



Petraeus Q & A. TWS Exclusive: An interview with Gen. Petraeus from the Swiss weekly Weltwoche and the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung

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Baghdad, Iraq

Q: General Petraeus, since February you have been the Commanding General of the Multi-National Force in Iraq. You have implemented a new strategy and earned a great deal of credit for your accomplishments. What is your overall assessment of the mission so far?

P: Well, it's really more the last five or six months, I think, during which we have seen progress in about every different respect and in almost every area of Iraq with the exception

of the Mosul-Ninawa area which has remained about the same in terms of violence because of the enormous importance of that area to al Qaeda. And we know that as al Qaeda has been thrown out of the Euphrates River Valley, killed, captured, or pushed out of Anbar Province, the southern belts, although there are still some areas. In fact, we have some work to do in the Salman Pak-Medina area, and that's one reason that attacks went up a bit last week is we think that we hit a pocket of them down there and they really are fighting back. In the Baghdad neighborhoods, by and large, there's been enormous progress, in Ghazaliyah, Amariyah, Doura, Adhamiyah, Arab Jabour, Nafiyas. We had had progress by September. In fact, that's what the

ambassador and I reported when we went back to Capitol Hill.

Q: What progress has been made since you have come back from Capitol Hill?

P: Till September it was still the early stages. What we have seen now for a sustained period of five or six months, since about mid-June, has been a steady reduction in violence. There was a little up-tick during Ramadan. There have been a couple of up-ticks in the past, say, ten weeks, but we've generally had a period of about ten weeks of levels of violence that have not been seen on a sustained basis like that since the late spring of 2005. So we are actually almost on a two-and-one-half year low in terms of violence.

Q: After many mistakes in the past years the US Mission in Iraq under your command seems to have found the right strategy. What is the reason for this success?

P: There are a lot of factors behind that. Certainly, the damage we have done to al Qaeda. It remains very dangerous and we see it periodically, they'll crank back up again. But we are trying to pursue them very, very tenaciously and we know where they are, we know what we have to do. You have to keep adjusting and shifting your forces to pursue that but it's a much better position to be pursuing tactically than it is to have to conduct an assault as we had to at Ramadi or into Baqubah very much or Doura even. Some of these areas where there were really prepared defenses, that's

very challenging, very dangerous, very costly. So what we want to do is very much try to keep al Qaeda on the run, recognizing that it remains lethal, dangerous, and capable of regenerating and they're constantly trying to do that.

Q: Jihadis from neighboring countries have been responsible for some of the most bloody suicide attacks in Iraq. Have you been successful in reducing the flow of foreign fighters into Iraq?

P: There has been a reduction of foreign fighter flow through Syria. That's a result of actions by source countries against possible extremists who might want to come to Iraq. It is a result of action by Syria which we think sees al Qaeda as a threat to its regime; correctly so. And it's very much a result of damage to the foreign fighter network inside Iraq including Abu Usama Al-Tunisi, the head of the foreign-fighter network and Mathana[ph] who was a facilitator up in Ninewa Province where we also captured the 800-plus records of foreign fighters who had come into the country from August, 2006 to August, 2007. Again, they're still coming in; they're just coming in at a level that, it's an imperfect estimate but, perhaps, half of what it was several months ago.

Q: Then there was the ceasefire declared by the Shia firebrand Mullah Muqtada al-Sadr in August. How did that contribute to the stabilization of Iraq?

P: Clearly Sadr's Jaish al-Mahdi (JAM) ceasefire does result in a re-

duction of violence. Although there are certainly elements associated with the Sadr Militia that have broken that ceasefire and have carried out attacks on the Iraqi forces, Iraqi civilians, and Iraqi infrastructure. It was one of these rouge JAM, or JAM special group cells, that did the rocket attack early December. One rocket of which hit the storage tank in the Doura refinery over here. Happily, they were able to contain that and they've got the refinery going again, but that produced a real threat, really, to all of Iraqis, not just to the refinery. They have been behind also using these EFP's that come across from Iran, in the killing of two governors of southern provinces, at least two police chiefs, and some others and also kidnappings.

Q: What made Sadr declare a ceasefire in the first place?

