



# LETTERS

## The Iraq War Blame Game

In an Oct. 12 speech to the Military Reporters and Editors Forum, former U.S. Iraq commander Lt. General Ricardo Sanchez condemned the mistakes of others in Iraq — though not his own. We'll hear more such speeches from recently retired senior officials as the war winds down in failure and the blame game heats up. The general's comments were candid, accurate and brave regarding the role of the press and the highest echelons of this administration. But in trying with an almost casual and unsupported "one-liner" to throw much of the blame for the Iraq debacle on the State Department, he erred. That record must be corrected.

His complaint (implicit because never voiced in detail) is that the State Department has not "been there" enough — a common complaint now from the Defense Department. That is ironic, given that the bulk of prewar planning for a postwar Iraq was conducted by the State Department, only to be trashed by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and his civilian coterie. They shoved the State Department aside during the initial period of occupation in favor of a seemingly total *laissez-faire* policy.

Then the Coalition Provisional Authority appeared in Iraq — not a State Department creation, but a hodgepodge of professionals heavily diluted by incompetent political ap-

pointees headed by a former State Department official, whose only significant posting abroad (as distinct from 7th floor and National Security Council service) was as ambassador to a benign, unchallenging post, The Hague. Paul Bremer made disastrous decisions and bears a heavy responsibility. But he was not a State Department appointee in Baghdad; he was a political appointee favored by this administration due to ideological considerations, not relevant experience.

Is the State Department still absent from the field, as Gen. Sanchez implies? Roughly a quarter of all current FSOs have rotated through Baghdad or Kabul. I'll admit that I think the Service should have gone to directed assignments long ago, instead of using an elaborately baroque set of incentives for loading onward assignment bidding criteria. That said, Gen. Sanchez errs if he expects unarmed civilians — including diplomats — to perform the role of soldier or point of the lance in venturing into the middle of free-fire zones that the military has been unable to pacify.

That is not to blame our military, who have been given a difficult, if not impossible, task in Iraq, due in part to insufficient resources and a lack of real national mobilization. But what American soldiers cannot achieve against armed insurgents on the battlefield, unarmed diplomats cannot achieve either.

Those of our colleagues who seek to persuade or rebuild cannot get very far if they cannot move about and do their jobs, or if their Iraqi contacts cannot be assured of survival.

*Marc E. Nicholson*  
*FSO, retired*  
*Washington, D.C.*

## Our Lost Voice for Human Rights

I commend the *Journal's* focus on human rights in the September issue. The articles by Ed McWilliams, Ken Roth, Sarah Sewall and, especially, Craig Murray were right on target. I wish our timid public media would give them a wider airing.

I was one of the officers assigned in 1976 to the State Department's new human rights office, which Congress insisted we create. Under the leadership of such legislators as Donald Fraser, Tom Harkin, Jonathan Bingham and Ted Kennedy, Congress passed the Foreign Assistance Act of 1976 over the veto of President Gerald Ford. (Yes, more than two-thirds of both houses of Congress voted in favor of human rights measures!)

The law included the Harkin Amendment, which called for the withholding of U.S. foreign assistance to any country that engaged in a consistent pattern of gross violations of human rights. It also required the department to submit annual human



rights reports on American aid recipients to Congress.

I stayed on through the first year of the Carter administration, which made human rights a major policy consideration. I assembled the first human rights reports sent to Congress in early 1977. Those reports on about 75 countries, compiled in a booklet no more than half an inch thick, were a mere shadow of the tomes the department later produced and continues to send to Congress each year.

In those years the United States became the leading voice for increased respect for internationally recognized human rights. In 1975, State Department FSOs insisted on including respect for human rights in the Helsinki Final Act, a first step in confronting communist regimes with their rights abuses.

The 1977 reports to Congress made front-page headlines in leading American newspapers, and Pres. Carter's references to human rights in his inaugural speech were followed by Vaclav Havel's creation of a human rights group in Prague the next day.

Top-level administration officials, including Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights Patt Derian, advocated increased respect for human rights publicly and privately in high-level diplomatic meetings. Even in the midst of the Cold War, we began to raise human rights concerns with our repressive allies and with communist adversaries.

Admittedly, human rights policy application was tentative, sometimes experimental and not always uniform, as its critics charged. But America's advocacy gradually brought some improvements around the world. And there was no doubt anywhere that our government, Congress and the majority of American people were strong supporters of human rights.

I don't think the department ever officially defined the term "gross

violations" of human rights in the Harkin Amendment, but our working definition certainly included such abuses as murder, other violations of the safety and integrity of the person, incarcerations without charges or trial, disappearances (a common practice in the Chilean and Argentine dictatorships) and torture.

Torture was viewed as barbaric, uncivilized and unjustifiable under any circumstances — a taboo. Until the aftermath of 9/11, I never imagined that U.S. officials could advocate, justify and condone its use. My shock and dismay only deepened as American citizens' civil rights — i.e., human rights — were also undermined in the mistaken belief that our security could be enhanced by violating some of our rights.

