



CASE STUDY

Industrial College of the Armed Forces
National Defense University

The Surge

General Petraeus and the Turnaround in Iraq

by William A. Knowlton, Jr.



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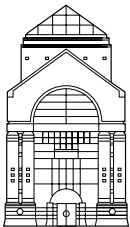
General David H. Petraeus speaks with Iraqi army general while touring a market in Abu Ghraib, Iraq, August 2, 2008 (Charles W. Gill)

**The Surge:
General Petraeus and the Turnaround in Iraq**

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by William A. Knowlton, Jr.

*Industrial College of the Armed Forces
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When General David H. Petraeus, USA, took command of Multi-National Force–Iraq (MNF–I) on February 10, 2007, beginning his 3^d tour and 28th month in Iraq, the situation was grim. Increasing sectarian violence had led to an escalation of killings of civilians in Iraq, with up to 150 corpses being found daily in Baghdad.¹ The government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki was viewed by almost everyone as ineffective at best, and the U.S. military strategy was not well defined and clearly not working. Iraq appeared to be sliding out of control toward civil war or disintegration, and the United States appeared to be headed inexorably toward defeat—another Vietnam. Popular sentiment held that the best course of action was to cut our losses and disengage from a fight we were losing. General George Casey, USA, the outgoing commander of MNF–I, had supported a gradual drawdown of U.S. forces and a handoff of security tasks to Iraqi forces even as the situation got worse.²

Yet by the time General Petraeus turned over command of MNF–I to General Ray Odierno in September of 2008 and took command of U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM), he had achieved a turnaround in Iraq that seemed almost miraculous. How did he lead “the surge” that achieved successes that were unimaginable 19 months before? How did he succeed when his predecessors failed? Answering these questions requires first examining General Petraeus himself, then looking at what he did between February 2007 and September 2008.

The General

It is common knowledge that General Petraeus is an atypical military officer and that he has had an unusual career in the Army since graduating from West Point in 1974. Without going into the details and chronology of that career, it is worth noting some highlights that made him stand out from his peers. First was his unequalled record of success in whatever he has done. Examples are his winning all three leadership awards in his class at the U.S. Army Ranger School, arguably the toughest training the Army has to offer; his top-ranking in his class at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, even though he was one of the most junior officers in the class; and his completion of both a Masters in Public Administration and a Ph.D. in international relations from the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University.

Second was working directly for and learning from some of the Army’s best strategic leaders. These assignments included being the aide to General John Galvin when the general commanded the 24th Infantry Division at Fort Stewart, Georgia, and then working for him again when he was the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Supreme Allied Commander, Europe (SACEUR). He also acted as aide to General Carl Vuono when the general was Chief

of Staff of the Army and executive assistant to General Henry (Hugh) Shelton when he was the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Third were the key assignments he had involving counterinsurgency operations. These included a year as the Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations of the NATO Stabilization Force and Deputy Commander of the U.S. Joint Counter-Terrorism Task Force–Bosnia; a year commanding the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) engaged in combat and counterinsurgency operations in Iraq during the first year of Operation *Iraqi Freedom*; and 15 months as the first Commander of the Multi-National Security Transition Command–Iraq and the NATO Training Mission–Iraq.³ General Petraeus also found two other assignments quite valuable: a summer in Central America in 1986 while he was working for General Galvin, during which the United States was supporting the Salvadoran government’s counterinsurgency operations, and 6 months in 1995 as Chief of Operations of the United Nations (UN) Force in Haiti.⁴

What makes General Petraeus unusual is that he has demonstrated exceptional performance in the troop-leading arena, achieved an equal level of success in the academic realm, had an almost unparalleled opportunity to serve directly for senior leaders in the strategic environment (another officer who shares that distinction is General Colin Powell), and gathered extensive experience in counterinsurgency operations, including his two tours in Iraq prior to assuming command of MNF–I. Finally, immediately before General Petraeus took command of MNF–I, he “commanded the U.S. Army Combined Arms Center and Fort Leavenworth, during which time he oversaw the development of the Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual.”⁵

What further makes General Petraeus unusual are his personal characteristics. He has been described as “the most competitive man on the planet.”⁶ He drives himself to succeed at every endeavor, and he usually manages to best everyone else. That competitiveness is evident in physical fitness. The general maintains an extremely high level of fitness, reveling in running Soldiers half his age into the ground, and beating them in push-up or sit-up contests. When asked how many push-ups, sit-ups, or ankles-to-the-bar he can do, his usual response is, “One more than you!”⁷ Twice, he had serious accidents: first, he was accidentally shot in the chest by a Soldier during a live-fire training exercise, and second, he broke his pelvis in multiple places in a skydiving accident. In both cases, he demonstrated incredible recuperative powers, returning to full activity much earlier than anticipated.⁸

General Petraeus also has a high level of strategic thinking skills developed and honed by the strategic leaders he has served as well as his broadening experiences at Princeton. He has described his time there as the most important developmental years of his career because of his

exposure to an environment where most people thought differently than he did. It broadened his perspective and helped him better get outside his preferred frame of reference.⁹

Finally, General Petraeus is not afraid to take prudent risks. Two examples illustrate this characteristic. The first was when he took command of the 101st Airborne Division at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, and was preparing the division to deploy to Iraq. Knowing that the deployment order was imminent and that he would have difficulty getting the division's equipment, particularly its helicopters, to the port of embarkation on time if he waited for the order, on his own initiative he sent all of the division's helicopters on a "cross-country training exercise" that just happened to terminate in Jacksonville, Florida, their point of departure. He also did a rail load-out exercise for the lead brigade at Fort Campbell, got the port in Jacksonville opened, and started shrink-wrapping his helicopters, all as part of the "exercise." When the deployment order came down from the Secretary of Defense through U.S. Forces Command (FORSCOM) a few days later with a seemingly impossible deployment date (as he had anticipated), he was able to report to the surprised FORSCOM commander that he would meet his deployment deadlines without any difficulty since his helicopters were already at the port and being prepared for shipment.¹⁰ General Petraeus's decision to send his helicopters to Jacksonville on his own authority was risky and illustrated his mantra: "In the absence of guidance or orders, figure out what they should have been and execute accordingly."¹¹

The second example of General Petraeus's willingness to take risks is recounted in a case study written at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard entitled "The Accidental Statesman: General Petraeus and the City of Mosul, Iraq." The case study focuses on his time in Iraq as the Commanding General of the 101st Airborne Division when he was in charge of all of northern Iraq. General Petraeus realized that restarting the economy there would require resuming trade with neighboring states, notably Syria. However, there was a UN embargo on Iraq and trade with Syria was opposed by the U.S. Government and Congress because Syria was perceived as "hostile to U.S. interests."¹² Also, there was no time to wait for the Department of State to get personnel on the ground in Mosul to negotiate opening the border. A statement from General Petraeus quoted in the case study illustrates his attitude: "You have to jump through windows of opportunity and exploit windows of opportunity while they're open, and not study them until they start to close, and then you try to wriggle through and force them back open."¹³

General Petraeus was determined to jump through this window of opportunity. Realizing he did not have the authority to negotiate an agreement with Syria or between Syria and Iraq, he arranged for his military lawyers to advise him. What they recommended was to unilaterally reopen the Iraqi side of the border, an action they believed he had the authority to execute. His

Staff Judge Advocate, the division's senior lawyer, later stated, "The decision was made that we'll tell [our higher headquarters that we are opening the border], but we won't ask permission and we certainly won't wait for the State Department to get in here and figure it out.' Petraeus kept [his higher headquarters] fully informed—but he also took the initiative."¹⁴

Taking Command

When General Petraeus returned to Iraq in February 2007, he was widely believed to be taking on a hopeless mission. Linda Robinson characterizes that view when she writes that "the president had asked him to rescue a failing war."¹⁵ Few believed that he would be able to effect such a rescue. When the general arrived back in Iraq, 2,000 to 3,000 people were being killed a month, many by sectarian violence.¹⁶ General Petraeus was shocked by how much the situation had deteriorated in the year and a half since he left the country. According to Robinson, for "months afterward, he referred to Iraq's 'torn social fabric,' and pondered whether it was too late to repair it."¹⁷ Despite his doubts, General Petraeus hit the ground running.

One of the first impacts General Petraeus had was on the tempo of operations in MNF-I. Wherever he took command, the pace seemed to noticeably pick up, and MNF-I was no exception. Part of the change in tempo was due to his high personal energy level—he tends to infuse an organization with energy. That is no accident, as General Petraeus believes energizing others is one of a commander's mandates.¹⁸ He wants to make things happen, and happen rapidly. One of his challenges, in fact, is not to move too fast but to take time for reflection when making important decisions.¹⁹ In MNF-I, the more rapid pace was immediately apparent in the daily "battlefield update assessment," a briefing for the general and the MNF-I staff and senior commanders that involved a classified intelligence assessment and that guided daily operations and priorities. This briefing was attended by some MNF-I staff and commanders and broadcast to others throughout Iraq by secure video teleconference (VTC). General Petraeus used this daily briefing both to get himself rapidly up to speed and to make his influence felt in guiding and directing what was going on throughout Iraq.²⁰

One example of General Petraeus's personal impact was the case of the notorious Tower 57, a damaged electrical power tower that had been inoperable for months. When the status of Tower 57 was briefed at one of his first daily assessments, instead of letting it go by without comment as had happened in the past, General Petraeus stopped the briefing and asked why it had been inoperable for so long. The reply was that it could not be repaired because it was in an unsecure area with a high threat of terrorist attack. The general's reaction was that he could not control many things, but one thing he could do was to ensure adequate security for Tower 57.