P: We believe that Muqtada al-Sadr is trying to clean up this kind of rogue activity and the special groups that have been trained, equipped, funded and, in some cases, directed by Iran but which are giving his movement a bad name. And he's right to be concerned about it. It is good that he's concerned about it. Everyone would welcome the Sadr-trained participating as a political organization in the Iraqi political dialog and activity. And you see that in certain areas. I think the accommodations that people made in Basra, for example, the negotiations between Fadilah, the Supreme Council and the Sadrist there are encouraging, albeit, certainly against the backdrop of various militia activities and, certainly, grow-

ing Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). It's a very complex situation, to be sure. There's no shortage of enemies still out there. Nobody at all is celebrating any kind of successes or anything like that. You know, what we are doing is keeping our head down and continuing to move forward and to pursue the different security challenges with our Iraqi partners.

Q: There has been a great deal of attention paid to the surge of the U.S. forces. How are the Iraqi troops performing in the ongoing campaign?

P: The Iraqi surge has been much greater than our surge. And actually, it is being felt. Yes, there's an uneven quality to Iraqi forces but they brought in some over 160,000 this year in terms of police, soldiers, border police and other assorted Iraqi security force members. That's huge. My own country is really working very hard to add between 5,000 and 10,000 soldiers a year to the U.S. Army, for example. It's really an enormous.

Q: How reliable are the Iraqi Security Forces?

P: There's an uneven quality to them, certainly. There are certainly concerns about sectarian allegiances of some of them still, although a number of them have been cleaned up over the course of the past six months as well. There are, for example, national police units that are really quite good in our estimation. There are some about which we still have concerns. But the Wolf Brigade commander was just replaced early

December as an example. So there is movement in these areas. We are concerned though also about campaigns to kill and intimidate some of the more nonsectarian and more successful leaders like General Qais down in Hilla. So again, the trajectory is never consistently up. It's sort of up in bumps and downs and sometimes it's a pretty big down and then we'll recover. What you're hoping to do is keep it generally on a positive trajectory. And I think that's generally true. I think if you look at, for example, attack trends. It really has been pretty steadily downward ever since June. Even if it were to stay at the level that it is now, that would be a level that we've not seen since, certainly, prior to the Samarra Mosque if not in the late spring of 2005. And you can feel it and see it in Baghdad in terms of markets. If to protect the civilian population is our purpose and it is, civilian deaths should come down and they have been. And this is, by the way, Iraqi data--not all of which is verified. We are working more and more with them. And you can see it does converge as we have worked more closely with them. There's some sectarian influence even on the reporting of data not to mention everything else. And there are corruption problems and there are lack of capacity issues and everything else. Ethno-sectarian is actually quite down. You'll remember what it was like last year and it's very different now. And that's a result of a number of factors. Some of it, again, is al Qaeda is on the run. Jaish al-Mahdi has a ceasefire. Special groups are in turmoil, really, among themselves. All the intelli-

gence sources we have tell us that the special groups are literally fighting among themselves. Some want to honor the ceasefire, some are opposing it, others are trying to impose on them. The chain of command is by no means clear.

Q: When you returned to Iraq last February as the Commanding General, you came with a brand new Counterinsurgency Field Manual that you co-authored. Could you explain how this new strategy helped to turn the page in Iraq?

P: It is a result of the employment of the forces, the additional forces and the way that they go into neighborhoods and to live with the people that you're securing. The platoons are all out; they're not on big bases except for the maintenance and city intelligence and headquarters. They're in the patrol bases, the Joint Security Stations (JSS), the Combat Outposts (COP). And that's where they need to be to secure the population. We watched this process as the first one went into Ghazaliyah in Western Baghdad and it was a ghost town. And gradually life has come back to some of these areas. US troops have done it not by themselves, but with Iraqi Security Forces. Increasingly in those areas that had no security, that had no police in particular, we are supported by Concerned Local Citizens (CLC) who give us the intelligence that comes from locals who want to defeat al Qaeda and want al Qaeda out of their neighborhoods because of the damage that they've done. It's the additional forces on the Iraqi side with the Georgian brigade in

addition to the U.S. forces. It's how they've been used by our commanders. It's the fact that our commanders, in many respects get it in a way that we never have before as a result of changes in our doctrinal manuals, changes in the way we prepare forces for Iraq, the experience that they've all had over here before, the study that they've done back in the United States and the preparation before they come back over.

