

Iraq Progress Report: A Time to Assess and Reflect

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Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

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The Bush administration is required to submit three progress reports on Iraq to Congress in September after it returns from its August recess. The US Comptroller General will issue one around September 1 on how well so-called congressional benchmarks have been met. Near the end of the month, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) conservative think tank will report on “The readiness of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) to assume responsibility for maintaining the territorial integrity of Iraq, denying international terrorists a safe haven, bringing greater security to Iraq’s 18 provinces in the next 12 to 18 months, and bringing an end to sectarian violence to achieve national reconciliation.”

Then, on or about September 15, General David Petraeus, US “Multi-National Force” – Iraq (MNF-I) commander will submit his assessment of progress before multi-billions more funding are released for a war the Pentagon and most others in Washington know is unwinnable and lost. No matter, his report (and the others) will state progress has been made and the “surge” is working even though details will be sketchy in what’s expected to be a vaguely worded deceptive snapshot of contrived positive trends. It’ll fool no one, but Congress will be asked to accept it (and the others) on faith that more time, money, sustained troop levels and patience are needed.

That’s assured from friendly Democrats and Republicans alike. They continue turning a blind eye to the daily nationwide out-of-control carnage like the August 14 Kurdish area truck bombings local Nineveh province officials report killed at least 500 (far above initial reports), seriously wounded hundreds more, and destroyed over 30 homes in the northwest Yazidi communities.

No matter, and who in Washington is watching and counting. The generalissimo’s wishes are all that matter, and he’ll have a list of them prepared for him by his bosses and handlers in “the White House, with inputs from officials throughout the government,” according to an August 15 report in the Los Angeles Times. All Petraeus has to do is transcribe them to his letterhead, sign them, and return them to Washington in the enclosed stamp-addressed envelope.

The generalissimo knows what’s expected of him which is why he was picked for the top Iraq job. He’s also an image-maker’s creation portrayed by the White House and dominant media as aggressive in nature, an innovative thinker on counterinsurgency warfare, a talisman, a white knight, a do-or-die competitive legend, and a man able to turn defeat into victory. Those of us old enough don’t remember adulation that strong for Eisenhower or MacArthur. Nor did we read about it for John Pershing in the earlier war or for George Washington either, for that matter. As for heaping it on Petraeus, borrowing a quote from a past article – “Phew.”

The generalissimo has now been in Iraq six months, and despite claims of progress, conditions are worse than ever and heading south under his stewardship. Still, the commander's hope springs eternal and won't likely wane (at least publicly) lest he risk another 4-star aspirant stepping in to replace him. With upper lip stiffened and reciting his prepared lines, he tells a New York Times reporter "we're going to try (to) win (this war, but)....it's likely to muddle along for quite a long time."

The boy emperor "commander-in-chief" back home has his ideas, too. He plans to continue the "surge" well into next year, all the while claiming "our new strategy is delivering good results, and our commanders recently reported more good news." Army Chief of Staff George Casey (who got bumped in February for Petraeus) was part of the amen chorus August 14 after a weekend visit to Iraq. "Our guys are seeing progress on the security front," he claimed. "From the time I was there, there was progress....every day....and there continues to be progress....We will succeed....if we demonstrate patience and will." More hype still came from an August 10 White House document citing positive reports from "several unexpected (unidentified) sources" and a recent uptick in polling numbers any able pollster can produce.

It's all part of a careful Washington-scripted scheme to band-aid-over an unfixable gaping wound. It includes dispatching hordes of congressmen, senators, friendly journalists and assorted think tank types to a series of staged events and meetings in Iraq, far removed from what's, in fact, happening on the ground. Their mission is to get it all down and tell it to the home folks on return, and that's what's happening.

Some of it comes from two on-off-and on again war-supporting flacks, Michael O'Hanlon and Kenneth Pollack. It was in their New York Times July 30 op ed piece titled "A War We Just Might Win." Neither one is credible, and that status earned them prominent space in "the newspaper of record" to pile on more hype for a failed and illegal enterprise.

