INSTITUTE FOR THE
STUDY OF WAR

MILITARY ANALYSIS AND EDUCATION
FOR CIVILIAN LEADERS

INTERVIEW AND MODERATED Q&A
WITH GENERAL DAVID PETRAEUS

January 22, 2010

Institute for the Study of War
1400 16th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C.
MR. SINGER: It's a pleasure to be here and
to be able to participate in the Institute for the
Study of War's outstanding program this year.

In a sea of public policy research
organizations, many of them doing important work, ISW
is a much needed island. The reason is that very few
institutions in American life are dedicated to
advancing an informed understanding of military
affairs.

This is a task that was once done at
America's colleges and universities, but many of them
abandoned that task long ago.

Under Kim Kagan, who received her Doctorate
from Yale, taught at West Point, Yale, Georgetown and
American University, and is an author, lecturer, and
advisor to generals, she has stepped into the breach as
the founder and leader of the Institute for the Study
of War.

She provides America's civilian leadership
with impressive, unbiased, timely and fact based
analysis.

ISW was founded on the principle that a healthy democracy requires civilian leaders who are well versed in military affairs, and every day it fulfills that task.

For a nation at war facing challenges on so many different fronts, ISW is indispensable. I'm extremely proud to support Kim Kagan and the good work of ISW.

I've been asked to introduce many people over the years, but few of them have achieved as much as our speaker today.

General David Petraeus assumed leadership of the United States Central Command in October of 2008 after serving for over 19 months as the Commanding General of the Multi-National Force in Iraq.

His awards and decorations are too numerous to cite here. Suffice it to say that General Petraeus is an authentic American hero. A man of remarkable honor and valor, and one of the most important public intellectuals in our country.

When he became the Commanding General in
Iraq, that country was sliding into Civil War. It was caught in a death spiral. The conventional wisdom was that Iraq was broken beyond repair.

Under the command of General Petraeus, America adopted a new counter-insurgency plan, one that was focused on securing and winning over the population. The shift was deliberate and strategic and desperately needed to reverse the slide.

We all know that the challenges in Iraq are still formidable, but we should all take note that without David Petraeus' wisdom and execution on the ground, Iraq would not be a nation on amend.

We are blessed with the greatest military on earth and the greatest military we have ever had in our nation's history. There is simply no substitute for that.

No single individual deserves more credit than General Petraeus. Having performed what nearly qualifies as a miracle in Iraq, he has now been handed responsibility for important parts of our Afghanistan and Pakistan challenges.

I know I personally take great comfort from
the fact that David Petraeus is applying his skill and
judgment to the complex issues and challenges in these
two countries.

It is my great privilege, truly great
privilege, to present to you one of the bravest
military commanders and one of the finest military
minds America has ever produced, General David
Petraeus.

(Appause.)

DR. KAGAN: Thank you all so much. Thank
you, General Petraeus, for joining us today.

GENERAL PETRAEUS: Glad to be with you. Can
I respond to that, by any chance, is that possible?

DR. KAGAN: You can.

GENERAL PETRAEUS: Paul, thanks for an over
the top introduction and very, very generous words.

I would remind you that it has always been
about the team and teams of teams. It's great to see
some of those members who are such heroes on the ground
and in that team where indeed there were some big ideas
that were used.

I think a lot of people would argue, and I
certainly would, that it wasn't by any means just the surge of forces.

In fact, far more important than the surge of 30,000 additional U.S. troops was the surge of ideas that helped us to employ those troops, and that surge of forces enabled the employment of the new ideas that were indeed the key to making the progress that has been achieved in Iraq over the course of the last three years.

It was the team that took those big ideas outside the wire under Kevlar, under body armor, or led the organizations, as Jim Dubik did with the Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq; Greg Goetz in leading the battalion where he was very seriously wounded, and a number of others. Colonel Burton.

That was the key. Again, it was also many courageous Iraqi partners, and it's great to see somebody here from Iraq and our partners from all the different nations that made up the coalition of the Multi-National Force-Iraq.

I would also add that again in helping to develop those ideas, I'd be hard pressed to say that
there was any organization, other than perhaps the Center at Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas, certainly in the think tank community and the think tank world, no organization, I think, had the truly strategic impact that the organization did.