Back in the 1970s, we often told dictatorships fighting insurgencies that the rule of law must be maintained, even in a state of emergency. We need more voices to make that point in Washington today, as Amb. Murray did so forcefully in the September *Journal*.

Sadly and tragically, America has now lost its human rights voice at home and abroad. Even worse, as some of your authors indicated, we now serve as an example and excuse for other rights-violating regimes. Little wonder that our reputation in the world has fallen to a historic low.

Your focus was one in a chorus of voices we must raise to denounce the current abuses and the wrong human rights policies of our government, both in the public forum and at the ballot box.

*H. Kenneth Hill  
Ambassador, retired  
Bradenton, Fla.*

### **A New Counterinsurgency Doctrine**

Speaking as someone who took part in the CORDS pacification pro-

gram in Vietnam, I write to compliment the *Foreign Service Journal* for its enduring attention to counterinsurgency. Between the publication of Sarah Sewall's article in the September *FSJ* and an all-too-similar article by Undersecretary for Political Affairs U. Alexis Johnson, which the *Journal* published in July 1962, 45 years passed.

In 1962, it looked like counterinsurgency doctrine had a better future than it does now, even with the recent publication of a brand-new army field manual. As Sewall points out, the interagency process that would implement the new doctrine is stalled, and she recommends a high-level bipartisan commission to clarify when and why counterinsurgency serves the national interest. In 1962, such a high-level body existed; it was called the Special Group (Counterinsurgency) and included Robert Kennedy, Gen. Maxwell Taylor, Edward R. Murrow and Under Secretary Johnson.

After Vietnam, counterinsurgency fell into disfavor. The Weinberger and Powell Doctrines put up a political barrier to counterinsurgency and other military intervention. In 1987, seeing the need for better coordination in the low-intensity conflict spectrum after the disastrous 1980 attempted rescue of the Embassy Tehran hostages and the fumbling surrounding the 1983 Grenada operation, President Reagan signed a National Security Decision Directive that established a low-intensity conflict board.

Because of opposition from the Defense Department, very little came of that body, even though it included a senior DOD official named Richard Armitage. It is more than ironic that the 1990s campaign against the U.S. military participation in counterinsurgency and low-intensity conflict (in the Balkans) was led by Gen. Colin

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Powell, who later, as Secretary of State, opened the way to the invasion of Iraq, creating the need for the new counterinsurgency doctrine.

Sewall notes that the new field manual recognizes the primacy of politics, and rightly so. But politics can be intractable. As this is written, Ambassador Ryan Crocker, reflecting on the political impasse in Iraq, has told Congress, "I cannot guarantee success." In his 1962 *FSJ* article, Under Secretary Johnson wrote that it was difficult to persuade a government threatened by subversion or insurgency to take remedial measures toward reform: "This calls for the utmost skills of our profession for it is always a difficult task and sometimes an impossible one."

Sewall is appropriately realistic in pointing out the challenges ahead to

organize anew for a counterinsurgency doctrine. Although the U.S. government did organize a successful counterinsurgency strategy for the pacification of Vietnam, counterinsurgency doctrine barely survived the bitter memories of our eventual defeat. The disengagement strategies for Iraq seem to be equally bleak. Will counterinsurgency survive it?

*Alfred R. Barr*  
*FSO, retired*  
*Washington, D.C.*

### Modernize Hiring

Ludovic Hood's letter in your September issue, "The Case for Mid-Level Entry," was right on the money. From a human resources point of view, the current Foreign Service recruitment and promotion system is inefficient, not merit-based. It wastes a lot of

talent and management skills that could be put to work for the State Department and for America, right away.

The current system directs untended generalists to visa lines around the world for up to four years. While the department obtains a significant amount of revenue from visa application fees, that does not justify the current practice. Does the Department of Homeland Security staff airport passport control lines with Ph.D.-holders and lawyers? Other options do exist.

Similarly, at a time when the image of the United States is plummeting abroad, we recruit individuals with 10 years of press or public relations experience in the private sector only to stick them on the visa line for three years.

Further, being against mid-level

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recruitment merely perpetuates the “old boy” system and the flawed mentality that only years of corps service bring competence and success. We need to modernize and accept the changes in the U.S. labor market of the last 25 years, and AFSA should support efforts to do so.

*Ralph Falzone*  
FSO  
*Embassy Hanoi*

### Getting the Best

Ludovic Hood makes a well-reasoned and convincing argument for a mid-level FSO entry program in his September letter. Many other officers also feel that there is a lack of avenues and enticements available for talented acquaintances and schoolmates with a raft of professional experiences to enter the Foreign Service. The pleasure I took in seeing questions raised, often off-hours in print, was matched only by the shock of learning that AFSA has actually made it a policy to oppose any such program.

