



## **The Man for the Plan. Meet General David Petraeus, the new commander in Iraq**

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"We need a man, and then a plan." So Field Marshall Bernard Law Montgomery is reported to have said when recommending General Sir Gerald Templer to be British high commissioner at the height of the Malayan insurgency. When, in January 1952, Templer was summoned to meet the prime minister, the British Dominion of Malaya had been under a state of emergency for almost four years. Churchill, newly returned to power and further satiated by a full dinner, waved a glass of brandy and bellowed: "Templer! Malaya!" A few minutes later: "Templer! Full powers!" And finally, "Full power, Templer. Very heady stuff. Use it sparingly."

If Gerald Templer was the face of Britain in Malaya, David Petraeus is

now to be the face of America in Iraq: Perhaps as soon as Tuesday, the Senate will confirm Petraeus's promotion to four-star general and he will assume command of "Multi-National Force-Iraq" in Baghdad. But generals, wrote John Keegan in *The Mask of Command*, "may be many things besides the commander of an army." A general may, Keegan continued, "carry both society and army farther than they believed they wished to travel."

Americans are near the point of wishing to travel no farther in Iraq. After tolerating Saddam Hussein's outrages for two decades, we find ourselves four years past his removal with the Iraqi government still unable to govern the country. At home, there is barely enough po-

litical will to press forward. Nor is there much belief that the Bush administration can chart the way. Petraeus must be many things, indeed: He must carry Americans and Iraqis alike farther than we think we wish to travel.

Happily, Petraeus, whom I've known and observed for nearly 20 years, wears "the mask of command" as well as any current officer. He's already done so successfully for Iraqis. As commander of the 101st Airborne Division at the time of the invasion, Petraeus quickly found himself effectively the mayor of Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city, and governor of the surrounding province at a time when the Saddam government had collapsed and the Coalition Provisional Authority barely existed on paper, let alone on the ground in northern Iraq. The Marine battalion that had been the first U.S. unit to enter Mosul was much too small to undertake the necessary tasks. Petraeus immediately threw himself into establishing what was, in effect, an occupation authority and creating a public persona for himself; admirers and skeptics alike called him "Petraeus Pasha" or "King David," though not often to his face. Importantly, he allowed his subordinates an equal latitude. Not every decision made was perfect--there was, alas, no real U.S. occupation policy, and, when Ambassador Paul Bremer set a different course, there were clashes--but Mosul as run by the 101st Airborne remains a tantalizing image of what an intelligent American occupation might have been like.

And Petraeus has successfully worn the mask for American audiences; for all our civil-military fretting about "men on horseback," we seem to like charismatic commanders almost as much as Iraqis do. Not the least of these audiences is the U.S. Army itself. Petraeus long has been marked as ambitious and smart--two qualities both admired and distrusted in the service. When I met him, he was working as the personal aide to then-chief of staff General Carl Vuono. Generals' aides don't necessarily long survive the passing of their sponsor and his posse; the officer corps can be clannish and prone to petty politics and jealousies. Petraeus has been assiduous in matching his reputation as a field soldier with his reputation as an intellect. He not only earned a doctorate from Princeton's Woodrow Wilson School--writing on the effects of the Vietnam war on civil-military relations--but also keeps himself maniacally fit. The speed of his recovery from a gunshot wound received on a rifle range when he was commanding a battalion in the 101st Airborne is legendary. (The wound required a five-hour operation--performed by Dr. Bill Frist.)

Further, Petraeus is coming off a successful tenure as head of the Army's Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth. While this job took a winning commander away from his war at a crucial moment, it has helped Petraeus polish his institutional credentials in a way that will now serve him well. The main efforts during his 15 months in Kansas were the recasting of Army training for counterinsurgency opera-

tions and the creation of a new counterinsurgency field manual. The manual has gotten tremendous attention and is now quoted in every profile of Petraeus, but he sagely conceived the new doctrine as process more than product, as dialogue more than decalogue. Petraeus brought in not only a good number of academics and experts, but Marines as well as soldiers. The manual is, importantly, a two-service publication, and Petraeus worked well with Marine Lieutenant General James Mattis--another tremendously successful commander in Iraq, a serious thinker, and a folk hero to Marines. Mattis's message to Iraqis was that they could have "no better friend, no worse enemy" than the Marines. Petraeus will be sending a similar message to Baghdadis.

Petraeus also wears the mask of command in a way that is convincing to the press. *U.S. News & World Report*, as ever determined to understand the universe as a giant top-ten list, named Petraeus one of "America's Best Leaders" in 2005. He was "an open mind for a new Army," the magazine thought. At a funeral for one of his troopers, "he wore the stone face; even in this tragic moment, he exuded calm and control." In 2004, when Petraeus took on the task of training the Iraqis, *Newsweek* likewise saw what it wanted to see: a one-man-way-out from a war that even then establishment journalists were coming to dislike. "General Petraeus," *Newsweek* concluded, "is the closest thing to an exit strategy the United States now has." Michael R. Gordon of the *New York Times*, a deeply experienced military corre-

spondent and author of one of the best books on Iraq, *Cobra II*, puts it more soberly: "I think [Petraeus] is going in to supervise and really energize and drive this new strategy in Baghdad."