At that time, Kim was in a different location, but the founder of the ISW guided together with Fred and a number of other heroes a study and analysis that did indeed have a strategic impact unlike that of any other study or analysis that I can think of.

They came up with the rationale for the additional forces that were required, described how they might be used in Iraq, and then indeed, enlisted the help of some others, General Cain, most prominently among them, in describing all that, and then serendipitously ultimately made its way into the West Wing and ultimately even into the Oval Office.

Again, I think it played a very significant role in helping to shape the intellectual concepts and indeed, in helping to shape the ultimate policy decision that was made that resulted in the additional
forces and then enabled us to implement the ideas that were so key to their use in a proper fashion.

Thanks for that, Kim. Paul, I want to thank you for all you have done to help them do what they are trying to do now and what they do so effectively.

We were upstairs and we asked for a show of hands of who is now working on Afghanistan, and there was some great talent. Asked who was still focused on Iraq, by golly, we have to sustain that. Asked about Pakistan. They contracted out Pakistan. Sounds like the military here now, Kim. Don't become like us.

(Laughter.)

GENERAL PETRAEUS: I didn't get to ask whose hands would go up if we asked about Iran, but that might be another one, and perhaps Yemen as well and a few others.

With that, please, Professor Kagan.

DR. KAGAN: Thank you so much, General Petraeus. Thanks for joining us today.

We have a wonderful format of our conversation today, as we think about what is going on within CENTCOM and AOR, area of responsibility, that
runs from Egypt to Pakistan.

GENERAL PETRAEUS: I have a PowerPoint slide.

We do have PowerPoint slides. She is not going to let me talk about, you know, that it is every Army Four Star General’s inalienable right, there is a little asterisk in the First Amendment, that we all get to use PowerPoints, and a major pointer. I'll try to not shoot your eye out, Kim.

(Laughter.

GENERAL PETRAEUS: I understand I get extra credit for each question that I answer without resorting to PowerPoints, so I'll try to make minimal use of that here today.

DR. KAGAN: Excellent. We are really glad to have you. I'm going to start the questioning, and as we move through, I will go to audience questions and particularly media questions that relate to the same things, so we can stay on topic and really probe in-depth some of the issues that face the CENTCOM AOR.

Actually, I'd like to begin with something that can look like a new problem set to those of who have been paying attention to other things. I want to
Can you tell us, to what extent do you see the rebellion in Yemen as a larger regional proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia?

GENERAL PETRAEUS: I don't see it right now. I think there is some potential for that. We have looked very hard frankly for Iranian involvement with the Huti's, any provision of substantial amounts of weapons or money or direction or what have you.

Frankly, although there is a lot of rumor, a lot of allegations and so forth, we have been hard pressed to find indications of substantial levels of that, although there have been some indicators in the past month or so that some of that is indeed beginning to happen.

I really don't see that yet. I think there are folks that might want to make it into that. I think this is truly a case of Yemen dealing with individuals who are rebelling against the Central Government up in the border region with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the Saudi's, understandably, are very concerned because indeed, there has been a lot of
stuff that has come out of that region into Saudi Arabia before that has caused problems.

They are really concerned about the broader challenges that Yemen faces with not only the Huti's in the north but the southern secessionists, along with the different social and political, economic and developmental difficulties that Yemen faces, and ensuring that Yemen hangs together.

Of course, it was only unified a little over a decade or so ago by President Saleh after a very, very tough Civil War.

In a lot of ways, Yemen was really sent from Central Casting, I think, as a location for extremist elements, the tribal nature of it, fairly conservative event of religion in certain areas and so on, and the dissatisfaction again with levels of services and opportunity and all the rest of that.

Frankly, a number of us have watched this. We have been watching Yemen for over two years, well over two years. In fact, when I was in Iraq we were very concerned about Yemen because we were looking at where the foreign fighters were coming from and where
the facilitators were located.

A lot of lines, red lines, kept leading back to Yemen, especially as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was doing a very impressive job with a very comprehensive counter-terrorist whole of government counter-terrorist program as additional pressure was being brought to bear in the Pakistani border region with Afghanistan and indeed, as al-Qaeda in Iraq was under much greater pressure as well.