Both men supported (illegally) attacking Iraq in the run-up to war when a quick victory looked easy. When it failed, they became harsh critics of administration bumbling until now. After being whisked to Iraq as part of the thinly veiled PR scheme, they returned after eight days of dog and pony show theater claiming the following: "the political debate in Washington is surreal (with its) critics unaware of....significant changes taking place (in Iraq.) We are finally (making progress), at least in military terms....In previous trips....American troops were angry and frustrated....Today, morale is high....they see real results." This over-the-top assessment stopped just short of claiming the troops are so elated they can't wait to come back for another tour when their current one ends.

After four and a half years of failure in a war longer in duration than WW I or II, and likely to exceed the latter one in inflation-adjusted cost before it ends, it's hard believing Congress would swallow any assessment ignoring reality. But you can bet it will on both sides of the aisle even though the generalissimo says success depends on a long-term US presence likely to be at least "9 or 10 years." In plain English, that means permanent occupation and turning a blind eye to defeat until the pain gets so great we give it up and leave.

That's not imminent as the administration-friendly horde descended on Iraq for an advance taste of what's coming next month straight from the generalissimo's mouth. They heard progress is slow but being made in places like Al Anbar province where Sunni tribal leaders have been armed and enlisted to help in an act of desperation likely to backfire. These same men are former and almost certain future resistance fighters. They turned against fellow

Iraqis (called Al Queda as standard hot button Pavlovian scare talk) because their views and actions got too extreme. That will change when American duplicity again is seen as the main threat. At that point, these same tribal leaders will rejoin the fight to liberate their country from a hostile occupier they and other Iraqi fighters won't tolerate.

The present detente will prove short-lived when they become as disillusioned as the main Sunni Accordance Front 44 seat bloc that left the Shia-dominated power-sharing government August 1 because their demands were ignored. A week later, five more ministers joined them by announcing a boycott of cabinet meetings. There's now no Sunni representation in the al-Maliki government causing fissures in it big enough to drive an M1A1 tank through, and all the Pentagon and Bush administration can do is blame it on Iranian meddling and al-Maliki's inability to contain it. It makes as much sense as a 1960s pop song blaming a magic spell of love on the bossa nova, but that Latin beat hasn't been cited yet for any of Iraq's problems.

In a sign of desperation, al-Maliki assembled top Iraqi political leaders August 13 to prepare for an August 14 summit of sorts to end the current crisis and restore unity. "Everything (he said would) be on the table," to resolve the impasse that may be unresolvable. Major contentious issues remain, and one of the biggest is Big Oil's drafted grand theft oil law unacceptable to most Iraqis and still to be legislatively settled one way or another. Nothing permanent will be settled, however, until a real Iraqi government is in place after the occupation ends, and the puppet one is gone. How pathetic it is showed when the "crisis summit" met. Like previous efforts, it produced nothing, and the largest Sunni bloc leader, Adnan Dulaimi, said there were no negotiations, nothing political was discussed, but it was a nice lunch.

It's more evidence claims of progress are pure fantasy, and despite the hype, the so-called "surge" is a bust. All that's "surging" is the number of:

- daily attacks played down in the major media;
- deaths that a Just Foreign Policy report calculates at over 1 million since March, 2003 based on updating an earlier Lancet study estimating 655,000 or more deaths through July, 2006;
- uncontrollable violence throughout the country;
- refugees fleeing for safety; the International Rescue Committee and UNHCR estimate the number at around four million including the internally displaced with a further 40,000 Iraqis fleeing their homes each month; and
- a near-total breakdown of essential services like electricity, drinking water, sanitation, medical care, education, security and even food compounded by mass unemployment and extreme poverty; the result is a crisis level humanitarian disaster of epic proportions that continues to worsen.

A July 30, 2007 Oxfam International and NCCI network of aid organizations report had grim findings. It estimates:

- eight million Iraqis need emergency aid – one-third of the population;

- four million can't buy enough to eat;
- 70% of Iraqis have no adequate water supply;
- 80% lack adequate sanitation;
- 28% of children are malnourished;
- the rate of underweight baby births has tripled;
- 92% of Iraqi children suffer learning problems due to fear; and
- there's been a mass exodus of around 80% of doctors, nurses, teaching staff at schools and hospitals and other vitally needed professionals.