Once security was improved, it finally took a letter to Prime Minister Maliki to prod the Iraqi electrical ministry into action, but Tower 57 eventually came back online. The effect on the MNF-I staff was significant. With that one action, General Petraeus demonstrated that it was not “business as usual” and that he would not be satisfied with people telling him why something could not be done; he expected his subordinates to tell him how they were making things happen and solving problems, and he would not let up until the problem was solved. At the briefing when Tower 57’s status was finally reported as online and operational, cheers could be heard from the staff listening to the briefing via VTC.²¹

General Petraeus believed in establishing as flat an organization as he could and in using a hands-off leadership approach. Early on, he told subordinates, “I don’t need to be hierarchical. . . . I want to flatten organizations. I’m comfortable with a slightly chaotic environment. I know that it’s okay if some of you get out ahead of us . . . we will catch up with [you].” One of his staff amplified: “A lot of [leadership] is about intent, about setting parameters, and an incredible decentralization.”²² Thomas Ricks commented in his book on a related aspect of Petraeus’s leadership:

*Petraeus adopted a posture of much lowered expectations, and as was his wont, set the tone for his entire command. One of his most striking characteristics is his ability to discern and evaluate the reality of events. That isn’t as easy as it sounds, and it is especially difficult to pick out reality through the fog of war. The first and foremost task of a commander is to understand, with a steady head, the nature of the conflict in which he is engaged. In order to achieve that understanding a commander can be neither overly optimistic nor pessimistic, and especially, not subject to McClellanesque mood swings, seeing every minor victory as a triumph and every partial setback as disaster.*²³

In this case, Petraeus’s job in setting expectations was particularly difficult because some members of his command thought the fight in Iraq was already lost. As retired Army General Jack Keane stated, “I was amazed with what Petraeus did. He took over a command with a sense of futility and hopelessness about it and almost overnight he changed the attitude and he brought them hope and a sense that we can do this, we can succeed at this.”²⁴

General Petraeus maintained a grueling daily schedule, often spending all day out visiting units, getting a first-hand look at conditions, and making his presence felt. He is known for his remarkable ability to respond to hundreds of emails a day. Often, someone sends General Petraeus an email, and no matter the time of day or night and what time zone he is in, he responds quickly,

sometimes within minutes. His public affairs officer commented, “He is more accessible than any general in the army. . . . He will respond to anyone from an E-2 [a private] to a three star.”²⁵

One of the keys to his ability to deal with incredible amounts of information and make sense of what goes on in his environment is his personal staff. Petraeus has been described as a “collector of intellectuals.”²⁶ Members of his personal staff in Iraq were handpicked, and they were an impressive group that included officers who were Rhodes scholars, had doctorates, or were at the top of their West Point classes. Among them were Colonel Pete Mansoor, his executive officer and chief of staff; Colonel Bill Rapp, the head of Petraeus’s Commander’s Initiatives Group; Colonel Mark Martins, his staff legal advisor; and Major Everett Spain, his aide. These four individuals and others on Petraeus’s personal staff were critical to allowing Petraeus to do all he did.

Mansoor was Petraeus’s link to the MNF-I staff and monitored who got access to Petraeus as well as orchestrating the flow of information and documents in and out of the general’s office. Spain ensured that the logistics of Petraeus’s incredibly busy schedule were fully coordinated and, like all good aides, tried to anticipate what his boss would need before he asked. Spain often had the opportunity to discuss issues with Petraeus on morning runs, and Petraeus developed the close relationship with Spain that he himself had with General Galvin as his aide.²⁷ Martins gave Petraeus legal advice on a wide range of issues, going well beyond the normal functions of a staff judge advocate. Rapp served as Petraeus’s “extended memory” and provided a second set of eyes and ears, accompanying him everywhere, staying in the background, and watching and listening. Most importantly, these officers served as Petraeus’s sounding board. They gave him a set of intellectually gifted individuals who understood how he thought. He could bounce ideas off them, and they would give him honest feedback on those ideas.²⁸

General Petraeus also benefited from a first-rate set of subordinate commanders and senior advisers. Chief among these was British Lieutenant General Graeme Lamb, his deputy commanding general, whose experience in counterinsurgency went back to tours in Northern Ireland fighting the Irish Republican Army. Lamb was on good terms with many key Iraqi players and provided Petraeus both with recent first-hand experience in Iraq and a long-term historical perspective on counterinsurgency. Other key subordinates included Lieutenant General Stanley McChrystal, heading up most special mission unit forces in Iraq, and Lieutenant General Odierno, commander of the Multi-National Corps-Iraq, who was Petraeus’s principal deputy for ground operations.²⁹

The final key element of Petraeus’s leadership group was the Joint Strategic Assessment Team (JSAT). Led by Colonel H.R. McMaster, another brilliant and unconventional thinker, and including David Kilcullen, an Australian counterinsurgency expert, this team augmented

Petraeus's personal staff in serving as an external sounding board for his ideas, conducting an in-depth analysis and evaluation of the situation in Iraq, and drafting recommendations to serve as the basis for the development of Petraeus's campaign plan (they would complete their study in late April 2007—General Petraeus recalls he let it drag to buy time).³⁰ In effect, the JSAT served as Petraeus's "brain trust."³¹

It is worth commenting specifically on the relationship between Generals Petraeus and Odierno. Both had commanded divisions in Iraq in 2003–2004 with very different leadership styles. Petraeus got favorable notice for his unconventional and successful leadership in northern Iraq; Odierno got some unfavorable attention for what were perceived as overly aggressive tactics in his area of operations. Some believed these differences in leadership styles would lead to friction between them when Petraeus took over MNF–I and became Odierno's boss. However, by most accounts, they worked together well, and General Odierno completely supported Petraeus's counterinsurgency strategy and doctrine.³²

The Military Strategy

The first major strategic decision that General Petraeus had to make was how to most effectively employ U.S. forces already in Iraq and the additional forces arriving as part of the surge. Petraeus was helped by the work that General Odierno had already done in starting to implement a surge strategy, and Odierno viewed the employment of U.S. forces much as Petraeus did.³³ Early in the strategic development process, Petraeus rejected a recommendation to use additional U.S. forces to strengthen the advisory teams embedded with the Iraqi forces. Rather, he opted to increase the pace and number of U.S. military combat operations.

Part of his rationale for this choice was the assessment that Iraqi forces were not yet capable of leading the fight despite the years of investment in their development and training, an effort General Petraeus himself had directed in 2004–2005. Two other decisions about the employment of U.S. forces had to be made: how to allocate them between Baghdad and the rest of the country, and how to allocate them between directly attacking the insurgents (using that term to cover a wide range of groups) and providing security for the Iraqi people. Although the primary thrust of military operations was fighting the insurgents in Baghdad, General Odierno advocated expanding the fight to the areas surrounding the city, arguing that limiting the fight to Baghdad would allow the insurgents a "safe haven" where they could build up their forces to attack Baghdad, much as Cambodia provided such a sanctuary for the North Vietnamese army during much of the Vietnam War. Petraeus accepted Odierno's recommendation and divided his forces between Baghdad and the surrounding area.³⁴

The decision of whether to take an “enemy-centric” or a “population-centric” approach was one of the most important and difficult decisions General Petraeus had to make.³⁵ The general has long believed in “big ideas . . . the right intellectual constructs to guide one’s approach or strategy.” In his words, “strategic leadership is fundamentally about big ideas and about four tasks connected with those big ideas: first, getting the big ideas right; second, communicating them effectively; third, ensuring that they are executed properly; and fourth, capturing, sharing, and institutionalizing lessons learned and best practices identified during the execution of those big ideas.”³⁶

The most important big idea that guided his strategy in Iraq was that securing the Iraqi population must be preeminent—that without security for the population, military operations against insurgents would bring only temporary gains at best. General Odierno agreed, recommending to Petraeus that their top priority be to “secure the Iraqi people, with a focus on Baghdad.”³⁷ As the commander of the newly formed Multi-National Division–Baghdad (MND–B) stated, “We are very good at clearing areas, but that does not count for anything unless you hold it afterwards.”³⁸ General Petraeus recognized that unless U.S. or Iraqi forces could hold and retain cleared areas, they could not secure the population and insurgents would just move back into areas after the coalition forces moved on.