In fact, when I went to CENTCOM, I said we're going to put a lot more attention on Yemen. I want an action plan, a country campaign plan. Indeed, we approved one of those in April of this past year.

Traveled there a couple of times. The first trip candidly didn't go entirely according to what we had hoped it would be. It was more along the lines of what Bud McFarland would recall from his days as frank and open conversations.

The visit in July, on the other hand, was a literal as far as figurative embrace. That gave us what we needed together with the State Department to intelligence agencies to start building what ultimately
enabled us when we saw the serious threats starting to emanate from Yemen to help with operations that were conducted on the 17th of December, 24th of December, and a number of other smaller ones that the Yemeni's conducted.

Those operations took out two training camps, killed three suicide bombers, the fourth who was with those three was wounded and captured with his suicide belt still on by the Yemeni sensitive site exploitation team.

A senior leader was killed and a number of others also were killed or wounded.

That pressure has continued. I think it is known. I was in there on the 2nd of July as well, had a very good meeting, and illustrative, I think, of where we are, we were going to make that a secret meeting as was the meeting in July, until a month or so ago at least.

I noticed there was a camera in the room. We left the big plane up in the Sinai, the sergeant major made a big show of going around the observers, I did sneak off, got in a smaller plane and went down to
Yemen, spent a few hours down there. I noticed there was a camera in the room, in the meeting with President Saleh, and within an hour of leaving, it was on al Jazerra, indicating there was no reticence to show that he was meeting with again the Commander of Central Command and indeed, announcing that the reason I was there was to talk about how we could support them and assist them in the effort to deal with the growing al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, because they were franchised this past year. They went from being al-Qaeda in Yemen to al-Qaeda senior leadership recognizing them as al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.

That is sort of how this has evolved, and the way ahead certainly has to be one that is again as always the biggest of the big ideas. In fact, it came out and was reaffirmed in the strategic assessment conducted by Central Command when I took command, the biggest of the big ideas about all this is it takes more than counter-terrorist forces to counter terrorist organizations, to deal with extremists.

It really takes a whole of governments, with
an "s" on the end, to a counter-insurgency kind of approach. That is really the appropriate way to go at this.

In this case, thankfully, the Saudi's have a huge interest in it, enormous. A number of the other Gulf States, Oman and other countries, also have a huge interest in it.

This is very important because again you must pressure al-Qaeda everywhere that al-Qaeda is located.

You cannot hit here and have them pop up there. It can't be whack-a-mole, as we also did in Iraq for a while. You have to go after them everywhere and whack moles everywhere you can find them.

We have to watch Somalia, by the way, as another place where there are considerable concerns, even though the senior leader of al-Qaeda in East Africa, Nabhan, was killed some months ago.

**DR. KAGAN:** The Saudi's aren't a neutral player in Yemen. As you talk about regional aid, coming into Yemen and hoping to reinforce the state, what are the different interests that we have with our regional partners and how is it that we must mitigate
for the differences in those foreign policy views?

**GENERAL PETRAEUS:** Well, obviously, there is always a mix where you have some very much mutual interests and then occasionally there are some that are divergent. That's just again sort of the stated nature of this kind of stuff, if you will, and certainly the case in Central Command.

It is one of those welcome to our world kind of observations.

In this case, I think actually there is much more convergence than divergence. I think every country on the Arabian Peninsula wants to help the Government of Yemen to address the problems that exist, want to prevent the country from splitting in two or whatever, as it was for quite some time.

Want to prevent the further growth of extremist elements that threaten all of them. Want to prevent migration of disaffected Yemeni's or even Somali's who make their way into Yemen, which is a huge problem, Somali refugee flow is an added challenge that Yemen has to face.

I think as a general proposition, again, in
terms of our interests and their interests, they
generally are convergent.

**DR. KAGAN:** President Saleh, I know he has
been very forthcoming with you over the past six
months, as you have described your meetings.