This writer observed back in February and earlier that conditions would continue to deteriorate, and the greater number of US forces there are on the ground, the worse things will get. That's the current situation, but it's not being reported. Nor do we hear about Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Michael G. Mullen's end of July assessment that "no amount of troops in no amount of time will make much of a difference," agreeing with other military analysts with similar views going back decades.

Instead, spin begets super-spin in an effort to keep defeat from becoming Armageddon or at least dampen or conceal it until a new President takes office and then it's his or her problem to sort out and explain. So far, it doesn't look promising according to accurate reports, some of which are Department of Defense (DOD) ones hushed up.

DOD notes the average number of daily attacks peaked in June at a level higher than any month since May, 2003, right after the invasion. Other independent reports note Baghdad is an out-of-control battle zone looking hopeless, conditions are nearly as bad in other parts of the country, and dead bodies are everywhere in numbers too great to keep accurate count. Morgues can't handle the volume and don't even try. To conceal the true toll, journalists aren't allowed at bombing site scenes and are kept out of hospitals and wherever else they can document carnage. The Bush administration calls it progress, and the hyperventilating media play along with people denied the truth unless they rely on unembedded independent journalists as growing numbers are doing.

Few parts of the country have escaped turmoil that's even in the Kurdish North as the August 14 bombings there proved. It's also hitting the British-occupied South around Basra that was never spared violence but once got much less than in American-controlled areas. Now it's pretty intense forcing the Brown government to consider heeding the recommendation of its senior military commanders that "nothing more can be accomplished" in Iraq and the remaining 5500 British troops should be withdrawn "without further delay," according to an August 19 report in the London Independent.

An earlier August 7 Washington Post report said "Shiite militias there have escalated a violent battle against each other for political supremacy and control over oil revenues" or maybe for other reasons the Post ignored. The report continued stating "Three major Shiite political groups are locked in a bloody conflict that has left (Basra) in the hands of militias and criminal gangs, whose control extends to municipal offices and neighborhood streets." Their main goal, in fact, may be no different than other resistance groups - to drive out a repressive occupier (the British in the South in their case) and reclaim their sovereignty.

Afterwards they can sort out how to run their country.

Things are little different in Afghanistan according to an August 19 London Guardian report revealing a shocking human toll on British forces (likely affecting Americans, too) that may signal a future withdrawal there as well as from Iraq. It cites military figures showing nearly “half of frontline troops have required significant medical treatment during this summer’s fighting....in southern Helmand province (that) offered some of the most intense fighting (British troops had been engaged in) for 50 years.” One soldier on the ground said “You could be in the army for decades and you will never get anything like that again.” It’s so intense, many British soldiers intend to leave the military when their duty tours end – if they survive them.

Back Home It’s Politics As Usual

Bush-supportive Republican and Democrat hopefuls have their own issues to deal with and getting reelected (or elected President) tops them. They’re stuck with the Iraq quagmire they backed from the start, know America is in Iraq to stay, but have to appeal to their base with soothing rhetoric even knowing expecting victory is pure fantasy. Billions spent on huge super-bases, an extensive base infrastructure and the largest US embassy in the world dispel talk of withdrawal with proof on the ground. So while pledging to end the war and bring home the troops, all major Democrat and Republican candidates say it will take years to accomplish and America must stay engaged for the duration. They mean forever.

The reasons given are pathetic and the usual kind of campaigning blather by aspirants trying to have it both ways – withdraw, but leave enough there to prevent:

- Iraqi genocide,
- civil war,
- violence from spilling into other countries,
- out-of-control lawlessness and the country becoming a breeding ground and staging area for broad-based “terrorist” attacks anywhere – that, in fact, the occupation incites,
- instability only our presence can contain (that, in fact, causes). We also must:
- protect American personnel (who shouldn’t be there) and Iraqis (we’re “killing” with our “kindness”),
- train Iraqis (who can run their own country quite nicely without us),
- contend with all other possibilities, and more.

Rhetoric goes even further with Hillary Clinton citing the need to fight “terrorism” and stabilize the Kurdish North, never mentioning the serious threat Turkey may invade in force and ignite a whole new war with untold consequences if it happens.