The implementation of this big idea—securing the population—was through the Baghdad security plan, which had been formulated and begun to be implemented before General Petraeus returned to Iraq, although it was not formally launched until after he took command in February 2007.³⁹ The author of this plan was Lieutenant Colonel Doug Ollivant, the MND–B chief of plans. Ollivant was a graduate of the School of Advanced Military Studies at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College and was another of the Army’s innovative thinkers. He had published an article in 2006 in *Military Review*, which caught the eye of General Petraeus and other senior leaders. In this article, Ollivant made the case that “the combined arms maneuver battalion, partnering with indigenous security forces and living among the population it secures, should be the basic tactical unit of counterinsurgency warfare.”⁴⁰ Ollivant was now getting the opportunity to put his ideas into practice in Baghdad. (It is worth commenting on General Petraeus’s interaction with Colonel Ollivant. Well aware of Ollivant’s *Military Review* article and that Ollivant was working on the Baghdad security plan, which would implement the ideas expressed in his article, Petraeus bypassed the layers of command between himself and Ollivant and contacted him directly by email. The resulting dialogue enabled Petraeus to tap directly into Ollivant’s thinking and also made Ollivant realize that his views mattered and that as a midlevel staff officer he could have a strategic impact far beyond his rank.)⁴¹

A key part of the plan was the necessity for the military force to get out of the large base camps.⁴² As General Petraeus put it:

*[We] realized we couldn't adequately secure the people by commuting to the fight. We had to live among the people we were going to secure. Thus we embarked on the construction of dozens of joint security stations and combat outposts in the midst of Iraqi communities, where our troopers, along with Iraqi security forces, were based and from which they performed their tasks—eventually establishing 77 such locations just in the Baghdad area alone. This entailed risk initially, of course, as establishing outposts in tough areas was clearly an action the enemy would fight to prevent, as it reduced his freedom of maneuver. And we did have some substantial engagements as we and our Iraqi partners expanded our footprint. But that was absolutely necessary, and over time it helped us reduce the enemy's capabilities and thus reduce sectarian violence significantly.*⁴³

This move away from centralizing U.S. forces at large bases represented a major change in the deployment of those forces, but one Petraeus believed was essential to securing the population. He stated, “In Iraq, winning the support of the people required creating a lasting presence and demonstrating to the Iraqi people that coalition and Iraqi security forces would not abandon them to an enemy that sought to return. Securing the people in Iraq was an enormous task, especially with an insurgency, terrorism, criminal activity, and ethno-sectarian violence all threatening simultaneously.”⁴⁴

The Political Strategy

Even before he returned to Iraq, however, General Petraeus had come to the conclusion that there needed to be “a surge in four areas: not just the military, but also the civilian side of the U.S. government, the Iraqi forces, and Iraqi political will.”⁴⁵ JSAT also recognized that the strategy for the war involved much more than just a military strategy, and in addition to their recommendation “to apply a military strategy of protecting the population and attacking those who would not come to the [negotiating] table,” the JSAT made four other recommendations:

- to adopt a political strategy of seeking cease-fire agreements with individual groups or key actors
- to engage in active regional diplomacy

- to build government capacity
- to root sectarian actors out of the government, if necessary unilaterally using the authority vested in the coalition under the UN Security Council Resolution.⁴⁶

The broader political strategy that encompassed these additional four recommendations would prove far more difficult to formulate and implement than the military strategy described above. One of the obvious challenges with developing and implementing a political strategy was that it is traditionally the role of the State Department, not the Defense Department.

The Petraeus-Crocker Team

The ability to surmount the U.S. intragovernmental challenges in Iraq was dependent on how well General Petraeus was able to work with the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq. Both General Petraeus and the United States were fortunate that Ryan Crocker became the U.S. Ambassador in late March 2007, less than 2 months after the general assumed command. Ambassador Crocker was first of all probably the most experienced diplomat in the region, having served as Ambassador to Lebanon, Kuwait, Syria, and Pakistan prior to his appointment to Iraq. He was fluent in Arabic and had decades of service in the Middle East. Crocker was astute enough to recognize that although he was formally in charge of the diplomatic and political aspects of U.S. policy in Iraq, the U.S. military wielded enormous influence and power—both because of the sheer size of its budget and presence in Iraq and also because of Petraeus's stature and personality.

Fortunately, both leaders recognized that they would need to work together to succeed. To this end, they worked hard to coordinate their schedules and personally met on an almost daily basis. Their personalities complemented each other. Petraeus liked to take the lead in almost any area, using his energy and drive to make things happen. Crocker often exerted his influence in a more subtle way, and did not fight Petraeus for control, a power struggle that would have been detrimental for all concerned. Neither was the Ambassador intimidated by the general's confident and energetic manner. Petraeus had tremendous respect for Crocker's intellect and greater experience in the Middle East, and their mutual admiration allowed them to forge a strong bond. Crocker frequently used his calm and even manner to smooth relations with the Iraqis, while Petraeus was more likely to push Iraqi leaders, including Prime Minister Maliki, for action, demonstrating a range of emotions and occasionally exaggerating his emotional reaction when he believed it was necessary—although the two did take turns being the “bad cop” on occasion.⁴⁷

Both leaders were absolutely committed to “unity of effort” if not unity of command, and Petraeus often used the slogan “one team, one mission” to get that imperative across. Both also “walked their talk” and demonstrated the importance of a unified approach between the Departments of State and Defense, not tolerating parochial fighting between their elements. Petraeus and Crocker almost always met together with Prime Minister Maliki, supporting each other and making it clear that either one of them spoke for both. Crocker was comfortable with Petraeus talking directly with Iraqi political leaders, which Petraeus frequently did.

On one occasion, General Petraeus pushed Prime Minister Maliki to visit Ramadi in Anbar Province, a strong Sunni area that Maliki had not visited before (Maliki was a Shiite and reluctant to venture into Sunni areas). Emphasizing the importance of Maliki demonstrating that he was the prime minister of all Iraq and not just a Shiite leader, Petraeus convinced him to go to Ramadi and took him there on his own command helicopter, without Crocker. Petraeus later took Maliki to several other locations where Sunni reconciliation was succeeding.⁴⁸

The importance of the close personal relationship between Ambassador Crocker and General Petraeus cannot be overemphasized, and without it, the United States probably would not have had a coordinated and united political-military strategy and effort in Iraq. Moreover, the situation demanded such a strategy because establishing security, the essential precondition for progress, was as much political as military, and perhaps more so.⁴⁹

Iraqi Political Dynamics

The political situation was extremely complex and almost unfathomable to those without first-hand knowledge and experience in Iraq. The largest political groups were the three major ethnosectarian groups: the Sunni, Shiites, and Kurds. The Kurds dominated the north, the Sunnis were most prevalent in the middle of the country, and Shiites were predominant in the south. The Shiites were the largest of these groups, but they had been repressed for decades by Saddam Hussein’s Sunni dictatorship. After Saddam’s overthrow, Shiites took control of the Iraqi government and in many cases deliberately blocked Sunnis from getting any positions of power in post-Saddam Iraq. This reenergized a Sunni insurgency, as Sunnis found themselves at best marginalized and at worst killed or forced from their homes by Shia militias that supported the government. Most of the sectarian violence that characterized Iraq in 2007 was Sunni-Shia as each group tried to gain control of the country and retaliate for attacks directed against members of their ethnosectarian group, much of this violence going back to Saddam’s brutal control of the Shia population during his regime.

Meanwhile, the Kurds continued their tight control of northern Iraq, in effect a semi-autonomous region. The power struggle among these three groups would have been complicated enough by itself, but there were also internecine power struggles within various Shia or Sunni groups, not to mention a still dangerous al Qaeda–led terrorist campaign aimed at amplifying sectarian divisions. Furthermore, other actors in the region had a vested interest in the ascendancy of one group or the other, particularly Shia Iran, who supported the Shia factions in Iraq, and the Kurdish groups within Turkey, who allied themselves with the Iraqi Kurds and pushed for an autonomous Kurdistan, which Turkey vehemently opposed.

Underlying and crosscutting the major ethnosectarian conflict were three other political/religious/cultural conflicts. Religious leaders from both the Sunni and Shia factions attempted to exert control over the government, some pushing for a theocracy rather than a sectarian government. The most visible religious leader was Moqtada al-Sadr, a fiery Shiite cleric who had a great deal of power because of the Mahdi army or Jaish al-Mahdi (JAM), the Shiite militia he led. Another Shia cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, was the most revered Shia religious leader in Iraq, but he rarely directly intervened in political conflicts and avoided advocating direct violence. However, both Shia and Sunni religious leaders often led factions, many on the Shia side leading militias that were jockeying for power and attacking Sunnis.

A second source of conflict that had gone on for centuries, if not millennia, was based in tribal allegiances—such as Saddam’s Tikriti tribe—sometimes aligned with the major ethnic/religious groups but often with their own interests and agendas. Finally, there were the major political parties themselves, sometimes religious based, but sometimes cutting across religious lines, such as the socialist Ba’ath Party that controlled Iraq under Saddam but had both Sunni and Shia members.⁵⁰ The end result for Iraq was a shifting mesh of ethnic, political, religious, and tribal groups, all intertwined and fighting for power, with political leaders who had linkages to different groups and often had deep-seated animosity toward other leaders.⁵¹ This was the political situation from which Crocker and Petraeus had to help build a unified central government for Iraq—an almost insurmountable task.⁵²

Executing a Political-Military Strategy

Guiding Political Reconciliation

Preeminent among the political tasks Petraeus and Crocker faced was a basic one: getting the different Iraqi leaders to work together with people they viewed as adversaries and did not like or trust. It was clear to General Petraeus that he could not just improve security for the

population and sit back to let the Iraqi leaders sort the political situation out on their own—he and Ambassador Crocker had to get personally involved, pushing, prodding, cajoling, guiding, and persuading the various leaders to overcome their differences and build a coalition government.⁵³ Linda Robinson nicely summarizes the situation:

Petraeus knew . . . that the real endgame for the Iraq war was a political solution. That meant delving into the intricacies of Iraq's religious, ethnic, and personalistic factions . . . to see what kinds of levers of persuasion and influence might be effective in bringing them together. The [JSAT] study had concluded that Iraq was now locked in a communal conflict, or low-grade civil war, which meant that the government that was the United States' ally was also a party to the conflict. That put Petraeus and Ambassador Ryan Crocker in the delicate position of both supporting and browbeating their Iraqi partner. Since the United States had been instrumental in bringing these Iraqi political factions and individual leaders into power, it would have to deal with them no matter what their flaws.⁵⁴