**GENERAL PETRAEUS:** Among many others. Again,
right after I went in the summer, John Brennan went in,
the JSOC Commander went in. That was actually released
as well, which was a surprise.

**DR. KAGAN:** President Saleh has supported
elements within Yemen. Can you in fact rely on him to
go after AQAT?

**GENERAL PETRAEUS:** As always with policy
choices, I think, typically it's compared to what, and
compared to various alternatives, none of which have
ever been presented to me or even remotely realistic or
good, I think the course that has been adopted is the
appropriate one.

That is not to say there is not again U.S.
and other countries in the region encouragement to move
in certain directions or others, but in terms of the
security threat, again, which I think has to be
paramount here, in this case, now a security threat
that has been shown to present a threat to our
homeland, with of course the failed Detroit 25 December
bombing.

We know that individual was in Yemen. We
believe he was there for several months. We know he
left some time in the mid-December time frame, went to
a couple of different countries, Africa, from which he
finally flew to the U.K. and got on the flight to
Detroit.

We are pretty certain that the explosives
were made for him in Yemen and he was trained to use
them there, that he had contact with al-Awlaki, the
Yemenian American who has been unhelpful, such a
charitable figure in cyberspace, which is another great
conversation topic.

DR. KAGAN: Are there audience questions
about al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and about
Yemen?

Please. If you could identify yourself.

QUESTION: Thank you, General. Thank you for
making time for us.
There are other Kagan's in this room who have argued and are somewhat critical of the Obama Administration policy towards Yemen. The argument being that we go to an ally and ask them please stop fighting your enemy and please start fighting our enemy.

I wonder if we are being too hard on Saleh in asking him to strike some sort of peace chord with the Huti rebels, should be more accommodating to Saleh in helping him put down that Civil War, and if so, what can we do to be more accommodating towards him to help him put down his enemies?

(Sound feed cut off.)

GENERAL PETRAEUS: Again, that has been a topic of discussion. There is an understanding of the threat to Yemenian sovereignty and obviously to stability and so forth, especially in that area that is disputed.

There has also been encouragement to at some point, at an appropriate point, to reach out to those who have been responding and saying get behind us, and either they are willing to accept the terms of
President Saleh - we will have to see where that process goes.

It certainly has resulted in the displacement of probably hundreds and thousands. I think that is the source of the concern there and the reason for encouragement to be ready to accommodate at some point in time.

These kinds of wars or conflicts don't always end with one side taking (Inaudible) at some point, there has to be some form of reconciliation. I think that has been the genesis.

**QUESTION:** (Inaudible.)

**GENERAL PETRAEUS:** Let me start by offering the observation that the best recruiting officer in most recent times for the CENTCOM, there is one, and it may not be a NATO like structure, but there is definitely a security architecture and there are milestones and so forth that continue to expand it.

The best recruiting officer for that effort has been the Irani President, Ahmadinejad. His rhetoric, his actions, the continued missile program development, the nuclear program, the employment
elements instilled in Iraq are still active, certainly after being defeated in March and April 2008, they are still there, there are still residual elements. Re-equipped and re-trained and so forth.

This architecture is literally in a sense being fleshed out. Shared early warning, if you look at where we were a year or so ago - B we go through a process that we sometimes call bi-multi-lateralism, and what I mean is that you have bilateral arrangements.

The United States works out a shared early warning agreement with a particular country, and then by integrating many bilateral arrangements, we achieve multi-lateral effects.

That has actually worked quite well. You see it not only in shared early warning but also in a variety of different ballistic missile defense endeavors in counter-terror activities, a common operational picture, and on and on.

You also see it in substantially increased arms sales, frankly, by countries in the region. One country alone, for example, last year I think it was $18 billion. That is a serious amount of investment in
a tiny little country who has an air force that is
tbetter than the entire Iranian Air Force, I might add.

Again, Iran is clearly seen as a very serious
threat by those on the other side of the Gulf front,
and indeed, it has been a catalyst for the
implementation of the architecture that we envision and
have now been trying to implement.

It also includes, for example, eight Patriot
missile boundaries, two in each of four countries, that
weren't there, U.S. Patriot boundaries that weren't
there say two years ago.