American diplomacy is sorely in need of the best minds and the best leaders possible. Now, more than ever before, government must compete with highly prestigious and well-compensated business and academic positions. The plain truth is that for successful investment bankers, think-tank advisers, lawyers or military personnel contemplating a new career in foreign affairs, the prospect of spending four years with no opportunity to take on the challenges for which you signed up, or responsibilities similar to those from where you came, is a non-starter.

New hires — the lifeblood of any organization — should be given reasons to join the Foreign Service, not disincentives. I would like very much to hear AFSA’s rebuttal to Hood’s persuasive case for instituting a mid-level entry program. It would

appear that only tenured, middle-level FSOs who could not compete with entrants from the private sector would have anything to fear from such a program.

Mid-level hiring worked for the Foreign Commercial Service. Why not for the State Department? At the very least, why not encourage the department to institute a fast-track program similar to that of the U.K.’s Foreign and Commonwealth Office, to seek out and aggressively promote talented and experienced newcomers? New management styles, ways of thinking and new skill sets, as well as the motivation that arises from competition, can always benefit an organization.

Corporations remain competitive by hiring the best within their field, as well as taking strong candidates from other fields. The Foreign Service would do well to emulate them. Congratulations to Mr. Hood for raising an issue essential to the future relevance of America’s professional diplomatic corps.

*Nick Snyder*  
FSO  
*Embassy Beijing*

### A Tragic Death in Afghanistan

On Oct. 4, Steven Thomas (Tom) Stefani was killed in an IED attack on the military convoy he was part of in Ghazni province, Afghanistan. I want to express to his family, friends and colleagues at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, as well as his co-workers in Afghanistan, my deepest sympathies and sorrow at their loss. To my knowledge, Tom has the unfortunate distinction of being the first U.S. government employee in a non-combat, non-drug interdiction, non-counterterrorism role killed in Afghanistan.

Tom was a USDA rangeland management specialist, who answered a call for assistance by his agency and

volunteered to serve in Afghanistan. I met him only briefly during my tour there (April 2006 through May 2007), but always found him to be committed to the task at hand, extremely professional and skilled. He was someone who got the job done, no matter what obstacles were placed in front of him.

USDA volunteers primarily serve as advisers to military commanders in the Provincial Reconstruction Teams, where development theory and civilian-military cooperation are being put into practice. Tom was based in Ghazni province, an increasingly hostile and dangerous place, but one where the need for development assistance is perhaps most acute. He lived, worked and played in conditions many can’t even imagine, let alone have the desire to experience.

Tom’s death is made even more unfortunate by the way it has been handled by USAID and the State Department. I only heard about it through the grapevine, two weeks after he was killed. After getting over my shock, I began to check around to see if I missed the announcement from USAID or State. When I checked both internal Web sites, I was dismayed to find no notice on the USAID site at all, and only a brief mention of Tom’s death by a State Department official during a routine daily press briefing. There was no statement from the Secretary of State, the acting USAID administrator or the ambassador. Only Acting Secretary of Agriculture Chuck Conner released a statement.

Although he was not an employee of either State or USAID, Tom, like the other USDA advisers serving in Afghanistan, was there under a Participating Agency Service Agreement between USAID and USDA. In Fiscal Year 2006 alone, an estimated \$1 million was transferred by USAID to

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USDA to help cover costs associated with staffing USDA personnel at the PRTs. This should not matter, however. Protocol about who releases a statement should have no agency limits, especially regarding the tragedy of a death in the service to one's country.

As someone who has served in Afghanistan, completing a 14-month tour only four months ago, I am troubled by the silence from State and USAID. The lack of acknowledgment of Tom's service diminishes the efforts of all those who have already answered the call, and the contributions, commitment and sacrifice of current U.S. government employees in Afghanistan.

Given this lack of support and acknowledgment from our leadership, it should come as no surprise

that it is becoming increasingly difficult to staff posts in places like Afghanistan. I am proud to have served there and would consider volunteering again. But I am no longer certain.

If the State Department, USAID and other agencies are serious about demonstrating support to those working in Afghanistan, Iraq and other critical-needs countries, a good start would be to recognize the service of *all* who serve, not just those sent by their home agency.

*Randy Chester*  
USAID FSO  
Embassy Sarajevo

*Editor's Note: Steven Thomas Stefani's name will be inscribed on the AFSA Memorial Plaques in the C Street Lobby of the Department of*

*State's Harry S Truman Building at the next Foreign Affairs Day commemoration on May 2, 2008. ■*

### Correction

We regret the errors in the entry for *Foreign Service Family*, the memoir by Harriet (Rita) Prince Parrish Youngquist and Eric V. Youngquist, on p. 31 of "In Their Own Write" in the November *Journal*. The cost of the book is \$21.00, and it can be ordered by writing to Managing Editor Nathaniel Kenton at Voyageur Publishing Co., 834 Lynnbrook Road, Nashville TN 37215.

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