The logistical problem of troop withdrawal then comes up. Candidates claim it’ll take a year or more to accomplish when, in fact, the only issue is the will to do it. Iraqis will be delighted to help. Candidates like flexible options, however, so it’s easy saying future policy depends on conditions at the time that now look “uncertain” at best.

Hillary Clinton is a metaphor for the times by her pious comment that if George Bush doesn't end this war, she will if elected. She won't say when, and in a turnaround states her real view that America has "remaining vital national security issues in Iraq" (spelled O-I-L) requiring our permanent presence in the country. So for her and other hopefuls, withdrawal is nice-sounding rhetoric, but when it gets down to policy, America is in Iraq to stay, so get over it.

Her leading opponent, Barak Obama feels no different with high-minded speechifying that "It is time to bring our troops home because it has made us less safe" (never mentioning the toll on Iraqis). He then admits away from supportive crowds he supports a permanent military presence in the country for the usual phony reasons hiding the real ones.

Dick Cheney's hidden ones just surfaced in a 1994 video explaining why he advocated leaving Iraq after the Gulf war. When asked then if US or UN forces should have occupied Baghdad, he answered "no" because it would become "a quagmire if you go that far and try to take over (the country)." He then highlighted the issue of casualties stating "how many additional dead Americans is Saddam worth? Our judgment was, not very many, and I think we got it right." Indeed he did, yet he ended up doing in 2003 what he thought foolhardy nine years earlier. So much for leadership, let alone honor and respect for the rule of law and rights of people everywhere to be sovereign and free.

Honor, public service and respect for sovereign freedom aren't parts of the New York Times agenda either, nor was it ever going back decades. A recent example was its August 13 editorial titled "Wrong Way Out of Iraq" in which it argues for a permanent US military presence in the country and against a significant troop drawdown. The Times position is pathetic but typical of its kind of reporting and editorial positions. It pledges allegiance to the US empire and the corporate giants for which it stands....with liberty and justice for them alone. Wars of aggression, scorn for the law, massive human suffering and deprivation are just business as usual for "the newspaper of record," indifferent to it all.

The editorial bluntly stated "The United States cannot walk away from the new international terrorist front it created in Iraq" while never admitting our presence causes violence that won't end while the occupation continues. It then added "there should be no illusions about trying to continue the war on a reduced scale. It is folly to expect a smaller American force to do in a short time what a much larger" one couldn't do over a longer period.

From the start, the Times was in the lead (with Judith Miller its chief front page voice) supporting the Bush war agenda to establish imperial control over the part of the world with two-thirds of all proved oil reserves. Look for more "stay the course" editorials and front page features in the run-up to Petraeus' mid-September "progress" report calling for continued patience, no troop drawdown, and lots more funding indefinitely. Democrats and Republicans alike are supportive with the Times out in front as lead cheerleader.

Unmentioned is that the war is unwinnable and Dick Cheney's 1994 prediction proved accurate. Those factors likely played into Karl Rove's August 13 resignation, but he didn't let on why beyond the usual stuff they all say about wanting more time with his family. Nonsense, but shed no tears for a man who may have outsmarted himself, yet isn't going away. Rove may move out of the spotlight, but he's not out of the game. He's sure to continue as a master-manipulator elsewhere, for another right wing scheme, or perhaps for the entire Republican party behind the scenes in some reengineering or new strategizing capacity if anyone wants him. Later on they'll be lucrative book deal and lecture circuit fees

sweet enough to keep any fallen politico living happily ever after.

In the end, however, the record will show Bush's Svengali failed to pull off his greatest scheme – solidifying the Republican base, building a generation-long super-party majority in Congress, and assuring a Republican gets elected President in 2008. His bungled post-9/11 strategy also resulted in the 2006 mid-term election defeat with things looking even bleaker as 2008 approaches.

Rove may also be leaving for another reason that at this point is pure conjecture. It may involve avoiding further congressional scrutiny. It's not off the table, but soon may be as part of a White House deal with Democrats softening in return for something its leaders want. That's how business is done in Washington where the criminal class is bipartisan and one favor begets another. Expect anything ahead in the dirtiest game around for the highest stakes with the public left out, in the dark, and nowhere in sight.