One means that Petraeus used to help him deal with the Iraqi leaders was an unlikely one: his translator, Sadi Othman. An imposing figure at 6' 7", Othman had first served as General Petraeus's interpreter when he commanded the 101st Airborne Division in Iraq in 2003–2004. A Palestinian who was brought up in Jordan and then moved to the United States, Othman quickly became one of Petraeus's most trusted advisors—far more than merely a translator—and each time Petraeus returned to Iraq he grabbed Othman to rejoin his inner circle of advisors. Othman rapidly became the perfect conduit for communication between Petraeus and the Iraqi political leaders. Giving Othman a secure cell phone and extraordinary autonomy, Petraeus used him to deliver messages to Iraqi leaders and listen to their concerns and complaints. The Iraqis grew to trust Othman and be confident that he would deliver their views to Petraeus unfiltered and without bias. They also learned that when Othman talked to them, he spoke for Petraeus. But Othman could soften a message from Petraeus and deliver it in the form of “friendly advice,” saving face for the Iraqi leaders and allowing Petraeus to avoid confrontation unless it was necessary. Othman's role as an unbiased communication channel between Petraeus and the Iraqis made him tremendously useful to Petraeus and his insights into the Iraqi leaders and their agendas, attitudes, allegiances, and interests more than earned him his title as senior advisor to the commanding general.⁵⁵

Buying Time

One major problem that Petraeus and Crocker faced was managing expectations in Washington. Political reconciliation among Iraq's leaders and their various groups and factions was incredibly difficult to achieve, and things did not progress or move as rapidly as they wanted or as the President and Congress expected. As Petraeus stated, "The Washington clock was moving much faster than the Baghdad clock."⁵⁶ Petraeus's solution to slow down the Washington clock was to make national reconciliation a long-term but "distant" goal of the Joint Campaign Plan (JCP) and to focus on a local level, measuring progress in terms of security gains and reductions in violence in specific localized areas in Baghdad and across the country. Over time, as more and more local areas achieved higher levels of security and decreased levels of violence, these "pockets of local security" could be linked, leading to "sustainable security" nationwide, and then to national reconciliation. By not even putting a target date on national reconciliation, the JCP made that a "generational goal" and eliminated expectations that Iraq would reach that goal for years to come. This also shifted the long-term goal from a military victory resulting in some kind of formal surrender of the enemy forces to a series of negotiated agreements for things such as sharing power and resources and national governance.⁵⁷

One tool General Petraeus used to great effect in managing expectations in Washington and elsewhere was the media. Petraeus is the exception to the common military view of the media as adversaries who can do no good but only harm.⁵⁸ In his view, providing open access to the media would allow him to get his message out and influence perceptions and expectations rather than reacting to what was printed or said without his input. In his dealings with the media in Iraq, he tried to be positive in highlighting accomplishments but realistic in acknowledging setbacks or lack of rapid progress, and he did the same in congressional hearings, another important venue for influencing public opinion.⁵⁹ As Robinson states:

Petraeus's views on the power of the news media went beyond a keen sense of its ability to make or break someone's career and personal reputation. He certainly tended his image, but he also believed that wars could be won or lost through information and perception, a realm the military had taken to calling information operations. He held fast to his philosophy that "you can't win if you don't play." That included taking the media to task for stories he . . . felt did not meet basic standards of accuracy, proper context, and correct characterization.⁶⁰

Petraeus further issued a mandate to his commanders to talk to the media, telling them: “We are in an information war. Sixty percent of this thing is information. . . . Don’t worry about getting out there too much [in talking to the media]—I will tell you if you are.”⁶¹

Achieving Local Successes in Baghdad

The experiences of U.S. Army units in two key areas of Baghdad are recounted at some length in Linda Robinson’s book and serve to illustrate how difficult and costly it was to achieve the “pockets of local security” that were the short-term objectives of the JCP. The first was the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry Regiment (1/26 IR), which fought for control of Adhamiya in northeast Baghdad for its entire 15-month deployment in 2006–2007. Adhamiya was a predominantly Sunni area that had been one of the centers of the Sunni insurgency in Baghdad, and a breeding ground for al Qaeda in Iraq. Sectarian fighting between Sunni insurgents, al Qaeda, and Shia militias had practically destroyed Adhamiya and made it one of the most dangerous neighborhoods in Iraq. It was certainly a hostile environment that tested the new strategy of pushing U.S. forces out into the neighborhoods in combat outposts to secure and hold the area. U.S. Army patrols faced heavy attacks or were embroiled in the ongoing sectarian violence that claimed the lives of many Iraqis. The 1/26 IR not only had to fight Sunni insurgents and try and root them out but also had to fight the Shia militias who were engaged in a form of ethnosectarian cleansing trying to drive Sunni families out of the area (often with the tacit approval of the predominantly Shia government). One of the techniques the U.S. Soldiers finally resorted to was building concrete barriers to separate Sunnis and Shiites and stop them from killing each other. Surprisingly successful, these barriers became one of the hallmarks of pacifying Baghdad, but they were not without controversy, and General Petraeus continued to build them despite international criticism that likened the walls to the wall that partitioned Berlin during the Cold War. He also had to cope with public criticism from Prime Minister Maliki, who denounced the barriers in public but supported their use in private. The bottom line was that the barriers worked. They inconvenienced Iraqi civilians and made life more difficult for isolated neighborhoods, but they limited the ability of both Sunni insurgents and Shia militias to move fighters, weapons, and bombs around Baghdad.⁶²

The experience of the 1/26 IR in Adhamiya clarified a number of things. First, it would require a lot of troops, both U.S. and Iraqi, to bring security to Baghdad. Related to this point, the Iraqi troops who were fighting alongside the Americans had to be willing to fight Shia militias as well as Sunni insurgents, and if they allied themselves with the Shia militias, they exacerbated the problem rather than helping solve it. Second, securing the population could

not be purely defensive but offensive as well. Insurgents had to be killed or captured, but “collateral damage” in the form of civilian casualties had to be minimized or the end result would be creating more insurgents than had been killed. Finally, the Sunni insurgents would keep fighting as long as they believed the Shia-dominated Iraqi government was out to kill Sunnis or drive them out of their homes. A lasting peace would require significant changes at the national level.⁶³ This was Petraeus’s conundrum: local gains were required to push along national reconciliation, but lasting local gains were impossible without progress toward reconciliation at the national level.

The second Army unit profiled by Robinson was the 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment (1/5 CR), which operated in Ameriya in western Baghdad. Like Adhamiya, Ameriya was a predominantly Sunni neighborhood with much the same situation: an urban area that had suffered extensive damage and was a center of Sunni insurgency and al Qaeda in Iraq. The 1/5 CR operated the same way the 1/26 IR was operating in Adhamiya and started pushing out into Ameriya, seizing areas and setting up combat outposts and joint security stations to hold them. The battalion also tried to establish contacts in Ameriya with imams who were the most influential leaders in the area, but with mixed results. Like their sister unit in Adhamiya, the 1/5 CR suffered casualties as it tried to clear and hold areas, mainly from bombs and improvised explosive devices. The battalion was having difficulty making progress in a hostile environment.

The turning point for Ameriya came in May 2007 when Sheikh Walid, one of the imams the battalion had made contact with, called the battalion commander of the 1/5 CR, Lieutenant Colonel Dale Kuehl, and notified him that Iraqis from Ameriya were going to attack al Qaeda fighters who had kidnapped two Iraqis. This was the result of increasing Iraqi disenchantment with al Qaeda’s objectives and methods, particularly their brutal treatment of Iraqis, which finally had led to a total break with al Qaeda and a decision to drive them out of Ameriya. In consultation with his brigade commander, Kuehl initially kept his battalion on the sidelines, and then assisted the Iraqis when al Qaeda fought back and the Iraqis asked him for help. This was a pivotal moment because there was considerable risk involved in supporting and allying with Sunnis who had been fighting against the Americans and the Iraqi government forces a short time before. This gradually led to a partnership with the Iraqi fighters, led by Abu Abid, a Sunni who until recently had been fighting against the Shia militias in sectarian battles, to defeat al Qaeda in Ameriya.⁶⁴

The 1/5 CR alliance with Abu Abid’s Sunnis was fully supported by General Petraeus, and the manner in which he expressed that support says something about his leadership

style. In early June, Petraeus invited an officer to accompany him on an early morning run at his headquarters (a large base named Camp Victory), something he commonly did. Petraeus used this as one means of keeping in touch with tactical-level leaders in his command and finding out what was going on directly from those leaders, rather than going through the layers of command, much as he did when he contacted Colonel Ollivant directly by email. In this case, the officer Petraeus invited was the operations officer of the 1/5 CR, Major Chip Daniels. When he asked Daniels what was going on in Ameriya, the major told the general about the ongoing joint operations with Abu Abid's Sunnis (operations Petraeus was already aware of) and expressed concern that Colonel Kuehl was taking a big risk in engaging in these operations with former enemies. Petraeus replied to Daniels, "Do *not* stop! Do not stop what you are doing. . . . You are doing the right thing and now is the time to take risks!" He then went on to say, "Do not let our army stop you. . . . Do not let the Iraqi government stop you."⁶⁵ In one short conversation, General Petraeus supported initiative, empowered his subordinates, reinforced a climate of risk-taking in his command, and gave his subordinate commanders reassurance that he would back them up against opposition from risk-averse individuals in the U.S. Army and Iraqi government.