And Petraeus gets rave reviews from Congress. From his time in Mosul to his stint beginning the serious training of the Iraqi army, Petraeus played host to members of Congress traveling to Iraq. Representative Ike Skelton, the Missouri Democrat who now heads the House Armed Services Committee and who, despite his recent opposition to Bush administration Iraq policy, remains highly regarded for his bipartisanship and his military expertise, declared Petraeus "a first-class leader," adding, "If anyone can help motivate the Iraqis into taking on more security responsibility and well lead American forces in Iraq, it is he." One of the few dissenting notes came from Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, who last week petulantly told a group of San Francisco-area journalists: "He has been in charge of training, unsuccessfully." The Petraeus nomination confounds the Democrats' argument that "the generals" oppose the surge of forces into Baghdad.

In striving to reenergize American strategy in Iraq, Petraeus, for all his virtues, could use more help as he carries us forward; the plan matters, too. The administration has spent the last two weeks issuing caveats and otherwise undercutting the seemingly strong plan set forth by President Bush in his January 10 speech. And indeed, not even that

plan vested Petraeus with the "full powers" that Templer had in Malaya; U.S. efforts, both in Iraq and Afghanistan, have never achieved unity of command. There have been occasional moments of unity of effort, but those have been happy coincidences when personalities have meshed: Envoy and ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad worked well first with Lieutenant General David Barro in Afghanistan and recently with General George Casey in Iraq. When the chemistry was bad, as it was between Bremer and Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez, the division of authority was a crippling problem. There's no reason to think Petraeus won't get along with the new U.S. ambassador in Baghdad, Ryan Crocker, but neither is it a sure thing, and--most important--there's no good reason to leave it to chance.

Nor is it clear that any other agencies of the U.S. government are prepared to surge in support of the military. There has been a lot of talk in recent years about the need to mobilize "all elements of national power," but the State Department and others have been slow off the mark. The ability of the Iraqi government to run its own reconstruction program, despite Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's promise of a \$10 billion effort, is even more doubtful than its ability to secure the streets of Baghdad. The military has stepped into the reconstruction vacuum in both Iraq and Afghanistan, but the White House needs to assert itself across the entire government as it has at last done at the Defense Department. U.S. forces will certainly clear and hold the crucial neighborhoods

of Baghdad, but it's essential that this lead quickly to the "build" phase of the Bush strategy.

A third challenge is the administration's insistent line that "the Iraqis are in the lead." This is a fiction meant for Iraqi and American domestic political consumption, but it is so transparent that it is counterproductive: If the Iraqis had been able to take the lead, there would never have been a need for a surge in American forces; if the Maliki government were able to control Baghdad, there wouldn't be a "Mahdi Army." It's also a fiction that plays directly into the hands of the congressional opponents of the surge. While the Democratic leaders have yet to summon the courage to cut off funding, they'll now likely tie as much as they can to measures of Iraqi participation and progress, which the president will be asked to "certify"--that is, lie about. Most significantly, this will obscure the fact that Petraeus will be, and needs to be, the Big Man in Baghdad, the leader of the most powerful militia of all.

There has long been a recognition that reconstruction efforts must have an "Iraqi face"; building the credibility of the legitimate local government is a central element of a successful counterinsurgency. But there is likewise a clear distinction between what soldiers and Marines call "hugging" Iraqi authorities--setting them up for success in a cocoon of American power--and pushing them prematurely out front, setting them up for failure. Establishing security in Baghdad, which can

only be done with Americans in the lead, would be the biggest boost for Maliki and for the Iraqi government more generally.

Yet the most important challenge is to ensure that the military aspects of the plan are correct. Petraeus is being asked to carry out a plan formulated, debated, and all but finalized before he was nominated. He needs the authority and flexibility to execute it, modify it, or scrap it entirely as he sees fit. The president promised in his speech that five full brigades would be available for duty in Baghdad, but Pentagon briefers and, astoundingly, officials from other agencies have been saying otherwise over the past week, particularly on Capitol Hill. Where the truth rests is difficult to tell, but it is now buried under a pile of contradictory information about force flow, force posture, dates of deployment, and so forth. New defense secretary Robert Gates stumbled this past week when he started talking about a possible drawdown of U.S. forces this fall in Iraq. And the long overdue agreement on expanding the size of the U.S. Army and Marine Corps was foolishly hyped by double-counting soldiers already added during the Rumsfeld years.

Whether fairly or not, the administration's nomination of General Casey as Army chief of staff further complicates matters. It invites a comparison to General William Westmoreland and Vietnam--and there's nothing less helpful to Iraq policy than Vietnam analogies. Last week, some in the administration

talked about linking the Petraeus and Casey nominations in a way that would do Casey no favors but Petraeus and the Iraq mission much harm. The hearing to confirm Casey as Army chief has been pushed back until after Petraeus's hearing, and the two have been de-linked. Nevertheless, Democrats will still seize on the Casey hearing as an opportunity to attack the administration's conduct of the war. Whatever Casey's strengths or shortcomings, this is likely to prove a shabby reward for a soldier who has served long and honorably, and a potentially crippling blow for an incoming service chief who, in addition to supplying Petraeus as theater commander with the resources he needs, must undertake the expansion and reconstruction of the Army.

Still, at the end of the day, Petraeus will be in charge of fighting the war. In war--especially in irregular warfare--a good man can overcome obstacles. In 1952, Sir Gerald Templer quickly concluded, "I could win this war in three months if I could get two-thirds of the people on my side." By December, *Time* magazine had made "Smiling Tiger" Templer its cover boy--with a front-page portrait that was the ultimate "mask of command"--concluding that it was the "measure of Gerald Templer's success that in less than one year he has been able to turn from quick skirmishes against disaster to slow battles for Malaya's future." Something similar in Iraq would be a measure of David Petraeus's success, and a road to victory for the United States.