



Top Story Of 2007: The Surge, The Military, And The Media

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There should be no question what the top story of the year was: America's counterinsurgency campaign in Iraq, the Democrats' hapless efforts to sabotage it, and the Western mainstream media's stubborn refusal to own up to military progress.

What happened in January defined the rest of the year. We rang in 2007 with vehement liberal opposition to the "surge" of 21,000 added U.S. troops and tactical changes to secure Baghdad. In the ensuing 12 months, Democrats tried and failed repeatedly to undermine this military strategy and starve the war of funding. Their poisonously partisan allies at MoveOn.org attempted to smear surge architect and patriot Gen. David Petraeus as a traitor. The New York Times and Associated Press fought tooth and nail to

obscure the successes of the surge with their relentless "grim milestone" drumbeat. But by year's end, with Shiites and Sunnis marching and praying together for peace, even anti-war Democrats and adversarial media outlets alike were forced to acknowledge that undeniable military progress and security improvements had been made.

Is there still a long way to go? Hell, yes. Were there other ancillary factors that contributed to the decrease in violence and the "awakenings" in Anbar province and Baghdad? Yes again. But go back to January. Refresh your memories of the anti-surge rhetoric and the spectacularly misguided conventional wisdom.

When the Senate Foreign Relation Committee's resolution opposing

the surge passed 12-9 on Jan. 24, Sen. Joseph Biden, D-Del., the panel's chairman, disingenuously claimed it was "not an attempt to embarrass the president." Bull. That's what the Democrats have been trying to do all year. Biden argued: The measure "is designed to let the president know that there are many in both parties, Democrats and Republicans, that believe a change in our mission to go into Baghdad -- in the midst of a civil war -- as well as a surge in ground troops . . . is the wrong way to go, and I believe it will have the opposite -- I repeat -- opposite effect the president intends."

Seven months later, staunch anti-war Democrat Rep. Brian Baird of Washington returned from Baghdad and recognized reality:

"As a Democrat who voted against the war from the outset and who has been frankly critical of the administration and the post-invasion strategy, I am convinced by the evidence that the situation has at long last begun to change substantially for the better . . . the people, strategies and facts on the ground have changed for the better and those changes justify changing our position on what should be done."

Wrong-way Biden insisted the anti-surge resolution wasn't meant to embarrass the president. Opponents of the Baghdad mission insisted they didn't want America to fail. But let's not forget where the Democrats came from in January -- and where the party leadership remains. A Fox News poll in mid-January revealed

that a disturbing 49 percent of Democrats either wanted us to lose in Iraq or "didn't know" if they wanted us to succeed. All but two Democrats voted in the House to oppose the surge. As our troops succeeded, these surge critics went from arguing against the strategy to arguing whether violence dropped in Baghdad to arguing about why that decrease occurred. Through it all, Gen. Petraeus and the troops serving under him have remained stalwart, candid and courageous. He told the Senate Armed Services Committee on Jan. 23: "The way ahead will be neither quick nor easy."

That's also what I heard repeatedly from officers I interviewed while embedded in Baghdad in January -- just as the first wave of surge forces was being mobilized. It's a message the instant gratification Beltway media didn't want to deliver.

There's a reason the magazine and newspaper editors are naming everything but the surge as their top story of the year. (Putin? The Virginia Tech massacre? Come on.) Good news in the war on terror is bad news for those rooting for failure. Far easier to play up casualties and sectarian strife, sensationalize accusations of atrocities, and demonize the men and women in uniform to indulge Bush Derangement Syndrome, as Washington Post staffer and NBC military analyst William Arkin did on Jan. 30 when he lambasted troops for enjoying "obscene amenities" and serving as a "mercenary" force.

One of the troops Arkin considers a "mercenary" was Army 2nd Lt. Mark J. Daily. On Jan. 19, a reader e-mailed me that the 23-year-old standout soldier had been killed in an IED attack in Mosul along with three other comrades. To MoveOn and Democrat leaders and the anti-surge press, he's just another number. Another "victim." Another pawn. But on his MySpace site and across the Internet, his immortal words resonate:

"Some have allowed their resentment of the President to stir silent applause for setbacks in Iraq. Others

have ironically decried the war because it has tied up our forces and prevented them from confronting criminal regimes in Sudan, Uganda, and elsewhere. I simply decided that the time for candid discussions of the oppressed was over, and I joined."

He declared simply: "I genuinely believe the United States Army is a force of good in this world."

It's the legacy 2Lt. Daily left on this world -- and the legacy that defined 2007 against all political and media odds.

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