Robinson's summary of the significance of what happened in Ameriya follows:

*Kuehl and his battalion had accomplished an amazing turnaround in Ameriya. They had implemented the full gamut of counterinsurgency tactics, including skillful diplomacy that had won the confidence of the local leaders and population and cemented an alliance with indigenous fighters. They had exploited all of this for intelligence to target and diminish the enemy forces, and had begun to revive the neighborhood's economic, political, and social life. The battalions and brigades had created facts on the ground that could be used as levers to move the national leaders forward. But it remained to be seen whether their local success would hold, and whether it would help catalyze wider progress.*⁶⁶

As indicated above, what happened in Adhamiya and Ameriya was matched by gains in many other parts of Baghdad, although the city was far from totally secure. One estimate put about half of the city still short of being cleared of insurgents or al Qaeda fighters, and the progress was not irreversible.⁶⁷ Thomas Ricks attributes the improved situation and the reduction in violence in Baghdad to five underlying reasons:

- securing the population by U.S. forces

- ethnosectarian cleansing that had already forced Sunnis out of some areas of the city and created separate Sunni and Shia enclaves
- Moqtada al-Sadr implementing a ceasefire that greatly decreased fighting between his militia and U.S. forces (although he did it under duress)⁶⁸
- U.S. forces all moving toward the same goal (securing the population) in the same way
- getting many of the Sunni insurgents to change sides.⁶⁹

The tide had turned militarily. The next step was to continue the movement toward national reconciliation.

National Reconciliation (Continued)

General Petraeus continued to devote much of his effort to the “bottom-up” approach of using local gains to push national reconciliation. The best example of that approach outside Baghdad was Anbar Province. An almost exclusively Sunni province, Anbar had been one of the most violent provinces in Iraq and a stronghold of the insurgency until al Qaeda brutality against Iraqis drove Sunni tribes to start fighting against al Qaeda and partner with U.S. forces in that fight (as happened in Ameriya). What became known as the Anbar Awakening developed in 2006, but did not gain ground until 2007 when U.S. commanders recognized that tribal leaders were the key power brokers in the province.

In late 2006, 35 tribes and subtribes joined forces against al Qaeda and started cooperating with the Americans instead of fighting them. Ricks views supporting the turning of Sunni insurgents from adversaries to partners as the biggest risk General Petraeus took in Iraq. Although the Sunni change of sides began without U.S. support, it continued and broadened because the U.S. military started paying and arming the Sunnis. This decision was risky for Petraeus for two reasons. First, it was done without the support or even official knowledge of the Iraqi government, who still viewed the Sunni insurgents as enemies. Of note, Petraeus had facilitated reconciliation of Sunnis before. During his first tour in Iraq in 2003, Petraeus supported the Iraqis in conducting a reconciliation commission in Mosul. Unfortunately, the results never went beyond Mosul because of a lack of support from the Iraqi government. Again, Petraeus did not get approval from Baghdad, at least initially.⁷⁰ Second, he implemented the policy without notifying President George W. Bush. Petraeus’s response when questioned about not getting the President’s approval is telling: “I don’t think it was something that we need to ask permission for. We had the authority to conduct what are called security contracts, and that was how we saw these. But to be truthful,

we didn't see it growing to 103,000 [fighters]."⁷¹ Interestingly, some 25,000 of those fighters were not Sunnis fighting against al Qaeda, but Shiites who opposed the Shia militias in their areas.⁷²

By summer 2007, attacks against American troops in Anbar Province had almost entirely ceased—a dramatic change. Although violence in much of the country continued at high levels and U.S. casualties were still high (particularly in June), the situation in Anbar was a leading indicator of the decrease in U.S. and coalition casualties nationwide that would follow in later months. Three critical decisions by the Iraqi government, pushed by Petraeus and Crocker, institutionalized the advances made in Anbar Province. First, with Prime Minister Maliki's approval, large numbers of Sunnis were allowed to join the Iraqi military and police force. This was not a small step because one of the greatest fears of Maliki and other Shiites in the government was that arming Sunnis and bringing them into the security forces would lead to a Sunni takeover of the government and seizure of power.

Second, tribal leaders in Anbar were allowed to run for seats on the provincial council, which gave them an active role in the political process. This also was not a small step because the provincial councils controlled the allocation of funds and other resources for the provinces. Third, with the strong support of Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih, the central government started releasing more resources to Anbar Province. In Petraeus's view, "these three steps represented the essence of a political solution" for Iraq.⁷³

An incident in Fallujah, one of the cities in Anbar Province that had achieved a remarkable turnaround, demonstrates how General Petraeus worked the Iraqi political leaders to push them toward national reconciliation. As he did with Prime Minister Maliki in Ramadi, Petraeus invited Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi, Iraq's highest ranking Sunni, to accompany him on a tour of Fallujah. Again using his own command helicopter, Petraeus flew Hashimi to Fallujah and led a walking tour of the market, which until recently had been an extremely dangerous place. Walking through the market with only a soft cap and no body armor, Petraeus demonstrated to the Iraqi officials who accompanied him (some reluctantly) that he was not afraid to connect with Iraqis, and that they should not be afraid either. He also demonstrated to the citizens of Fallujah that members of the government were interested in their concerns and would listen to them, not a foreign concept to politicians in the United States but uncommon in an Iraq still beset with factional and sectarian violence.⁷⁴

Crocker Continues Top-down Push

Meanwhile, Ambassador Crocker continued to push the Iraqis to achieve progress toward political reconciliation. Six benchmarks adopted by the Iraqi government in 2006 were particularly related to national reconciliation:

- bring more Ba'ath Party members from Saddam's regime into the government
- agree on legislation determining how to share the country's oil among the three ethno-sectarian regions
- pass legislation establishing (and increasing) the powers of the provincial governments
- hold provincial elections
- revise the constitution to give Sunnis more power in governing Iraq
- reach an agreement on how to demobilize the predominantly Shia militias and how and for what to provide amnesty.⁷⁵

Progress on achieving these benchmarks was slow. In fact, by August 2007, it was doubtful whether Maliki's coalition government would even survive. Sunni members of the government had largely become frustrated with their exclusion from positions of power, half the members of Prime Minister Maliki's cabinet had withdrawn from any active role, and Maliki was rarely even talking with many remaining members of the government, including the president and vice presidents. However, Crocker kept working with the leaders, going to the next level down in the government when the top leaders would not budge from their partisan positions. Crocker's view was that the only hope for survival of the Maliki government and any progress toward reconciliation was to get the various parties to negotiate, and he pushed them that way at every opportunity.

Some progress was made, however limited. As Ambassador Crocker stated, "The future of Iraq lies in the ability of these three communities [Shiites, Sunnis, and Kurds] to work out problems and set policies and courses. They managed to do it [achieve agreement], however painfully, and that is the way I think they have to keep going."⁷⁶ One positive outcome from an incident of violence was when Moqtada al-Sadr overplayed his hand and his JAM militia attacked the guards at a major Shia shrine in Karbala in late August, leading to a fight that killed or wounded more than a hundred Iraqis. Maliki was outraged, and he aggressively reacted, personally going to Karbala to restore order. He gained a lot of points with Sunnis by his actions to finally curb the power of the Shia militias and indicate that he was not going to allow sectarian violence initiated by the militias to continue.⁷⁷ In spite of gains in some areas, however, Crocker and Petraeus did not have much political progress to show when they were called back to report to the President and Congress in September 2007.

Briefings and Testimony in Washington: Influencing Up

The Petraeus and Crocker briefings and testimony before Congress were a watershed event for the Iraq War and the surge. Petraeus had been in command in Iraq for almost 8 months, and military and political leaders in Washington wanted to hear from him if he believed the surge was working, and what his recommendations were for the future. Most of the leaders were inclined to believe that the surge was not achieving its desired effects and that it was time to shift to a gradual withdrawal from Iraq. Although Ambassador Crocker accompanied General Petraeus to Washington and testified with him before Congress, the weight of making the case for continuing the surge strategy in Iraq rested on Petraeus's shoulders.

One of the first battles Petraeus faced was determining to whom he could make his recommendations, and to what extent he should make them through those higher in his chain of command. His immediate boss was Admiral William Fallon, USCENTCOM commander. Although there is some question as to whether General Petraeus and Admiral Fallon had as bad a personal relationship as has been reported in the press, there is little doubt that they disagreed on the correct strategy for Iraq. Fallon and Petraeus's relationship was worsened by Fallon's belief that Petraeus was bypassing him and communicating directly with the President. Fallon was correct; Petraeus had two direct links to the President—one formal and one informal.