Q: You are able to tap in, as you never have before, to a Sunni Arab rejection. How did this come about?

P: We've helped them recognize through information operations or we amplified their own sentiments that al Qaeda-Iraq and the associated insurgents espouse an ideology of extremism that they don't subscribe to. The Shi'a certainly don't subscribe to it. But also the Sunni Arabs, in whose area they had sanctuary to some degree, do not believe in this kind of extremism. These aren't the kind of people that are Talibanish, if you will. They abhor the indiscriminate violence that took place. And over time, particularly this past spring, there were attacks. I remember they hit outside a mosque one time, they've hit funeral parties, and they've hit police stations in Sunni Arab areas. So they were killing, in a sense, their own. Those who, to some degree, were supporting them because that segment of the Iraqi population felt disrespected, dispossessed, disappointed, disgusted and all these other things because of the way things shaped up after liberation. And then they came to hate the oppressive prac-

tices. There are stories of not only being told they couldn't smoke--which is just unbelievable in this society and a real non-starter if you're running a political campaign which is what it is--but they end up cutting fingers off the people who smoked. It's just bizarre--forced marriages and that kind of thing. So that sentiment was there.

Q: When did you see this anti-Qaeda movement emerging?

P: It really started, in truth, before the surge. We've seen it all along. We've seen it at various times. Al-Qaim sheikhs all the way back in 2004-2005 stood up against al Qaeda but a lot of them had their heads chopped off, too. So it never reached the critical mass and set off the chain-reaction up and down the Euphrates River Valley that the movement in Ramadi did.

Q: Who took the initiative? Was it the Americans who approached the Sunni Sheikhs?

P: You had Sheikh Sattar who went to the U.S. Army brigade commander in 2006 and said, "Okay. What if we point our weapons at them instead of at you?" And our commander said, "Yeah, I guess that would be okay." The attacks in Ramadi or in Anbar at that time were at an all-time high. I think it was something like 1,600 a month; just incredible. And so we then spent a couple of months basically sort of training the guys, trying to get some organization and all the rest of that. And in the mean time trying to help the sheikh to survive.

And tragically, as you know, he was a martyr a couple of months ago. But his brother has taken over. And then when they had enough forces and now we had some extra coalition forces and some extra Iraqi forces as well, they were able to clear Ramadi from mid-March to mid-April. And then the whole thing just rippled up and down the Euphrates River Valley. What this whole thing what we now call Concerned Local Citizens emerged.

Q: Up to today there are 72,000 Concerned Local Citizens helping US troops and the Iraqi government to stabilize the country. Many among them are former insurgents. How stable is the coalition with these former enemies?

P: In Anbar in particular they have been able to be integrated into the police, into the Army. We've worked the same kind of arrangement in Baghdad although, to be frank, it has been much tougher because of very legitimate and understandable concerns on the part of the government, the Shi'a-majority government, that what is largely a Sunni Arab phenomenon will turn one day on the government. So they have to get integrated into the legitimate forces. They have to be vetted. They have to be carefully reviewed. And I think we're up to about 6,000 now or so including about 1,700 in Abu Ghraib and then thousands from the western part of Baghdad in particular that have been all the way through the process and have either gone through the police academy or are in line to go to the police academy and some of that fairly recently.

And it does take an effort to do that because, again, there have been, as I said, legitimate concerns about some of these individuals.

Q: How can you make sure that they won't turn their guns against American or Iraqi troops again?

P: Well, that highlights the importance of getting them tied into national institutions in Iraq so they have a stake in the success in Iraq, so they're members of the police and, therefore, the chain of command that extends all the way to the Minister of the Interior. Because all salaries are paid by him, it's another one of those forces that pulls them together. You can be a "local policeman" now in Haditha in Anbar Province, but your salary is paid by the Minister of Interior, don't forget it, and if you do your name might be stricken from the payroll. In fact, in past years the goal of an awful lot of Iraqis is to get on a national payroll because that's the economy of Iraq. It is the ultimate centrally-planned economy. And it's one of the factors that they have to come to grips with if they're going to unleash the economic potential of the country and have something akin to the free-market economies that have driven the growth in our own countries. But this is why it's called reconciliation. You reconcile with former enemies not with former friends.

