

TRANSCRIPT:

General Petraeus on the Way Ahead in Iraq

The following is a transcript of General David H. Petraeus's opening statement before a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing on his nomination to be the commander of Multi-National Force-Iraq. At this critical point in the war, and with General Petraeus about to preside over a new strategy, the editors of Military Review deem it important that this assessment be given widest dissemination.



GEN. PETRAEUS: Mr. Chairman, Senator McCain, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you. I'd like to begin this morning by briefly reviewing the situation in Iraq, explaining the change in focus of the new strategy and discussing the way ahead. This statement is a bit longer than usual, but as I discussed with you last week, Mr. Chairman, I believe it is important that the committee hear it, and I appreciate the opportunity to present it.

The situation in Iraq has deteriorated significantly since the bombing this past February of the Al-Askari Mosque in Samarra, the third-holiest Shi'a Islamic shrine.

The increase in the level of violence since then, fueled by the insurgent and sectarian fighting that spiraled in the wake of the bombing, has made progress in Iraq very difficult and created particularly challenging dynamics in the capital city of Baghdad.

Indeed, many Iraqis in Baghdad today confront life-or-death, stay-or-leave decisions on a daily basis. They take risks incalculable to us just to get to work, to educate their children, and to feed their families.

In this environment, Iraq's new government, its fourth in three and a half years, has found it difficult to gain traction. Though disappointing, this should not be a surprise. We should recall that after the liberation of Iraq in 2003, every governmental institution in the country collapsed. A society already traumatized by decades of Saddam's brutal rule was thrown into complete turmoil, and the effects are still evident throughout the country and in Iraqi society.

Iraq and its new government have been challenged by insurgents, international terrorists, sectarian militias, regional meddling, violent criminals, governmental dysfunction, and corruption. Iraq's security forces and new governmental institutions have struggled in this increasingly threatening environment, and the elections that gave us such hope actually intensified sectarian divisions in the population at the expense of the sense of Iraqi identity. In this exceedingly difficult situation, it has proven very hard for the new

PHOTO: LTG David Petraeus testifies on Capitol Hill in Washington, 23 January 2007, before the Senate Armed Services Committee's confirmation hearing on his nomination to command multinational forces in Iraq. (AP Photo/Dennis Cook)

government to develop capacity and to address the issues that must be resolved to enable progress.

The escalation of violence in 2006 undermined the coalition strategy and raised the prospect of a failed Iraqi state, an outcome that would be in no group's interest save that of certain extremist organizations and perhaps states in the region that wish Iraq and the United States ill. In truth, no one can predict the impact of a failed Iraq on regional stability, the international economy, the global war on terror, America's standing in the world, and the lives of the Iraqi people.

In response to the deterioration of the situation in Iraq, a new way ahead was developed and announced earlier this month. With implementation of this approach, the mission of Multi-National Force-Iraq will be modified, making security of the population, particularly in Baghdad, and in partnership with Iraqi forces, the focus of the military effort.

For a military commander, the term "secure" is a clearly defined doctrinal task, meaning to gain control of an area or terrain feature and to protect it from the enemy. Thus, the tasks will be clear-cut, though difficult. Certainly upcoming operations will be carried out in full partnership with Iraqi forces, with them in the lead whenever possible and within arm's length when that is not possible. Transition of Iraqi forces and provinces to Iraqi control will continue to feature prominently in the coalition plan, and as recommended by the Iraq Study Group, the advisor effort will be substantially reinforced.

The primacy of population security in the capital will mean a greater focus on that task, particularly in the most threatened neighborhoods. This will, of course, require that our unit commanders and their Iraqi counterparts develop a detailed appreciation of the areas in which they will operate, recognizing that they may face a combination of Sunni insurgents, international terrorists, sectarian militias and violent criminals.

Together with Iraqi forces, a persistent presence in these neighborhoods will be essential. Different approaches will be required in different locations. Whatever the approach, though, the objective will be to achieve sufficient security to provide the space and time for the Iraqi government to come to grips with the tough decisions its members must make to enable Iraq to move forward. In short, it is not just that there will be additional forces in Baghdad, it is what they will do and how they will do it that is important.

Some of the members of this committee have observed that there is no military solution to the problems of Iraq. They are correct. Ultimate success in Iraq will be determined by actions in the Iraqi political and economic arenas on such central issues as governance, the amount of power devolved to the provinces and possibly regions, the distribution of oil revenues, national reconciliation and resolution of sectarian differences, and so on. Success will also depend on improvements in the capacity of Iraq's ministries, in the provision of basic services, in the establishment of the rule of law, and in economic development.