The formal link was through weekly VTCs that Petraeus and Crocker had with President Bush. These updates were carefully prepared by Petraeus to help "make sure [his] bosses [particularly Bush] understand the mission." Admiral Fallon was aware of the content of these updates since advance copies were sent to him, General Peter Pace (then-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff), and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates. Moreover, all of the chain of command were linked into the VTC itself. However, Petraeus and Crocker did the majority of the talking, communicating directly with the President. That gave Petraeus unusual access to Bush and allowed the President to directly provide guidance to his leadership team in Iraq.⁷⁸

As Bob Woodward reported in an April 2008 *Washington Post* article, Petraeus also had an informal link through General Jack Keane, one of Petraeus's mentors who was a close informal advisor to the President and Vice President. Woodward reported that Keane went to the White House on September 13, 2007, and briefed Vice President Richard Cheney that the military chain of command above General Petraeus disagreed with Petraeus's assessment of the situation in Iraq and that disagreement "threatened to undermine Petraeus's chances of continued success."⁷⁹

Fallon was not the only one in the military chain of command who disagreed with Petraeus's assessment of the situation and his strategy. Also supporting a disengagement from

Iraq and a drawdown of military forces were the Chief of Staff of the Army, General George Casey (Petraeus's predecessor as Commander, MNF-I); the other members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, including General Pace; Lieutenant General Doug Lute, not formally in the chain of command but in an influential position in the White House; and Secretary of Defense Gates.⁸⁰ Not only did Petraeus and his military chain of command have different ideas about what he should present to Congress and the President, but they also disagreed on how he should present it. Petraeus was asked to present only an assessment of what would happen in three future scenarios to the Chairman and the Secretary of Defense, who would then make a recommendation to the President. Petraeus strongly opposed that course of action, realizing that his ability to shape the force levels and overall strategy in Iraq in the future would be diminished if he did not make a recommendation directly to the Commander in Chief. Accordingly, he insisted as strongly as he could that he make his recommendation not only to his superiors in the military chain of command—the Chairman and the Secretary of Defense—but also to the President. Robinson concludes, “Petraeus’s attitude . . . was that he was presenting his views rather than clearing them with his superiors. The president would decide whether to accept or reject them, but his core recommendations were not going to change.”⁸¹ This internal battle was resolved by Secretary Gates:

Secretary of Defense Gates was . . . personally in favor of a drawdown on a more modest path, but he was not inclined to overrule Petraeus. The views of Petraeus, as the commander on the ground, should carry enormous weight, the secretary believed. But he also believed that CENTCOM [Admiral Fallon] and the joint staff [the Joint Chiefs] should be heard directly by the president, so he constructed a process that allowed each to have his say. Petraeus’s superiors had a right to offer their views on Iraq, and it was their responsibility to assess Iraq in light of other regional and global challenges as well as the state of the military services.⁸²

In the end, General Petraeus prepared his assessment of the three scenarios as directed and briefed each of his superiors in his chain of command on his views and recommendations. They each presented their views to the President (including Admiral Fallon, who met with Bush in the White House the night before Petraeus’s briefing),⁸³ and then Petraeus got his turn to brief the President.

General Petraeus personally briefed President Bush on August 31, making his recommendations to the President unfiltered. At the end of the briefing, President Bush approved those

recommendations, which essentially were to continue the surge strategy and gradually draw down military forces, but only as the situation in Iraq would permit.⁸⁴ General Pace ultimately helped gain support among the Joint Chiefs for Petraeus's recommendations, recognizing that it would not be good to have the Joint Chiefs unsupportive of the general even though they did not fully agree with his recommendations.⁸⁵ The President's support was made even clearer in an extraordinary "back-channel" message that President Bush asked General Keane to deliver to Petraeus just before he left Washington to return to Iraq. Bob Woodward recounts that Keane wrote down the President's words and read them to Petraeus:

*I respect the chain of command. I know that the Joint Chiefs and the Pentagon have some concerns. . . . I want Dave [Petraeus] to know that I want him to win. That's the mission. He will have as much force as he needs for as long as he needs it. When he feels he wants to make further reductions, he should only make those reductions based on the conditions in Iraq that he believes justify those reductions. . . . I do not want to change the strategy until the strategy has succeeded. I waited over three years for a successful strategy. And I'm not giving up on it prematurely. I am not reducing further unless you are convinced that we should reduce further.*⁸⁶

Clearly, the President's support was assured. However, there was another key stakeholder whose support was not at all assured. Petraeus would have a much harder time convincing Congress of the success of the surge strategy.

In the Hot Seat: Testifying Before Congress

Even before General Petraeus testified before Congress, his credibility was being attacked in the media by a number of sources. Some questioned Petraeus's assertions about progress being made in Iraq, some questioned the facts and metrics he was using to support his conclusions, and some questioned his integrity and suggested that he was distorting facts to suit his own ends. The most direct of these personal attacks was a large opinion piece in the *New York Times* placed and paid for by moveon.org, a liberal group who opposed the war in Iraq. The headline of the piece was "GENERAL PETRAEUS OR GENERAL BETRAY US? COOKING THE BOOKS FOR THE WHITE HOUSE." The piece accused General Petraeus of lying and distorting facts to further his own advancement and agenda. Reaction to the piece was rapid, but not what the originators of the piece intended. Accusing an Active-duty general of betrayal

(in effect, treason) was perceived by many as an unprincipled and unwarranted personal attack, and it increased support for General Petraeus among those who believed that he had been the target of a vicious and unjustified attack. A number of politicians on both sides of the aisle immediately distanced themselves from moveon.org and condemned the piece.⁸⁷

That did not mean that General Petraeus had an easy time when appearing before Congress on September 10 and 11, 2007. Rather, over those 2 days he was asked pointed questions by Members of Congress, some of whom expressed their skepticism with his facts and conclusions. He began his opening remarks with an unusual statement designed to preemptively disarm those who would believe that he was only repeating what he had been told to say: “At the outset, I would like to note that this is my testimony. Although I have briefed my assessment and recommendations to my chain of command, I wrote this testimony myself. It has not been cleared by, nor shared with, anyone in the Pentagon, the White House, or Congress.”⁸⁸ Having established his independence by making it clear that his testimony was unvetted and unfiltered, General Petraeus went on to state, “the military objectives of the surge are, in large measure, being met.”⁸⁹ He described the gains that had been achieved, the reduction in ethnosectarian violence, and stated:

*Based on all this and on the further progress we believe we can achieve over the next few months, I believe that we will be able to reduce our forces to the pre-surge level of brigade combat teams by next summer without jeopardizing the security gains that we have fought so hard to achieve. Beyond that, while noting that the situation in Iraq remains complex, difficult, and sometimes downright frustrating, I also believe that it is possible to achieve our objectives in Iraq over time, though doing so will be neither quick nor easy.*⁹⁰

Petraeus concluded his statement by summarizing the recommendations that he had presented to his military chain of command and to the President, although he did not specifically mention his briefing to President Bush. The operational and strategic considerations he listed are worth noting:

The recommendations I provided were informed by operational and strategic considerations. The operational considerations include recognition that:

- *military aspects of the surge have achieved progress and generated momentum;*
- *Iraqi Security Forces have continued to grow and have slowly been shouldering more of the security burden in Iraq;*

- *a mission focus on either population security or transition alone will not be adequate to achieve our objectives;*
- *success against Al Qaeda-Iraq and Iranian-supported militia extremists requires conventional forces as well as special operations forces; and*
- *the security and local political situations will enable us to draw down the surge forces.*

My recommendations also took into account a number of strategic considerations:

- *political progress will take place only if sufficient security exists;*
- *long-term US ground force viability will benefit from force reductions as the surge runs its course;*
- *regional, global, and cyberspace initiatives are critical to success; and*
- *Iraqi leaders understandably want to assume greater sovereignty in their country, although, as they recently announced, they do desire continued presence of coalition forces in Iraq in 2008 under a new UN Security Council Resolution and, following that, they want to negotiate a long term security agreement with the United States and other nations.⁹¹*

Petraeus then recommended a limited reduction in military forces returning to pre-surge force levels by July 2008, but stated that he was recommending to delay a decision on further force reductions until March 2008 when he would be able to make an assessment of the situation and what, if any, further reductions would be justified. Finally, he concluded, “In describing the recommendations I have made, I should note again that, like Ambassador Crocker, I believe Iraq’s problems will require a long-term effort. There are no easy answers or quick solutions. And though we both believe this effort can succeed, it will take time. Our assessments underscore, in fact, the importance of recognizing that a premature drawdown of our forces would likely have devastating consequences.”⁹²

After Petraeus’s opening statement, it was Congress’s turn, and the Members were not hesitant to make their views known. As mentioned above, in 2 long days of almost continuous hearings, a number of Members questioned General Petraeus’s views, facts, and conclusions. Senator Hillary Clinton was among the most skeptical, stating, “Despite what I view as your rather extraordinary efforts in your testimony both yesterday and today, I think that the reports

that you provide to us really require *the willing suspension of disbelief*. In any of the metrics that have been referenced in your many hours of testimony, any fair reading of the advantages and disadvantages accruing post-surge, in my view, end up on the downside.”⁹³ Senator Clinton’s comments clearly indicated that she was not convinced the situation in Iraq was as favorable as General Petraeus portrayed it, and some interpreted her comment on “the willing suspension of disbelief” to indicate that she questioned General Petraeus’s credibility and integrity.⁹⁴ Other Senators, including Barack Obama and Joseph Biden, expressed reservations about General Petraeus’s assessment and conclusions.

In spite of what could be described as a hostile atmosphere, throughout the hours of hearings General Petraeus demonstrated incredible self-control and an ability to conceal any affective reaction to the comments being made. His demeanor never changed even when the comments amounted to personal attacks. Petraeus’s ability throughout the hearings to “keep his cool” was perhaps as important as the content of his assessment in delivering his message, and some viewers compared his performance favorably with that of the Senators and Members of Congress questioning him.⁹⁵

There was another group that Petraeus and Crocker had to report to and convince that it was not time to give up in Iraq: the American people. In keeping with their philosophy that engagement with the media was the best way to ensure that their views got out and that it was better to be seen and heard expressing their views than to have media commentators stating what they had heard, Petraeus and Crocker gave numerous media interviews after each day’s hearings, some running late into the evening. One count had Petraeus giving 23 interviews during his short time in Washington.⁹⁶

The end result of Petraeus and Crocker’s visit to Washington was mixed. Many people still believed that the war in Iraq was lost and that the United States should withdraw its forces as rapidly as possible—indeed, their views had not changed. However, General Petraeus’s and Ambassador Crocker’s performance during the hearings received generally favorable reviews, and they were successful in controlling the size and speed of the drawdown of U.S. forces until at least March 2008. Buying the time to continue the surge strategy was no small accomplishment and gave them 6 more months to achieve the progress on political reconciliation that so far had been elusive.