Q: Another factor that has seriously threatened the formation of a stable and secure Iraq is Iran. Lately Tehran seems to have decreased its

interference in Iraq. Would you agree to that assessment?

P: There may be Iranian reduction in exporting violence to Iraq. I say "may" because it really is a may. There is not an apparent reduction in training because we have detained individuals in recent months and weeks who recently received training in Iran as late as late October or early November. So it may have stopped since then but it did not stop immediately after the Iranian senior leaders promised their Iraqi counterparts that they would stop the training, funding, arming, and equipping and directing of Shi'a militias.

Q: What is the reason for Iran's reduction of its interference in Iraq?

P: Well, the Iraqi leaders asked them to. I mean one Iraqi leader after another went to Tehran and said, "This is very damaging to Iraq. The al Qaeda threat is gradually being beaten back. How about laying off? Let the Iraqi and coalition focus on al Qaeda so they're not having to fight Shi'a militias at the same time." The Iranian interference was damaging. We saw certain ministries hijacked by militias. The Ministry of Health was really overtaken to a degree, certain elements of it, by militia elements and a couple of other ministries as well. There are certain segments, certain of these government-owned companies that run various elements of the governmental structure that were hijacked by militia interests. Just in the same way that certain elements of the national police were heavily influ-

enced by sectarian interests and carrying out horrific activities. But when the al Qaeda threat is diminished, there's not the big need for militias to protect neighborhoods. And, in fact, the population is starting to ask, "Why do we need these guys on the street who are extorting money? They're vicious, they're emotional, they're uneducated, and they're not responsive to anybody except, it seems, to local thugs." So there is a rejection in many cases of these individuals as well. They see what Shi'a militias do shoot rockets. They hit the Rusafa Rule of Law Complex. Those are Shi'a prisoners in there just as well as Sunni prisoners.

Q: Talking to the soldiers out in the field in the past weeks, we noticed two things. First of all, they're optimistic, much more than only a few months ago. And the second thing we noticed is a certain degree of frustration. They say, "We were trained to fight and now we tend to do nation building." Is that the future role of a soldier according to the new counterinsurgency strategy?

P: Well, what our Army has stressed on our ground forces is the idea of what we call full-spectrum operations. In other words, our capstone operational manual clearly states, and this is a very big change from the past, that all operations are some mix of offensive, defensive, and stability and support operations. And that is a very big deal. We almost underlined it in the doctrine manual. I was back at Fort Leavenworth when we were working on this; that's where we did the counterin-

surgency manual as well, that's where we did the detainee operations manual. And we overhauled the combat training centers and all of the officer education courses. That process was ongoing for about, really, a several year period after we entered Iraq and started taking lessons back from it--way before I went back to do that. I think that doctrinal statement captures what we have to be prepared to do. And the Marine Corps has the idea of the three-block war: in one block you're fighting, and in another block you're stabilizing, and in another block you're sort of repairing, if you will, or rebuilding. It's the idea that the same troopers who might have to do major combat operations also have to do major stability and support operations, nation-building. And that is part and parcel of what it is that we have to do. It's something that we just need to have the sufficient understanding of to be able to carry it out. That's the piece that I think we do have now in much greater quantity.

Q: You oversaw the training and education of Army officers at Fort Leavenworth. And you co-authored the new Counterinsurgency Field Manual. Would you agree that you are trying to bring about a cultural revolution on the U.S. Army?