It is, however, exceedingly difficult for the Iraqi Government to come to grips with the toughest issues it must resolve while survival is the primary concern of so many in Iraq's capital. For this reason, military action to improve security, while not wholly sufficient to solve Iraq's problems, is certainly necessary. And that is why additional U.S. and Iraqi forces are moving to Baghdad.

The way ahead is designed to be a comprehensive approach. Indeed, the objectives of helping Iraqis increase the capacity of their governmental institutions, putting Iraq's unemployed to work, and improving the lot and life of Iraqi citizens requires additional resources, many of which will be Iraqi. In carrying out the non-kinetic elements of this strategy, however, our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, and civilians downrange must get all the help they can from all the agencies of our government. There is a plan to increase that assistance, and it is hugely important. This clearly is the time for the leaders of all our governmental departments to ask how their agencies can contribute to the endeavor in Iraq, and to provide all the assistance that they can.

Our military is making an enormous commitment in Iraq. We need the rest of the departments to do likewise, to help the Iraqi Government get

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the country and its citizens working, and to use Iraq's substantial oil revenues for the benefit of all the Iraqi people.

Having described the general approach, I would like to offer a word on expectations. It will take time for the additional forces to flow to Iraq, time for them to gain an understanding of the areas in which they will operate, time to plan with and get to know their Iraqi partners, time to set conditions for the successful conduct of security operations, and of course time to conduct those operations and then to build on what they achieve.

None of this will be rapid. In fact, the way ahead will be neither quick nor easy, and there undoubtedly will be tough days. We face a determined, adaptable, barbaric enemy. He will try to wait us out. In fact, any such endeavor is a test of wills, and there are no guarantees.

The only assurance I can give you is that if confirmed, I will provide Multi-National Force-Iraq the best leadership and direction I can muster; I will work to ensure unity of effort with the ambassador and our Iraqi and coalition partners; and I will provide my bosses and you with forthright, professional military advice with respect to the missions given to Multi-National Force-Iraq and the situation on the ground in Iraq.

In that regard, I would welcome opportunities to provide periodic updates to this body. Beyond that, I want to assure you that should I determine that the new strategy cannot succeed, I will provide such an assessment.

If confirmed, this assignment will be my fourth year or longer of deployment since the summer of 2001, three of those to Iraq. My family and I understand what our country has asked of its men and women in uniform, and of their families, since 9/11.

In fact, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the American people for their wonderful support in recent years of our men and women in uniform. Tom Brokaw observed to me one day in northern Iraq that those who have served our nation since 9/11 comprise the new "Greatest Generation." I agree strongly with that observation, and I know the members of this committee do too.

Over the past 15 months, I have been privileged to oversee the organizations that educate our Army's leaders, draft our doctrine, capture lessons learned and help our units prepare for deployment. This

assignment has provided me a keen awareness of what we've asked of our Soldiers and of their families. In view of that, I applaud the recent announcement to expand our country's ground forces. Our ongoing endeavors in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere are people-intensive, and it is heartening to know that there will be more Soldiers and Marines to shoulder the load.

I recognize that deploying more forces to Iraq runs counter to efforts to increase the time at home for our troops between deployments. I share concerns about that. However, if we are to carry out the Multi-National Force-Iraq mission in accordance with the new strategy, the additional forces that have been directed to move to Iraq will be essential, as will, again, greatly increased support by our government's other agencies, additional resources for reconstruction and economic initiatives, and a number of other actions critical to what must be a broad, comprehensive, multifaceted approach to the challenges in Iraq.

Many of the emails I've received in recent weeks have had as their subject line "Congratulations—I think." I understand the message they are conveying. I know how heavy a rucksack I will have to shoulder in Iraq if confirmed. I am willing to take on the position for which I have been nominated because I believe in serving one's Nation when asked; because I regard it as a distinct honor to be able to soldier again with those who are part of the brotherhood of the close fight; and because I feel an obligation to help the shab el-Iraqi, the people of Iraq, the vast majority of whom have the same desires of people the world over: security for themselves and their loved ones, satisfaction of their basic needs, and an opportunity to better their life.

In closing, the situation in Iraq is dire. The stakes are high. There are no easy choices. The way ahead will be very hard. Progress will require determination and difficult U.S. and Iraqi actions, especially the latter, as ultimately the outcome will be determined by the Iraqis. But hard is not hopeless, and if confirmed, I pledge to do my utmost to lead our wonderful men and women in uniform and those of our coalition partners in Iraq as we endeavor to help the Iraqis make the most of the opportunity our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines have given to them.

Thank you very much. **MR**