

General Petraeus Needs Time

By Peter Wehner The Wall Street Journal July 28, 2007



"This [Iraq] war is lost," Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid has stated emphatically and without qualification. "There's simply no evidence that the escalation is working," he said recently. It requires "blind hope, blind trust" to believe in progress of any sort.

Sen. Reid is now in the position of having to deny facts on the ground in order to sustain his bleak judgments. And his job is getting more difficult all the time.

Shiite death-squad activity and executions in Baghdad have significantly decreased since January. In Anbar Province and increasingly in Diyala Province, tribal sheikhs have turned against al Qaeda and are now siding with American and Iraqi Security Forces (these are examples of "bottom-up" political reconciliation for which we had been hoping). Attack levels in Anbar have reached a two-year low. Ramadi, once among the most dangerous cities in Iraq, is now dramatically safer. Violence in Fallujah has declined. Al Qaeda's networks and safe havens are being disrupted beyond anything we have seen before.

Since the start of the year, Baqubah, al Qaim, Haditha, Hit, Ramadi, Habbaniya, Fallujah, Abu Ghraib, and Arab Jabour have all been liberated from al Qaeda control. Arms caches are being found at more than three times the rate of a year ago. Intelligence tips are sharply up. We are also seeing signs of normalcy return to Baghdad, including soccer leagues, amusement parks and vibrant market places. More than half of Baghdad is now under the control of coalition or Iraqi Security Forces.

"We have achieved . . . a reasonable degree of tactical momentum on the ground," according to Gen. David Petraeus, the commander of U.S. forces in Iraq. "Gains against the principal near-term threat, al Qaeda-Iraq, and also gains against what is another near-term threat, and also potentially the long-term threat, Shia militia extremists as well." About al Qaeda in Iraq, the cautious Gen. Petraeus said this: "We think that we have them off plan."

The surge in operations -- as opposed to simply the surge in forces -- is just beginning. Operation Phantom Thunder, the largest multiphase operation since 2003, began on June 15.

None of this means success is preordained or the gains we have seen are irreversible. It is an exceedingly tough endeavor. Iraq remains a dangerous and violent nation, and al Qaeda in Iraq will try to make it more so in the coming months, in order to influence the American political process. Sectarian splits remain deep, and deeply problematic. Political progress is slower than anyone wants.

It's possible that the U.S. offensive will falter, that the enemy will adjust to our tactics or that Iraqi society is just too fractured to be rebuilt. But in terms of security, we are in significantly better shape than we were six months ago, and the trajectory of events is positive.

What, then, explains the fact that some critics of the war are unwilling to hear good news of any sort -- and get visibly agitated and disdainful when we see (and cite) signs of progress? Why won't they acknowledge empirical evidence of progress by the American military? And why are some critics of the war frantically attempting to make a final judgment on the war even before Gen. Petraeus and Ambassador Ryan Crocker provide their assessment in September?

It is as if some critics of the new strategy have decided that the war shouldn't have been fought, cannot be won, and therefore defeat is now written in the stars -- and since surrender will eventually happen, let's get on with it.

This is, to put it mildly, a curious position to adopt, particularly given the stakes of this struggle and all that might happen in the aftermath of an American defeat. Whether we like it or not, al Qaeda has made Iraq a central battlefield in their jihadist campaign.

In the words of Ayman al-Zawahiri, al Qaeda's ideological leader, Iraq "is now the place for the greatest battle of Islam in this era." Just a few weeks ago, in a taped message, al-Zawahiri urged Muslims to "hurry to Iraq." It's reasonable to assume he wasn't recommending it because he thinks it's a world-class tourist attraction.

The critics of the war know, deep in their bones, that an American retreat may well lead to ethnic cleansing and genocide, massive refugee flows and regional destabilization, spreading civil war between Shiites and Sunnis, creating a new safe haven for terrorists and giving an enormous psychological victory for America's enemies, from Iran to Syria to al Qaeda.

In the current issue of Commentary, Gal Luft and Anne Korin of the Institute for the Analysis of Global Security put it this way: "Iraq [is] the current vortex of both regional and inter-denominational strife. A decent resolution of that conflict will hasten the reform and modernization of other nations, Sunni and Shiite alike. If our project there fails, whether from Arab indifference and incapacity or a lack of Western resolve, the resulting civil war could feed the flames of both intra- and extra-Islamic conflict on a global scale."

To repeat, then: Why the rush to declare the war irretrievably lost, when doing so requires one to be deaf and blind to what is now unfolding on the ground? Why, given the importance of this struggle, are so many critics of the war unwilling to support, or even wait to hear from, Gen. Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker in September?

Perhaps this attitude is rooted in war weariness. The Iraq war has been a long and difficult struggle. Mistakes and misjudgments have been made, false summits have dashed early hopes, and more than 3,600 American military lives have been lost, causing unspeakable grief for families and friends of the fallen. Yet tragically, more often than not, this is the nature of war, which involves unexpected costs and awful sacrifices.

