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Self-appointed SecDef: How to clean house, fill a vacuum at DoD

By Terence J. Daly

The other day, I was with some friends and one of them issued the group a challenge: “Give me a strategy for what we do in Iraq , starting now. Two minutes for hand-wringing, then concrete action, please.”

So I appointed myself secretary of defense and I came up with the following.

1. Tomorrow at 8 a.m. , call a meeting of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Inform them that we are in a war for national survival, and we are losing today in Iraq and Afghanistan . Inform them that the Defense Department inspector general will monitor each service’s progress in prioritizing programs so that support to the fighters in the war zones comes first. The inspector general will brief me weekly at 7:30 a.m. Monday until I tell him to stop.
2. Tell each chairman and my personal staff that anyone in his position who doesn’t have problems isn’t doing his job. I require, however, that I hear about their problems first from the staff member — along with his recommended solutions. It will go hard for him if I learn about problems first from the media.
3. Advise those present that I have sent messages to the commanding generals of Central Command and Multi-National Force-Iraq thanking them for their many years of loyal service and informing them that they are being replaced. By close of business, each service chief will give me the names of two general officers or flag officers who understand counterinsurgency as replacements.
4. The two new commanders would be directed to have on my desk — 30 days from now — a one-page, five-paragraph field order, plus an annex stating personnel, training and equipment requirements, to:
 - Deny al-Qaida and other radical Islamist groups Iraq as a safe haven.
 - Restore U.S. credibility as a friend — and enemy — in the Middle East .
 - Guarantee that the flow of oil from Iraq to the world market continues and increases to its full potential.

I am giving them 30 days to get themselves and their staffs out of the green zone, away from the slick PowerPoint briefers, and learn what reality is on the ground.

5. Direct the Army chief of staff and the commandant of the Marine Corps to have on my desk at 8 a.m. a week from Monday plans to procure the personnel and equipment to stand up 1½ new Army active-duty divisions — with organic civil affairs, military police and military intelligence capabilities maximized for counterinsurgency — each year from fiscal 2007 to 2010, and one new Marine active-duty and one new Marine Corps Reserve division during that time.
6. A three-star general or flag officer from each service will identify talented mavericks, intelligent risk-takers and deep, unconventional thinkers in their service in every grade and protect them from being ground up by the careerist sausage machine.

A senior staff officer will review service publications to identify writers who merit promotion ahead of their contemporaries because of their courage, candor and fresh, creative ideas.

7. Finally, I would make sure deputies are fully briefed in case they need to replace the leaders.

Then I'd instruct my aide to block two hours twice a week for me to get out and walk around the Pentagon and talk to people, and two days (plus travel) each month to visit sites and units that need help or are in trouble. Briefing books would include suggestions for hard questions to ask and candid analysis of problem areas.