The Tide Gradually Turns

Progress continued in the fall of 2007. Generals Petraeus and Odierno carefully monitored the situation in Baghdad and the surrounding areas and adjusted U.S. troop strengths down as violence decreased. By December 2007 in Dora in southern Baghdad, one of the al Qaeda

strongholds in the city and one of the most violent areas, Iraqi deaths had dropped to one-tenth of the previous levels and attacks against U.S. troops had completely stopped. This progress in Dora and other Baghdad neighborhoods was due to the hard work of the U.S. forces in the areas in finding and killing or capturing al Qaeda insurgents (the “irreconcilables”), their partnering with Iraqi military and police units who could be relied upon not to engage in sectarian attacks against Sunnis, getting more Sunni volunteers into the Iraqi police units, and getting those units to then take on the JAM and other Shia militias.⁹⁷

One technique that worked particularly well was U.S. commanders brokering cease-fire agreements between Shia and Sunni factions at the local level and then facilitating a return to the status quo ante as much as possible, including helping to forge agreements to resettle Iraqis displaced from their homes by sectarian violence and helping restore basic services.⁹⁸ All the while, Petraeus kept a visible personal presence throughout Iraq, often bringing Iraqi government officials with him into previously unsecure areas as part of his campaign to work from the bottom up to build security and also to push Iraqi government involvement in reducing violence and increasing national reconciliation.⁹⁹

One could attribute the tide having changed during the last half of 2007 to many factors. Certainly the added U.S. troops committed during the surge had a major impact, but, in Robinson’s analysis:

The way in which the troops were employed was even more important than the numbers. . . . The dispersion of troops . . . to live with the population they were securing made them a catalyst for much of the grassroots reconciliation and cease-fires that occurred. Most important each [unit] made it a priority to develop relationships and reach out to the “reconcilable” antagonists, their supporters, and the fence-sitters. These were inherently political activities that produced political effects that Petraeus massed rapidly to pressure the Iraqi government to in turn take political action that would affect the war’s strategic level. The emphasis on the political line of operations at all echelons stood in stark contrast to past practices. . . . Petraeus waded into politics as no general before him had done and directed his troops to do the same.¹⁰⁰

Also important was turning sectarian forces, both Sunnis and Shia militias, from “enemies into allies.”¹⁰¹ The more volunteers who joined the fight against al Qaeda, the fewer there were engaging in sectarian violence or attacking U.S. troops or Iraqi government forces. And that

directly led to a decrease in violence against Iraqi civilians as well as U.S. and coalition forces. The role of U.S. commanders and troops in “setting the conditions” that allowed this turnaround to occur should not be underestimated; they took immense risk and suffered casualties in intervening in sectarian fighting and resourcing and supporting the Iraqi sheikhs and tribal leaders who turned against al Qaeda.¹⁰²

A Political Crisis Barely Averted

Unfortunately, progress in reducing violence and winning the fight against the insurgents was not matched by progress politically. In fact, in late 2007, the Iraqi government almost collapsed. Prime Minister Maliki had indicated an unwillingness or inability to create a genuine coalition government with real power-sharing among the different ethnosectarian groups, and those who were disenfranchised got tired of waiting for him to take any forward steps. In December 2007, a number of political leaders, including President Jalal Talabani, threatened to withdraw their support for the Maliki government and bring it down if he did not meet their demands in a number of areas. The U.S. reaction to this looming crisis was mixed. Ambassador Crocker believed allowing the Maliki government to fall would significantly set back efforts to achieve political progress. Other U.S. officials believed that Maliki was incapable of unifying the country because of his sectarian leanings and were ready to write him off as a bad investment. There was a lot of political maneuvering among the Iraqi factions and leaders, but ultimately the Maliki government survived—at least for the time being. There was a positive result of the political crisis: it broke the deadlock over passing legislation to further national reconciliation.¹⁰³

Expanding beyond their traditional mission, the U.S. military had an active role in getting key legislation passed in the Iraqi parliament. Operating once again in the political realm, General Petraeus acted on his conviction that political progress was essential to benefit from the military gains. He knew that the window of opportunity opened by the military would not remain open for long, and he used all the resources available to push the government and Prime Minister Maliki through before it closed. At Petraeus’s direction, military leaders at all levels engaged in a campaign to get votes in the Iraqi parliament for the reconciliation legislation. Sadi Othman, Petraeus’s link to the Iraqis, proved particularly useful in this campaign because of his extensive contacts with the Iraqi leaders and his established role as Petraeus’s informal spokesman. Commenting on the military role in Iraqi politics, Petraeus stated, “We know the legislative process now. This is what it takes. This is what we need to do, and the scrutiny that this makes them [the Iraqis] feel is enormously important to the overall effort.”¹⁰⁴

Also on the table in early 2008 was the formal relationship between Iraq and the United States. Ambassador Crocker was active in forging a new agreement, engaging in hard negotiating with the Iraqis over the terms under which the U.S. and coalition forces would remain in Iraq and for how long. General Petraeus was actively managing the gradual transfer of missions and power to the Iraqi military and police forces, an equally important issue. Ensuring that Iraqi military and police forces did not engage in sectarian attacks was paramount to building government legitimacy and keeping sectarian violence low, and Petraeus was aware that sectarian attacks by Iraqi government forces or violence against the Iraqi people by coalition or Iraqi forces could quickly undermine the progress that had been made.¹⁰⁵

Maliki Takes a High-risk Gamble

In March 2008, Prime Minister Maliki made a decision that had significant consequences. Faced with increasing violence and lawlessness in Basra, the major city in Shiite-dominated southern Iraq, he decided to lead a poorly planned, hasty attack to roust out the militias and “criminal elements” there and restore order. This was a total surprise to Petraeus, who, along with Maliki’s national security advisors and security ministers, had just been briefed on a deliberate plan to retake Basra in 3 to 4 months. Maliki’s military commanders told him that it would be an easy victory, and he decided to launch the attack in 2 days and to personally direct the operation.

From the U.S. perspective, prospects were not good, and the situation in Baghdad was poor with over a dozen rocket attacks daily on the Green Zone, the U.S. and Iraqi government safe-haven in Baghdad, from Sadr City—the part of Baghdad controlled by the Moqtada al-Sadr and the JAM, who also were the major source of violence in Basra. As feared, at first the government attack looked like a disaster in the making, but on the fifth or sixth day, the momentum turned as Petraeus and the new Multi-National Corps–Iraq commander, Lieutenant General Lloyd Austin, shifted U.S. assets to support the fight in Basra, and Sadr called on his militia to stand down and discontinue attacks. A cease-fire followed with fighting dying out by early April. Petraeus viewed this as a clear-cut military victory; Sadr’s militia was destroyed and control of Basra and its ports was taken back by the government.¹⁰⁶ The attack in Basra totally changed almost everyone’s opinion of Maliki. From being perceived as a weak politician, Maliki almost overnight became seen as a strong and decisive leader for all Iraqis who was willing to take on and whip Shiite militias. To many more Iraqis, siding with Maliki rather than Sadr looked like a good decision.¹⁰⁷

Another Challenge for Petraeus

The next challenge for General Petraeus came in March 2008 when he was due to make his recommendations on the pace of the decrease of military forces in Iraq to the President and Congress. Petraeus believed that it was critical to keep 15 Brigade Combat Teams in Iraq until September, while most of his superiors were pushing for a more rapid decrease to 10 brigades.¹⁰⁸ Petraeus knew that he held a trump card, which was the direct communication channel that President Bush had established with him—and the President’s willingness to use it. Bush had met with Petraeus and Crocker in Kuwait in January and made it clear that he would support keeping the troop levels they believed they needed. He had then stated to the press, “My attitude is, if [Petraeus] didn’t want to continue the drawdown, that’s fine with me, in order to make sure we succeed. I said to the general, ‘If you want to slow her down, fine; it’s up to you.’”¹⁰⁹ With that kind of support from the President, General Petraeus knew he would be likely to prevail on troop levels, and that happened in April when President Bush accepted Petraeus’s recommendations to keep troop levels at 15 brigades while also recognizing the stress that would put on the Army and Marine Corps by directing that the tour length for military units be reduced from 15 to 12 months by August.¹¹⁰

Petraeus’s stature was boosted further when his direct boss, Admiral Fallon, the USCENTCOM commander, was forced to retire after publication of an article in which he appeared to come out against administration policy. Petraeus was not involved in the article or the issues that got Fallon in trouble, but it was well known that Fallon and Petraeus had disagreed on U.S. policy in Iraq, and Fallon’s abrupt departure was seen as a positive development for Petraeus (even more so when the general was later selected to replace the admiral as USCENTCOM commander).¹¹¹ Petraeus found that getting his recommendations up to the President was much less difficult in the spring of 2008 than in the previous fall, and that Fallon and the Joint Chiefs were relatively supportive of his recommendations even though they favored a more rapid drawdown than Petraeus did.¹¹²