There comes a point in many wars, maybe in most wars, where the single most important issue is whether a nation can summon the resolve and courage to see a good cause through to the end. We are now at that point in the Iraq war. We have in place the right team, pursuing the right strategy. The thing Gen. Petraeus needs above all else, he says, is time.

The American political class can give him that time, if it chooses. We are not passive actors in this clash of force and wills, and defeat is not fated. We can still shape the outcome of the war, and with it, the future of the Middle East.

In the past this nation, in the face of great challenges and hardships, worn and weary, has ridden out the storm of war. In so doing, tyrannies have fallen, captives have been set free, and history has honored America's sacrifice and its role in building a more hopeful world. It will do so again, if we can, one more time, summon the will.

Mr. Wehner is deputy assistant to the president and director of the White House's Office of Strategic Initiatives.

JOB OPENING

Dr. Jun Hu of Akron University has asked me to help him spread the news that his Chemistry Department is searching for Asian Graduate Students.

The tuition is free and the students will receive a stipend around 17K annually. He told me that the University will handle all the paper work if the students meet their criteria for admission.

People could contact Dr. Hu directly: jhu@uakron.edu. He told me that: We would like to have students with a TOEFL score about 600 (graduate school require 550) and a BS degree in chemistry. He gives me the link below. <http://www.uakron.edu>

Dr. Stephen Cheng named dean of the College of Polymer Science and Polymer Engineering

After a national search, Dr. Stephen Z.D. Cheng has been named dean of the University's esteemed College of Polymer Science and Polymer Engineering. He will be the college's second dean. The first, Dr. Frank N. Kelley, served as dean from the college's inception in 1988 to last year, when he retired.

Cheng is well known on the Akron campus, having joined the University in 1987 as assistant professor of polymer science. He was promoted to associate professor in 1991 and to full professor in 1995. He was named the Trustees Professor of Polymer Science in 1998 and the Robert C. Musson Professor of Polymer Science in 2001.

"Dr. Cheng's work is admired around the world," said Dr. Elizabeth Stroble, senior vice president and provost of chief operating officer. "He is a gifted researcher and a talented teacher. He understands the polymer industry and what the industry seeks from our graduates. He is an excellent choice to build upon the significant accomplishments of Dr. Kelley, and I look forward to working with him as this College and this University lead next generation work in polymer science and polymer engineering."

Dr. George Haritos, dean of the College of Engineering, served as the chair of the search committee. "We had more than 60 applicants for the position, with vitas coming in from across the world," Haritos said. "A high number of the applicants were exceptionally well qualified, but Dr. Cheng stood out. He is an accomplished scientist, a natural collaborator and an able leader who has a well-defined and achievable vision for the college. He will serve students well."



Cheng earned a bachelor's degree in mathematics from East China Normal University, a master's in polymer engineering from Donghua University in Shanghai, and a Ph. D. in polymer chemistry from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, N.Y.

A prolific researcher, Cheng has authored more than 300 journal articles and drawn more than \$18 million in research funding, often from highly competitive sources. His research interests are centered on polymers, liquid crystals, surfactants and micelles.

Cheng's honors and awards include: a Presidential Young Investigator Award from the National Science Foundation and the White House,

a John H. Dillon Medal from the Division of Polymer Physics of the American Physical Society,

a Cooperative Research Award from the Division of Polymer Materials Science and Engineering of the American Chemical Society, and

a TA-Instrument Award from the International Confederation for Thermal Analysis and Calorimetry.

He has been named a society fellow by both the American Physical Society and American Association for the Advancement of Science. Cheng serves as a senior editor of Polymer and as a member of the editorial or advisory boards of nine other international journals.

Last summer, the University of Akron celebrated the 50th anniversary of the awarding of its first doctoral degree in polymer chemistry. The celebration was the first of several events that served to salute the many contributions that Frank Kelley made to the University and the polymer industry.

NEED YOUR HELP

I am the Volunteer Coordinator at WVIZ/PBS, and the reason for my contact is to see if some members of the Organization of Chinese Americans of Greater Cleveland would be interested in volunteering during our station's next membership pledge drive in August. We will be airing a program called "12 Girls Band: Live from Shanghai," so I thought there might be some interest.

We need 20 volunteers, though your group doesn't need to commit to bringing all 20. We'd love to have help from anyone who is available. Also, we would be happy to recognize and thank your organization on the air for supporting us by organizing volunteers.

We will be airing this program on Thursday,

August 9. Volunteers would be needed from 7 - 10:30pm. This includes training time, and also help with a second program that will follow the 12 Girls Band program.

Parking for our volunteers is free, and we plan to have sandwiches and snacks for them to eat.

Please let me know your thoughts on this. I'd be happy to answer any questions you have! You can reply to my email, or reach me by phone. Thanks!

Maggie Gibson
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Volunteer Coordinator
WVIZ/PBS and 90.3 WCPN ideastream
(216) 916-6156; (216) 916-6157 Fax

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