Tucker has no problem with paid, sell-out retired generals and colonels, like his guest, chiming in. And I'll bet he wouldn't even bat a well manicured eyelash at currently serving generals going on TV, so long as they loyally parroted the Commander-in-Chief's talking points (which they always do) . But Tucker thinks the sky is falling when mere enlisted men speak up.

Tucker also tells us that like most Americans he respects the military but he thinks the troops daring to speak out "squanders the awesome moral authority that these guys [combat vets] already have." But what is the point in those combat vets having that awesome moral authority if they are expected to keep their mouths shut? Moral authority to do what? Look good in pictures? Look good standing around the President during some photo op? Moral authority to support the President in whatever hair-brained military adventure He Decides to embark on -such as war with Iran?

No, the troops have an obligation to use their moral authority and their boots-on-the-ground knowledge by speaking up when they see the situation in Iraq being royally FUBAR'd. The courageous action of these troops in speaking out is an act of patriotism and a credit to the spirit and resolve of the Airborne. It is precisely because they are combat vets, who have earned our trust and respect, that they should speak up and we should listen.



Perhaps I am biased, since I also served as an Airborne grunt, but I am not at all surprised that it was a group of enlisted Airborne troops who had the gumption to buck the sell-out, ass kissing brass and go against the grain of the official propoganda party line scripted in the White House and parroted by all the medal and star seeking toadies down the chain of command.

Airborne troopers are renowned for thinking outside the box and acting on their own initiative. It is what we are trained to do in combat, where we can expect to often times have no contact with the chain of command, in the midst of chaos, often behind enemy lines, surrounded by foes, in a fast

moving, ever fluid combat environment.



You can't train men for that without them being in the habit of thinking for themselves. And so, the military brass, and the "commander in chief" are now embarrassed because these troops display the initiative that is the hallmark of the infantryman, who's motto is "follow me!" (to which the 82nd adds "All the Way").

We NEED to hear from the troops with their boots on the ground, where all the theories and grand strategies of the martini sipping think tank chickenhawk wonks go to hell in short fucking order when RPG's start wooshing in. For far too long the information from the battlefield has been constrained and controlled by those who think themselves our betters, but wouldn't last ten seconds in a firefight.



Here is some of what these Airborne troopers had to say about Iraq:

VIEWED from Iraq at the tail end of a 15-month deployment, the political debate in Washington is indeed surreal. Counterinsurgency is, by definition, a competition between insurgents and counterinsurgents for the control and support of a population. To believe that Americans, with an occupying force that long ago outlived its reluctant welcome, can win over a recalcitrant local population and win this counterinsurgency is far-fetched. As responsible infantrymen and noncommissioned officers with the 82nd Airborne Division soon heading back home, we are skeptical of recent press coverage portraying the conflict as increasingly manageable and feel it has neglected the mounting civil, political and social unrest we see every day The claim that we are increasingly in control of the battlefields in Iraq is an assessment arrived at through a flawed, American-centered framework. Yes, we are militarily superior, but our successes are offset by failures elsewhere. What soldiers call the "battle space" remains the same, with changes only at the margins. It is crowded with actors who do not fit neatly into boxes: Sunni extremists, Al Qaeda terrorists, Shiite militiamen, criminals and armed tribes. This situation is made more complex by the questionable loyalties and Janus-faced role of the Iraqi police and Iraqi Army, which have been trained and armed at United States taxpayers' expense.

As if speaking directly to all the weenie think tank guys who go on controlled, sanitized little tours of Iraq, the troopers tell us:

The ability of, say, American observers to safely walk down the streets of formerly violent towns is not a resounding indicator of security. What matters is the experience of the local citizenry and the future of our counterinsurgency. When we take this view, we see that a vast majority of Iraqis feel increasingly insecure and view us as an occupation force that has failed to produce normalcy after four years and is increasingly unlikely to do so as we continue to arm each warring side.


The troopers concluded by saying:

In the end, we need to recognize that our presence may have released Iraqis from the grip of a tyrant, but that it has also robbed them of their self-respect. They will soon

realize that the best way to regain dignity is to call us what we are — an army of occupation — and force our withdrawal.

Until that happens, it would be prudent for us to increasingly let Iraqis take center stage in all matters, to come up with a nuanced policy in which we assist them from the margins but let them resolve their differences as they see fit. This suggestion is not meant to be defeatist, but rather to highlight our pursuit of incompatible policies to absurd ends without recognizing the incongruities.

Of course, Tucker Carlson's paid talking head of an ex-military officer, Col Jack Jacobs, thinks the troopers are unqualified to make the assessment that we are losing the battle for the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people. But I'll take the word of the troopers who have been there, among the Iraqi people, and have looked into their eyes. Who do you trust? -Stewart Rhodes

Posted by Stewart Rhodes at 10:18 PM 

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