



How the Left Spent Its Summer Vacation. The season's big anti-war campaign fizzles

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[Clifford D. May](#)

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A few short months ago, the anti-war left was feeling its oats. On campuses around the country, professors were receiving letters asking them to steer students to "a major new organizing initiative to end the War in Iraq - Iraq Summer."

"Many of you will remember Mississippi Summer that helped pass the civil rights laws, and Viet Nam Summer that helped end the Viet Nam war," the letter read. "Iraq Summer will be the 21st century edition of those historic projects."

The letter explained that a coalition under the banner Americans Against Escalation in Iraq (AAEI), and in close association with MoveOn.org, was gearing up "to deploy 110 organizers to Districts

(sic) of critical House and Senate Republicans who still support the President's disastrous policy in Iraq. Their job will be to execute a national program to help fracture critical elements of the Republican base of support for the war by early fall. ... AAEI plans to demand that by late August every one of these Republicans are (sic) forced to 'Take a Stand' - to break their ties with Bush's war."

In May, the *Washington Post* reported that as much as \$12 million would be spent on a three-month campaign of demonstrations, mass phone-calling to congressional offices, television and radio ads, and other forms of political pressure, all guided by top pollsters and public relations firms. Thomas Matzzie,

director of both AAEI and Washington director of MoveOn.org Political Action, told the *Post*: "Our job is to focus on Republicans. How can we juice up attacks on them?"

By late June, Iraq Summer was seen as a juggernaut. As one wire service reported: "Even senior Republicans have said they expect the president will have little choice but to make adjustments in the Iraq strategy" by September.

What went wrong for the anti-war left? How did they end up further from their goal than when they began? Why is Congress now less likely than it was before Iraq Summer began to cut off funding for the war or legislate timetables for withdrawal? Why are the polls showing fewer Americans convinced that defeat in Iraq is inevitable, and more saying that the new strategy being implemented by Gen. David Petraeus deserves support?

The primary reason is that Petraeus and his troops have made real gains on the ground in Iraq. Working hand-in-glove with Iraqis, they have smashed al-Qaeda's Iraqi infrastructure and begun to confront the Iranian-backed death squads.

Witnesses to this shift have included Michael O'Hanlon and Kenneth Pollack, scholars at the liberal Brookings Institution, two of *The New York Times'* top reporters, John Burns and Michael Gordon, and a number of Democratic congressmen led by Rep. Brian Baird - who voted against U.S. intervention in Iraq but who opposes a precipitous retreat

now, a time when, he says, success seems possible and the consequences of retreat would be "catastrophic."

Progress in Iraq has been given short shrift by most of the major media. But the news has been spread by the alternative media: opinion journals, blogs and talk radio. At the same time, groups supporting the Petraeus mission and opposed to America's defeat in Iraq - it would not be merely "Bush's defeat" -- decided not to sit on their porches as the Iraq Summer heated up.

Venerable organizations such as the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars have spoken up clearly. Young and energetic groups such as Vets for Freedom, and Families United for Our Troops and Their Mission made sure elected officials would hear not only from far-left protestors and college students on the AAEI payroll. They were joined by such spirited organizations as Freedom's Watch, Gathering of Eagles, Move America Forward, Concerned Women For America, and American Values. Hundreds of members of these groups gathered in Washington this week to rally and buttonhole their representatives.

One more thing: The anti-war movement made a strategic error by aiming not to persuade but to punish; not to debate but to coerce and bully. This approach reached its peak - or rather its nadir - with MoveOn.org's full-page ad accusing General Petraeus of "betraying" his

country for daring to say that continuing to fight al-Qaeda and Iranian-backed militias is preferable to ceding Iraq to these enemies of America.

In the end, the ad has damaged MoveOn.org much more than Pet-

raeus. And it forced the group's Democratic allies in Congress to be the ones who had to "Take a Stand" -- to either denounce MoveOn.org's slander, or tacitly endorse left-wing McCarthyism. As you doubtless know by now, profiles in courage were few and far between.

[Clifford D. May](#), a former New York Times foreign correspondent, is the president of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, a policy institute focusing on terrorism.

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