Petraeus’s reception when testifying before Congress in early April 2008 also was considerably more favorable than it had been in the previous September, and he believed that without the recent fighting in Basra and Sadr City that his testimony would have been “very straightforward.”¹¹³ As it was, he still faced tough questioning about the duration, cost, and extent of the U.S. commitment and some skepticism as to how lasting the gains would be. Petraeus was clear about his assessment of the situation in his prepared testimony before Congress:

Since Ambassador Crocker and I appeared before you seven months ago, there has been significant but uneven security progress in Iraq. Since September, levels

*of violence and civilian deaths have been reduced substantially, Al Qaeda–Iraq and a number of other extremist elements have been dealt serious blows, the capabilities of Iraqi Security Force elements have grown, and there has been noteworthy involvement of local Iraqis in local security. Nonetheless, the situation in certain areas is still unsatisfactory and innumerable challenges remain. Moreover . . . as I have repeatedly cautioned, the progress made since last spring is fragile and reversible. Still, security in Iraq is better than it was when Ambassador Crocker and I reported to you last September, and it is significantly better than it was 15 months ago when Iraq was on the brink of civil war and the decision was made to deploy additional US forces to Iraq.*¹¹⁴

Petraeus made no predictions about the future in his prepared testimony, and when asked when the war would be over, he replied that it depended on how and when the Iraqis resolved the ongoing struggle for power and control of resources and the various factions decided to work together.¹¹⁵

Petraeus Changes Commands

As mentioned above, General Petraeus's tenure in command of MNF–I ended in an unpredicted way with Admiral Fallon's departure as USCENTCOM commander. Petraeus was nominated to succeed Admiral Fallon in April 2008, but also to remain in command in Iraq until the fall of 2008. General Petraeus was confirmed by the Senate as USCENTCOM commander on July 10, 2008,¹¹⁶ and took command on September 16, 2008, replaced in command of MNF–I by General Odierno.

What had been accomplished by the time General Petraeus left Iraq? Violence had sunk to levels not seen since 2004. He had led the U.S. and coalition forces that, with the help of their Iraqi comrades, created the time to allow the Iraqis to work toward national political reconciliation. According to Robinson, "Petraeus and Crocker's main achievement was that they identified the right goal—political accommodation among Iraqis—and then bent all their efforts to that task."¹¹⁷ She concludes her book with this summary: "Petraeus may not have brought the Iraq war to its conclusion, but what he did accomplish will surely be enshrined in the annals of U.S. military history and counterinsurgency warfare. . . . Petraeus gave Iraq a chance to climb out of its civil war and America a chance to redeem itself for the errors it made there."¹¹⁸

Thomas Ricks was not as optimistic. His evaluation was that the surge had not achieved its objectives:

The surge campaign was effective in many ways, but the best grade it can be given is a solid incomplete. It succeeded tactically but fell short strategically. There is no question that the surge was an important contributor to the reduction in violence in Iraq and perhaps the main cause of that improvement. But its larger purpose had been to create a breathing space that would then enable Iraqi politicians to find a way forward and that hasn't happened. As 2008 proceeded, not only were some top Iraqi officials not seizing the opportunity, some were regressing. . . . Iraqi politicians had found that they didn't necessarily have to move forward.¹¹⁹

Two years later in September 2010, an active combat role for U.S. forces in Iraq has ended and U.S. troop strength has gone below 50,000. However, after parliamentary elections in March 2010, no clear winner emerged, and 6 months later the Iraqis have been unable to form a new government or decide on a new prime minister. Random violence also continues, mostly blamed on Sunni insurgents. General Petraeus probably was not surprised by these developments, but one doubts even he would have foreseen that in 2010 he would be facing an even greater challenge than Iraq: Afghanistan.

Notes

Most of the information that is the basis for this case study is drawn from Linda Robinson, *Tell Me How This Ends: General David Petraeus and the Search for a Way Out of Iraq* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2008), supplemented by Thomas E. Ricks, *The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq, 2006–2008* (New York: Penguin, 2009), Rick Atkinson, *In the Company of Soldiers* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2004), and personal conversations between the author and General David Petraeus.

¹ Linda Robinson, *Tell Me How This Ends: General David Petraeus and the Search for a Way Out of Iraq* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2008), 17.

² *Ibid.*, 15.

³ Various sources, including General Petraeus's official biography, available at <www.defense.gov/bios/biographydetail.aspx?biographyid=166>, and personal knowledge of the author.

⁴ Petraeus, conversations with author, August–September 2010.

⁵ Petraeus's official biography.

⁶ Rick Atkinson, *In the Company of Soldiers* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2004), 73.

⁷ Petraeus, conversation with author.

⁸ Personal knowledge of author.

⁹ Petraeus, conversation with author.

¹⁰ Atkinson, 35; and Petraeus, conversation with author.

¹¹ Petraeus videotaped interview with David Ignatius, February 9, 2010.

¹² Kirsten Lundberg, *The Accidental Statesman: General Petraeus and the City of Mosul, Iraq* (Boston: Kennedy School of Government Case Study, 2006), 29.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 29–30.

¹⁵ Robinson, 83.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 86.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 88.

¹⁸ Petraeus, conversation with author.

¹⁹ Robinson, 89.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 90–92.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 92–93; and conversation with author and staff officer.

²² Thomas E. Ricks, *The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq, 2006–2008* (New York: Penguin, 2009), 154.

²³ *Ibid.*, 154.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 154–155.

²⁵ Robinson, 93.

²⁶ Briefing prepared by Colonel Brad Pippin, USA, for The Great Captains elective course, slide 6.

²⁷ Personal knowledge of author.

- ²⁸ Robinson, 109–113.
- ²⁹ Ibid., 94–97.
- ³⁰ Petraeus, conversation with author.
- ³¹ Robinson, 98–100, 114.
- ³² Ricks, 130–133.
- ³³ Ibid., 132–133.
- ³⁴ Robinson, 104–105.
- ³⁵ Ibid., 104.
- ³⁶ Petraeus, videotaped presentation to students at the Industrial College of the Armed Forces, August 2009.
- ³⁷ Ricks, 133.
- ³⁸ Robinson, 122.
- ³⁹ Ibid., 119.
- ⁴⁰ Doug Ollivant, “Producing Victory: Rethinking Conventional Forces in COIN Operations,” *Military Review*, July–August 2006, as reported in Robinson, 121.
- ⁴¹ Robinson, 123–124.
- ⁴² Ollivant, as reported in Robinson, 121.
- ⁴³ Petraeus, videotaped presentation.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid.
- ⁴⁵ Robinson, 82–83.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid., 115.
- ⁴⁷ Petraeus, conversation with author.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid.
- ⁴⁹ Robinson, 148–153.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid., 2.
- ⁵¹ Ibid., 142.
- ⁵² Background information for this section comes from a variety of open sources, but the summary in this section is the author’s, who wishes to thank John Matheny for his assistance in developing this section.
- ⁵³ Robinson, 141.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid., 142.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid., 175–176.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid., 176.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid., 176–177.
- ⁵⁸ Ricks, 133.
- ⁵⁹ Petraeus, videotaped presentation.
- ⁶⁰ Robinson, 179.
- ⁶¹ Ricks, 133.
- ⁶² Excerpts from Robinson, 181–216.
- ⁶³ Ibid., 189, 215.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid., 217–249.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 238.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 248–249.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 269.

⁶⁸ Petraeus, conversation with author.

⁶⁹ Ricks, 200–202.

⁷⁰ Petraeus, conversation with author.

⁷¹ Ricks, 202.

⁷² Petraeus, conversation with author.

⁷³ Robinson, 271–275.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 278.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 170.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 282.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 285–286.

⁷⁸ Ricks, 225–227; and Petraeus, conversation with author.

⁷⁹ Bob Woodward, “You’re Not Accountable, Jack’: How a Retired Officer Gained Influence at the White House and in Baghdad,” *The Washington Post*, September 9, 2008, A1.

⁸⁰ Robinson, 294.

⁸¹ Ibid., 295.

⁸² Ibid., 294.

⁸³ Ibid., 295.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 294–296.

⁸⁵ Petraeus, conversation with author.

⁸⁶ Woodward.

⁸⁷ Robinson, 296–297.

⁸⁸ David H. Petraeus, “Report to Congress on the Situation in Iraq,” September 10–11, 2007, available at <www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/Petraeus-Testimony20070910.pdf>.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Robinson, 300. Emphasis added.

⁹⁴ Author’s opinion, supported by others’ observations.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Robinson, 300.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 309–312.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 315–317.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 312–313.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 324.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid., 324–325.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 327–331.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 331.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 334–336.

¹⁰⁶ Petraeus, conversation with author.

¹⁰⁷ Ricks, 280–285.

¹⁰⁸ Robinson, 337–339.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 339.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 342.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 340.

¹¹² Petraeus, conversation with author.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ David H. Petraeus, “Report to Congress on the Situation in Iraq,” April 8–9, 2008, available at <<http://armed-services.senate.gov/statemnt/2008/April/Petraeus%2004-08-08.pdf>>.

¹¹⁵ Robinson, 344.

¹¹⁶ “Senate Confirms Gen. Petraeus as New Central Command Chief, Gen. Odierno Promoted,” Associated Press, July 10, 2008, available at <www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,379942,00.html>.

¹¹⁷ Robinson, 349.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 363.

¹¹⁹ Ricks, 296.

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