

May 20, 2008

TO: Interested Parties
FROM: Matt Bennett, Sean Barney and Scott Payne
RE: Petraeus Confirmation Hearings

Overview

Last time General Petraeus was on the Hill, he avoided questions about the effect of the President's Iraq policy on America's overall national security and on America's military readiness by pleading, fairly enough, that his billet was limited to Iraq. Now that General Petraeus has been nominated to oversee operations in the entire Centcom region, it is vital that Senators press General Petraeus to answer the broader policy questions that he refused to answer last time around.

To that end, Senators should not let this hearing become dominated by questions about Iraq and the success or failure of the surge—issues with which General Petraeus is most closely associated. Rather, they should widen the frame by focusing on two broader questions: ***Is America safer as a result of President Bush's policies in the Centcom region? And have those policies so depleted the war fighting capability of the military that it is at risk of losing its effectiveness, either now or in the future?***

Set forth below are some proposed questions for General Petraeus that committee members could use to explore these critically important issues.

The Mission in the Centcom Region

- Q. The Director of the CIA has said that, if the U.S. is going to suffer another terrorist attack on American soil, it most certainly will originate from the Afghan-Pakistan border region. He recently called the area a "clear and present danger to ... the West in general and the US in particular." Do you agree with Director Hayden's assessment?
- Q. Like yours, Ambassador Ryan Crocker's job has required him to focus on Iraq of late. However, he told the Senate in April that if he were forced to choose between fighting al Qaeda in Afghanistan versus Iraq, he would "pick al Qaeda in the Pakistan-Afghanistan border area." Currently, we have roughly one US or coalition soldier for every square mile in Iraq. In Afghanistan, it is roughly one soldier for every 10 square miles.

Does it make sense to have the vast majority of troops in Iraq rather than Afghanistan, given that the director of the CIA, and even our ambassador to

Iraq, have identified the Afghan-Pakistan border region as the source of the most immediate and compelling terrorist threat facing America?

- Q. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said recently that “we don’t have enough forces [in Afghanistan] to be able to hold in what is a classic counterinsurgency. And that’s what we need, in addition to a fully integrated all agency of government approach in Afghanistan, which just isn’t there yet either.” Do you agree with Admiral Mullen’s assessment?
- Q. The *Wall Street Journal* reported on May 6th that U.S. commanders in Afghanistan had requested 10,000-12,000 additional troops to fight a resurgent Taliban. However, because of the current troop commitment in Iraq, the Pentagon simply cannot provide these forces. As Admiral Mullen has said “We don’t have troops ... sitting on the shelf, ready to go [to Afghanistan].”

If General McNeill asked you for additional troops in Afghanistan to defeat al Qaeda and help break up terrorist plots against the United States, would you be willing to lower our troop commitment in Iraq and deploy forces to Afghanistan?

- Q. In discussing troop levels in Iraq, you’ve repeatedly stated the decisions must be “conditions based.” If you are to command Centcom, what conditions would you need to see to move more troops from Iraq to Afghanistan? Is a resurgent Taliban enough? Or does another terrorist attack need to occur before we refocus our efforts on Afghanistan?

What combination of events needs to occur in Iraq and Afghanistan for you to recommend that troops be moved from Iraq to Afghanistan?

Are you satisfied with the current conditions in Afghanistan? If not, what policies will you recommend to change the dynamics on the ground?

The Military’s War Fighting Crisis

- Q. The Army Chief and Vice-Chiefs of Staff both have come to the Senate recently to express concern that, given the demands of repeated and frequent deployments to Iraq, insufficient time is being devoted to training our soldiers for the full range of missions we need our Army to be capable of performing.

As commander in Iraq, I expect you have been grateful every day for all that our soldiers have given to the effort in Iraq. As you think about assuming a command with broader responsibilities though, are you concerned that we have been giving short shrift to our security requirements—and the Army’s ability to meet them—elsewhere in the world?

- Q. You literally wrote the book on U.S. counterinsurgency operations. You and other Army leaders have pointed out how indispensable junior and mid-level officers—company-level commanders—are to effective counterinsurgency operations.

58 percent of the West Point Class of 2002 left active duty in 2007 after completing their initial commitment. In previous testimony you mentioned your concern regarding the high number of junior Army officers leaving the service. Do you expect any improvement in these trends so long as we maintain the deployment schedule necessary to support current troop levels in Iraq? Are you concerned about the impact losing these officers will have on our ability to fight counterinsurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan?

- Q. In discussing effective counterinsurgency operations, you have also noted that “preserving noncombatant lives and dignity is central to mission accomplishment” and that “counterinsurgency forces achieve the most meaningful success by gaining popular support and legitimacy.” A recent Army report stated that troops with high levels of combat stress are seven times more likely to hit an Iraqi civilian and twice as likely to violate military ethical standards. The Army has also found that among combat troops sent to Iraq for three or more tours, 27 percent show signs of anxiety, depression, or acute stress—actually demonstrating PTSD symptoms in theater. Currently, more than 10 percent of active duty forces have deployed to Iraq three or more times. Countless more face their third, fourth, or fifth deployments if we continue to maintain current troop levels in Iraq.

Are you not concerned that, besides compromising the future readiness of the force, the current unsustainable cycle of repeated and extended deployments will actually come to be counterproductive in both Iraq and Afghanistan—that it will actually erode over time the effectiveness of our fighting force, specifically as a counterinsurgent force?

- Q. Throughout our history, the Marine Corps has been available to rapidly respond to unexpected contingencies around the world. Not infrequently, where they've been needed has been in the neck of the woods that you will be overseeing if you become Centcom Commander. But the Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps has indicated that the current cycle of deployments, resulting from the demands of operations in Iraq, “does not allow [Marine] units the time to train ... to be ready for other contingencies.” “This most directly affects,” he has said, “Marines' proficiency in core competencies such as combined arms and amphibious operations.”

What does it say about the strategic risk that we are currently running, in the Centcom region and elsewhere, that the Marine Corps - they who are supposed to be trained to fight our nation's battles from the Halls of Montezuma to the Shores of Tripoli - are so consumed with an occupation that is now in its fifth year that they are unable to properly train for their traditional role of responding to unforeseen contingencies?