Other countries have certainly increased
their Patriot's, a whole host of different systems,
Aegis ballistic missile cruisers are in the Gulf at all
times now.

That is sort of the context in which this is
playing out. I don't personally think that the concept
of an NATO like organization is all that realistic, at
least in near terms, and you have to remember there is
some friction certainly to put it mildly between a
number of the different countries.

(Sound feed restored.)
QUESTION: What role does Iraq play in the security of the Gulf region and in a Gulf region in which Iran is developing increasing power?

GENERAL PETRAEUS: Well, the GO strategic position of Iraq couldn't be more significant I don't think. The recognition that again the extraordinary blessing's that it has, second or third most oil in the world, maybe the most if the exploration really gets going again.

You see these enormous deals that have been consummated now which is very, very heartening. The fault lines that run through it, of course, between Arab and Kurd communities, between Sunni and Shia, and also a number of other minority, ethnic and sectarian grouping's in the society there.

Just literally the position between in a sense what some have occasionally called the Shia crescent and the Sunni Arab world.

It's hugely important to do all we can to continue to help Iraq get it as right as possible.

It's an interesting observation, by the way.

I had a question yesterday. Someone asked, what
really was accomplished out of all this. It's a legitimate question.

One of the accomplishments is that you have a country that touched wood, that right now of the 20 counties in the Central Command region, I think arguably, it is the most democratic. It's a very interesting observation that sort of smacked us in the forehead as we were thinking about this.

It has a parliament that is representative of the people of Iraq. It is reasonably responsive to them. The fact that they know they have to face the electorate and all the leaders have to face the electorate on the 7th of March, it is very significant.

It is why they have really taken on corruption, why they have worked very hard to increase electrical production, 1,400 megawatts added to the grid in the last 13 months alone, why they have raced now to finally get these oil deals done.

I'm not saying they wouldn't have done all this on their own, but there is something about the prospect of having to face the electorate in the morning that does indeed give you some added incentives
if you in fact want to retain your job and your position in a sense, political power and so forth. It's been very interesting, I think, to see how this has evolved. There was yet another political crisis last week with this supposedly defunct commission in its role as the Accountability and Justice Commission, for which it was not confirmed, but that hasn't stopped it. There are various accusations about what country is behind this and sort of pulling the strings and trying to mimic perhaps the Guardian Council activities in vetting candidates. There are over 500 candidates now. I think this is going to through. The Minister of Defense's name was removed from it. It was bizarre that the individual that played such a prominent role in the post-liberation of Iraq and who was imprisoned by the Ba'athist for six or seven years, and whose property was seized by the Ba'athist and everything else, but was at one time a Ba'athist and would be on that particular list. I think they are going to work through that again. There is an aspect of muddling through that
does sometimes, I think, characterize Iraq's movement forward, but yet it does happen.

There is often enormous emotion. There is drama. It's all at the 11th hour. Actually, it's beyond midnight typically. There is ultimately white smoke comes out of the chimney somewhere in the green zone.

Again, touch wood that will all continue.

Iraq is a country of just staggering potential. What we fought for was, of course with our Iraqi brothers and our coalition partners, to provide the people of Iraq a hope that potential could indeed be realized.

I think it is more within their grasp and certainly much more than it was when the surge started and there were 53 dead bodies every 24 hours. Just think of that. Every 24 hours on the streets of Baghdad, just from sectarian violence.

MS. KAGAN: Has the new Iraq actually been accepted by its neighbors and by its partners?

GENERAL PETRAEUS: You know, the short answer, the candid answer is probably no, but it's a mix. Some countries have very much sought to embrace
the new Iraq. There are certain Gulf states that quite early were sending ambassadors and sending foreign ministers, even when the violence was very high, still taking considerable risk, to send those very prominent leaders in.

Then there were others who still just couldn't come to grips with the idea that this formerly Sunni Arab led Shia country was now led by representatives of the majority in the country, by Shia Arabs.

That was a seismic change. There is a very long view. You have leaders in some cases who have been in their positions for decades and don't jump right into something. To some degree, it's also on Iraq that it has to show that it deserves again an outreached hand or at least an ambassador.