P: First of all, none of this stuff is about one person. I think that the leadership of the Army, the Chief of Staff of the Army, charged me with this. There is quite a big cultural change going on. We used to say, that if you can do the "big stuff," the big combined arms, high-end, high

intensity major combat operations and have a disciplined force, then you can do the so-called "little stuff," too. That turned out to be wrong. As I came to Fort Leavenworth late 2005 everybody knew, from the Chief of Staff of the Army on down, that we needed to make substantial changes as an Army. My predecessor in Fort Leavenworth, General William Wallace, actually coined the phrase "engine of change" for the overall organization. We're dealing with new doctrines, new concepts on all levels, that, in turn, shape the education of our commissioned, warrant, and non-commissioned officer leaders, and then, in turn, influence the training of our units at our Army's major combat training centres. All that had to be modified in light of the lessons we've learned in our ongoing operations.

Q: What are those lessons you've learned?

P: We brought a lot of experiences back from Iraq but also from Central America and to some degree from other places like Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo. There was a general awareness of the importance of understanding the huge impact of cultural, religious, and ethnic factors - that knowledge of the so-called "cultural terrain" was as important in many cases as knowledge of the physical terrain in contemporary operations. We had to deal with these new challenges because it turns out they are key elements when you plan and conduct military operations.

Q: Why did you take so long? I mean, it's the first counterinsur-

gency field manual since the Vietnam War. Why did it take almost four years after the Invasion in Iraq to come up with this new strategy?

P: Well, to be fair there was an interim one that my predecessor at Leavenworth put out about two years earlier. So he got one out right away but it was very rapidly done. And then what we did was we tried to collect the feedback on that interim--it was called an interim manual--to really, as you say, expand the tent; get everybody inside the tent and participating as opposed to throwing stones at the tent. And then drew on that. But still in a pretty quick process for doctrinal manuals. We produced it in less than a year which for Army major doctrinal publications is very rapid. It takes time to change the professional military education system. There's dozens of schools and centers and courses and everything else that have to be changed. It takes time to change the preparation for deployment process. I mean, we used to have a seminar that would begin that process for each brigade that was combat in cities. And we're still doing that, I think, two years into the time period. Still starting with a seminar that was largely focusing on what we would call kinetic operations and then this transformed into a counterinsurgency seminar to begin the road to deployment. And that complemented the mission rehearsal exercises they called the two-week, very intensive training exercise they have at the combat training centers in Fort Irwin, California, in the Mojave Desert, and in Germany. They all went

from being major combat operations-focused to being complex, continuous counterinsurgency with hundreds of Iraqi role-players, native speakers. I mean it's a dramatic transformation. And we keep changing it.

Q: Would you say it's too early to assess whether the Counterinsurgency Field Manual actually holds true?

P: I would say it holds true.

Q: Because you need to say that?

P: No. I mean, I'd be the first to say it. As I mentioned earlier, there's nobody doing victory dances in the end zone. There is nobody talking about lights at the end of the tunnel or having turned corners or anything like that. The progress is tenuous. The situations are fragile. They have to be solidified or cemented, if you will, by true political and economic progress. We can in a sense achieve short-term improvements in security and local security and local stability, but the long-term has to be the result of national reconciliation as embodied by legislation, governmental actions, economic growth and opportunities, reconstruction, if you will, of education systems, health systems, basic services, and all the rest of that.

Q: Would you agree that it is also one of the major tasks to weave together, so to speak, the patchwork of Iraqi security forces? Iraqi Army, National Police, Local Police, Concerned Local Citizens - all those seem to overlap somehow.

P: Yeah, absolutely. Although they are actually fairly comfortable with a less clear chain of command than we are. They actually construct a slight degree of ambiguity.

Q: Which might be prone to fall apart?

P: Well, some of it is an Iraqi way of doing things. Their approach, for example, is to have a checkpoint for which there are police, there are soldiers, and there maybe National Police or now, Concerned Local Citizens, so you get them all. And their thinking is we're all keeping an eye on each other and the result will be something that is reasonable. I mean over time what you want to get to is local police policing local areas. And that has actually been achieved in, of all places, Fallujah. Fallujah has now just police; there's no Iraqi Army left in there. They've all been able to move out and move up to the north by Lake Tharthar and that area over by the rock pile or the quarries area. And in Fallujah there are basically ten police precincts. Each is a gated community. Each has population access control to varying degrees. And each has a single Marine squad with it to ensure situational awareness, good coordination, communications and an intelligence flow. But you're absolutely right. Not only that, we actually have a slide in our campaign plan that shows, in fact, sort of a patchwork quilt. Actually, first it's a quilt. First, it's missing patches. Then you have a patchwork quilt, and then you have a quilt that's sort of semi coherent. And so there's no question about that is more showing

how you have to knit pieces of the country together in truth. You know, it's more about that's the fabric of society. But you have to do the same thing with the fabric of security forces.