Looking Ahead in Iraq

In his August 10 AntiWar.com article titled "Mechanistic Destruction: American Foreign Policy at Point Zero," distinguished historian Gabriel Kolko notes the US rarely ever "lost any conventional military battle since at least 1950. Nor has it....ever won a war." In all its wars since Korea, it failed to win a single victory. It's good at overthrowing governments, but the political fallout often ends up "far, far more tenuous. In a word, in international affairs it bumbles very badly" making an "unstable world far more precarious" than if it left well enough alone. "All this is very well known," Kolko states. "The real issue is why the US makes the identical mistakes over and over again and never learns from its errors."

We're now "losing two wars and creating a vast arc of profound strategic and political instability from the Mediterranean Sea to South Asia." In addition, we reignited the arms race in Europe, turned a friendly Russia into a foe, and are heading the country toward possible bankruptcy through reckless fiscal policy. In sum, "this administration has been at least as bad as any (in the nation's history and perhaps it's) "the worst" ever.

By its record (with plenty of Capitol Hill help), it's fair to compare Washington to an asylum with members of both parties the inmates. An outside observer would have to conclude the inmates were in charge, and it shows by what's happening. It also brings to mind the Wile E. Coyote cartoon character as a way to explain it. Bush's political agenda has been disastrous, yet both parties continue supporting the same mistakes expecting a different outcome.

Impossible, according to Kolko, saying the nation is "at point zero in the application of American power in the world." We can't win two "extremely expensive adventures nor will (we) abstain from policies" hurting other nations and our own. Myopia, self-interest and a lot of arrogance have led us to this "impasse," and Kolko isn't optimistic. He's also a noted expert on the Vietnam war having written the seminal work on its history he says was "purchased by many base libraries, (and) military journals (treat) it in detail and very respectfully."

With that in mind, it's fitting to draw parallels to that earlier time. They're striking even though marked differences exist as well. By the late 1960s, victory in Southeast Asia was considered unattainable and a new strategy was needed, even though it developed slowly. It was called Vietnamization combined with duplicitous and delaying diplomacy orchestrated by Nixon's Svengali, Henry Kissinger. He also ended discredited with Karl Rove his Bush

administration equivalent for domestic policy in the role of former Deputy Chief of Staff to the President as of August 31.

The Pentagon has a current version of the Vietnam era plan. It's been arming and training Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) as our enforcer hoping US troops eventually can stay hunkered down in super-bases as backup. In the early to mid-1970s, Vietnamization failed because, as Kolko explained, victory isn't just about tactics, weapons and winning battles. Economic, social, political and morale factors come into play. The same holds true today in Iraq.

In Vietnam, the revolution was a powerful defense against a foreign invader. An emboldened North used it, was more committed, and had majority popular support on its side. They had enough of the Japanese earlier followed by the French and Americans making any alternative an improvement as long as it meant peace with their own leaders in charge.

Those leaders didn't resist the Japanese and then fight a 30 year war to give it up in the end a foreign occupier and its imperial ambitions. At least that's how it was then. Vietnam kept its territory but, in the end, surrendered its economic sovereignty to the lord and master of the universe it could outlast on the battlefield but not in the marketplace.

Iraq one day may be no different turning a future resistance victory into eventual economic defeat somewhere down the road. The country has enormous untapped oil reserves thought by some analysts to be potentially greater than Saudi Arabia's they believe are overstated. Iraq's remained undeveloped because of almost continuous war preventing any since September, 1980, or for nearly 27 years.

Even so, it has around 10% of proved world reserves that will be far greater when all potential deposits come online. Whoever controls them will have an economic bonanza worth many trillions of dollars. It may entice a future Iraqi government to partner with the US-led West, and by so doing let America win in the marketplace what it can't achieve in battle. In the end, Iraq may surrender as Vietnam did and lose everything now being fought for. How this plays out will only be known in the fullness of time. Millions of Iraqis hope equity and justice will triumph over greed and are betting their lives on it. May their struggle not be in vain.

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