Now, having said that, if you look at the list of ambassadors that are now there, let's face it, Ambassador Crocker and I were sent in fact to do the tour of the countries in the region on the way home, and I think it was from the September 2007 testimony, and over time, and we have done it again and again, and
of course, I've done it many more times as Central
Command Commander, and one of the arguments that I have
made is okay, I've got it.

You don't like the Iranian influence that is
in Iraq now. Well, do you really not like that. Oh,
it's very disappointing. I say how about a little Arab
influence then. When are you going to send your
ambassador? When are you going to have a senior member
visit there?

Again, it takes two hands to clap or shake,
putting an ambassador in a green zone.

Over time, I think this is going to knit
together. It does happen. Most recently, Kuwait, who
has every right to be the most aggrieved of the
neighbors of Iraq, given what Saddam did to Kuwait, of
course, in 1990, Kuwait has now had sort of low key
steps, but there are a number of different steps that
have been taken by Kuwait that really add up to a
degree of conciliatory policy that again I think points
the way ahead and offers some encouragement for the way
ahead.

MS. KAGAN: Is U.S. engagement in Iraq
important to ensure that Iraq remains internally
peaceful and part of the international community?

**GENERAL PETRAEUS:** Of course. It's hugely
important, as I think it is in any country really.
You can argue about our status in the world
but I think it's fairly difficult to assert anything
but that the U.S. is the only super power in the world
still, and the economy is still in multiple's, larger
than any other in the world, despite all of the
different challenges and down turn.

Yes, as always, U.S. influence, U.S.
leadership indeed is very important, but we have worked
very hard to change the character of that from that in
which the U.S. was leading activities in Iraq to one in
which Iraq is a sovereign country.

There is a big shift. You could feel the
shift when the security agreement and the other
agreement that was reached with Iraq after very tough
negotiations in the Fall of 2008, when that was
implemented in early 2009, and even more important when
in July, we lived up to that agreement and removed our
combat forces from Iraqi cities, and have increasingly
supported Iraqi leadership, the Iraqi lead of security forces and operations, if not having turned them over completely to them in certain areas.

That's not to say we are not working hard to provide assistance, support enabler's and all the rest of that, to share intelligence. There is a very good partnership.

It's relatively rare now that an operation is carried out that was not based on an arrest warrant. Unthinkable probably three years ago when we launched the surge that you could reach that point and there would actually be a reasonable dependence on the rule of law.

Again, I don't want to over state this, as we occasionally mentioned, it is Iraqacy, not necessarily democracy, but again, it is in that region still something that is quite unique.

Certainly, there are challenges in the rule of law. Certainly, there are issues across the board and innumerable obstacles and events that should give rise to great emotion and drama.

Again, the Iraqi leaders have generally,
after some wrangling about, tended to figure out a path forward. Again, touch wood.


QUESTION: Eli Lake, Washington Times. Was Qais Qazal's release part of a hostage exchange? And is he still dangerous?

GENERAL PETRAEUS: No. His release was part of an overall effort led by Prime Minister al-Maliki and the Iraqi Government to reconcile with a group of that he led. His brother, Laith, was released earlier in that regard. In a sense, this was on the Shia side similar to what the Iraqi Government and we did with a variety of different Sunni elements during the course of reconciliation that did so much to help reduce the violence starting in the Spring of 2007 in particular.

We did a reconciliation in Mosul in 2003. In fact, with Ambassador Bremer's express approval, as Dan will affirm. In the Summer of 2003, the Iraqi's, not us, we supported it, ran a reconciliation commission in Mosul.

It's very important to remember, Ambassador
Bremer not only did de-Ba'athification, it was de-Ba'athification and reconciliation. In fact, in one of his final speeches in May 2004, he noted his disappointment that one of the tasks that he really regretted not being able to bring along further was indeed the reconciliation component of de-Ba'athification.

Indeed, we submitted -B the Iraqi's submitted on our CH-47s, to Baghdad, literally boxes and boxes full of documents that supported their decisions, their recommendations, out of the reconciliation commission that was run there.

By no means was it a whitewash or anything. It started off with Mosul University in which there were 110 or 120 of the tenured professors who were Ba'ath level four's or above, in part, you had to do that to get educated outside the country.