Q: Among Iraqis and Americans, frustration about the country's political elites is high. Can the gains in security you have achieved be sustained without ending the political deadlock within the Iraqi government?

P: The Iraqi political leaders themselves are not pleased with the level of progress at the national political level, the leaders themselves. In fact, they're all, right now, doing some very serious behind-the-scenes dialog about making the processes work that they agreed on during September. In early September, you'll recall they published this declaration about how they would function. And so there's a lot of discussion ongoing about that. But the one factor that is very important to remember is that there are centripetal forces here in Iraq as well as centrifugal forces. I think we tend to focus perhaps rightly on the centrifugal forces because there are some serious ones, the ethno-sectarian differences foremost among them. Religious sect differences. And political party differences that are serious. This is a full-contact sport here when it comes to politics in Iraq. But there are also some forces that keep Iraq together. The most important is the central government's role in the distribution of oil revenues. And they are doing that, by the way. Even in the ab-

sence of a law on oil revenue-sharing, the budget does share the oil revenue. And that's a huge function of the central government. Beyond that, they are distributing those oil revenues about the way it should be. It's 17% for the Kurdish regional government. The provinces are getting an increasing share in the draft 2008 budget. And we think that budget will be done fairly early in 2008 which will, again, be a sign of some progress. We think there's a chance that the justice and accountability law could be voted on again early in 2008 which would be very significant. The pension law has already passed which is a reconciliation achievement as well for Iraq although not that focused on for some reason, I'm not sure why, but it extends pension benefits to tens of thousands of Iraqis who were shut out for the first few years after liberation. So, as I mentioned, the Iraqi leaders are not satisfied with the progress that's been made. But there has been this halting or very slow progress that has taken place in those respects. And we'll have to see in the new year, can those senior leaders come together and reach agreement on some of these very, very important but very challenging issues that the Iraqi people want them to resolve? But they are fundamental issues. It took our country years to resolve States' Rights. Arguably it took us centuries. We're still not done with it.

Q: General Petraeus, there is one final topic we would like to touch upon. Traveling around Baghdad we witnessed an increased level of security. We walked through mar-

kets and that's huge progress. But to some degree, of course, this is because of the walls that were built to separate Sunni from Shia areas.

P: Yes. Good T-walls make good neighbors.

Q: But the question is: Isn't there a danger that Baghdad is becoming a new Jerusalem in terms of being a divided city?

P: Now, to be sure, there has been a degree of Balkanization of neighborhoods. Over time that's where there have to be stitches back in. Some areas are very complex, such as Ghazaliyah in Western Baghdad for example. But even there are hopeful signs. We literally had a Ghazaliyah south-Ghazaliyah north soccer game, which means Sunni-Shi'a soccer game, the other day. And they're actually, at local level, talking about helping people go back to their homes because Shi'a moved north, Sunni moved south. It's a metaphor for Iraq that what sometimes is very difficult at national level because of the magnitude of the problem sometimes can be resolved at local level because the problem's a little bit more bite-sized. The same as for Ghazaliyah could be said of northwest Rashid. There's a similar sort of coming back together. But you can't come back together until the violence is stopped. And as long as people are shooting at each other, they're not going to be talking. And until you can get the climate of fear to subside just a bit at least, really playing soccer with one another instead of throwing each other out of houses, you can't get to

that point. So, I mean, we hope to see the day when some of those concrete walls come down. But interestingly, many Iraqis will say privately that they are very happy to have the walls. There's this public sort of complaint, "All of the walls going up, that's terrible". And then they'll tell you right after that they didn't really mean what they said. I

mean I've had this at the highest level of the Iraqi Government where I ask the individual did you really mean what you said on television about that wall in Adhamiyah? And I was assured, "Don't worry about what was said in public. Worry about what's said in private. Leave the wall there."

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