By the way, these are folks in many cases educated in the West, in the United States, the U.K. and elsewhere, and generally somewhat secular, but had advanced over time to Ba'ath level four.

The de-Ba'athification commission, which had
been somewhat hi-jacked by certain individuals in Baghdad at the time, just slow rolled this. Gave a lot of assurances, visited Mosul, spoke very heartily, but did not in the end live up to the encouragement that they provided to us about this.

Again, that is what Ambassador Bremer observed as well. Again, this is part of that.

There has been other reconciliation with other Shia militia or former militia groups as well, just as I mentioned with various of these Sunnian surgent groups.

**MS. KAGAN:** John Barry, did I see your hand?

**GENERAL PETRAEUS:** Hello, John. How are you?

**DR. KAGAN:** If we can have a microphone for John. On Iraq.

**QUESTION:** You mentioned tactically a question yesterday about what had been accomplished in Iraq. Could I tempt you to broaden it and attempt some kind of net assessment? I mean, looking back on Iraq, what would you count as the big pluses of the expedition and its aftermath, and what do you see, what are you living with, as any down sides of what happened
in Iraq?

GENERAL PETRAEUS: Well, you know, first of all, you've got to -- I think you've got to let history proceed a little bit further before you make any kind of definitive assessments. But, you know --

QUESTION: Well, but you always do.

GENERAL PETRAEUS: Well, no. I know. And nor do the Professors Kagan. So, I mean, I'll try to be a good student here.

But, you know, as an interim assessment, as a, you know, work in progress, I mentioned that, you know, it has features of democratic governance that are again, I think, fairly unique in those 20 countries, from Egypt to Pakistan, Kazakhstan down to Yemen, and of course the waters off Somalia, so that we could keep the pirates.

Beyond that, certainly I think that the threat that Saddam posed to his neighbors, needless to say, is removed. The kleptocracy that he used to lead is obviously gone, I mean. And it was not just an autocracy, it was a, you know, kleptocracy because he was also stealing from the Iraqi people. An incredible
amount of stealing and, you know, an incredible way of
running that country.

I remember, in the early days, we used to --
we were trying to, of course, you know, resurrect
different businesses and rebuild markets and repair
infrastructure and all the rest. And it didn't take to
long to figure out that there really weren't that many
ture private industries or private businesses or
anything else that was truly private.

You might actually have a level that seemed
to be private, but then it would actually -- very
quickly, you'd find the link to Uday or Qusay or some
other inner circle member of Saddam's regime. So
that's obviously gone.

And I think, you know, arguably, that's the
most important accomplishment, assuming that the Iraqi
people can indeed enjoy a much brighter future as a
result of that, and that the work that is in progress
there continues toward, again, a future that does
indeed provide them better services, indeed, a
continued form of democracy and so forth.

Obviously, on the other hand, if you take it
from the perspective of the Sunni Arab governments in
the region, again, I think it's understandable to have
some of the concerns that they have that there is,
obviously, greater Iranian influence in Iraq. But then
I'd also note that, look: Iraq has to have a
relationship with Iran.

It is its neighbor to the east. It is a
fellow Shia-led country, albeit one that is very
conscious of its Arab identity and, you know, speaks a
different language, has a different background, and is
not at all desirous of being the 51st state of Iran.

In fact, as we saw very recently, where you
had Iranian military or border guards take over an
Iraqi oil well inside the border, very clearly
demarcated, the outrage over that was not just by Sunni
Arabs or others. In fact, the most outrage was by Shia
Arab tribal elements in the south.

So again, I think that's sort of the texture
of this. And I think you can actually say that, you
know, within reason, life is better for, you know,
quite a substantial swath of the Iraqi society and,
touch wood, getting better as, again, basic services
have gradually shown some improvement as this, you know, 1400 megawatts has been added to the grid, as and there's much, much more coming, and as now these multi-billion, multi tens of billions of dollars of oil deals have been struck, as you see the Kurdish regional government and the citizens of the Kurdish region of Iraq really pointing the way ahead to show what can be possible if you stop shooting and just, say, shout at each other instead of shooting.

So, you know, that's sort of where I would put that, I think. And, you know, Iraq is not going to be the 51st state of the United States, either. And I think we have to be very realistic about that, and we have to recognize that this is a proud country with an extraordinary history, the land the two rivers, ancient Mesopotamia.

And we have to, again, be respectful in our dealings with our Iraqi partners. That is crucial to this enterprise, indeed. And we have to understand that they, like other countries, will on occasion want to show their independence of the great United States, despite all that we have done, indeed, to make it
possible for those who are now in power to be exercising that power.

DR. KAGAN: You mentioned Iraq's neighbor to the east. And I would like to turn now to Iran and ask you: What is Iran's regional strategy, and how is CENTCOM countering it?

GENERAL PETRAEUS: Well, you know, since -- with Professor Kagan, you know, we should start off with a little international theory, I think. And if you think, you know, the international theorists -- I think I got this right -- you know, sort of divide the world into two camps. You know, you have the status quo powers and the revolutionary powers.

The status quo powers are obviously sort of reasonably accepting of the way things are. And, you know, they might have a little more of this, a little more of that -- there's always going to be a quest for that -- but in general aren't out to completely upset the existing order; whereas revolutionary powers do not accept the status quo and are, indeed, intent on bringing about some significant changes.

And I think, you know, that has some pretty
big ramifications if you assess that Iran is not only revolutionary in the title of its country, the name of its country, but also, of course, in its activities.

And as you assess those activities -- again, as I mentioned, the provision of -- continued provision, maybe a smaller scale, of weaponry, training, equipment, money, and even direction to various Shia extremist elements, proxy elements, in Iraq that still cause problems for Iraq.

I mean, Ambassador Crocker, a great diplomatic wingman, during the surge used to assert that in a perfect world, Iran would like to Lebanonize Iraq. They'd like to have sufficient proxy elements that when something is starting to head in a direction they don't like, those proxies could launch a bunch of rockets or mortars or something else like that, and the Qods Force commander could call up and say, oh, my gosh, I'm so disturbed to see this is happening. We'll stop it immediately. But, of course, you know, we'd like to have one more vote in the council of this or that. So again, you have that activity there.

You obviously have the continued provision of
all kinds of resources and weaponry and advanced
technology and so forth to Lebanese Hezbollah, to
Hamas, and, to a much lesser degree but still
happening, to a lesser degree to the Taliban in western
Afghanistan. Certainly the use of soft power wherever
they can, as well, to compliment the various activities
of the hard power.

And now you have this complicating factor
that Iran has gone from being, you know, if you will, a
theocracy to what some pundits have described as a
thugocracy, where because of the unrest in the wake of
the hijacked elections this past year, the security
apparatus has been able to grip even more of the power
because the Supreme Leader has had to turn to the
Revolutionary Guards corps, to the siege militia, and
to the Qods Force far greater than before.

And that has enabled them to then expand
their already considerable influence beyond just the
security arena, but ever more greatly into the economic
arena and even into the diplomatic arena. You know, in
the middle of the battle with the militia in March and
April of 2008, a message was conveyed to me by a very
senior Iraqi leader from the head of the Qods Force, Kassim Suleimani, whose message went as follows.

He said, General Petraeus, you should know that I, Kassim Suleimani, control the policy for Iran with respect to Iraq, Lebanon, Gaza, and Afghanistan. And indeed, the ambassador in Baghdad is a Qods Force member. The individual who's going to replace him is a Qods Force member.

Now, that makes diplomacy difficult if you think that you're going to do the traditional means of diplomacy by dealing with another country's Ministry of Foreign Affairs because in this case, it is not the ministry. It's not Mottaki who controls the foreign policy, again, for these countries, at least. It is, again, a security apparatus, the Qods Force, which is also carrying out other activities.

So, you know, that's -- again, these are the dimensions of this, with now greater unrest in the country, I think it's safe to say unrest that is of more significance than at any time since the actual revolution itself, and seems to have more legs to it.

I mean, it seems to have an enduring quality
where every anniversary or every additional milestone
in the days of mourning after the death of a
significant leader, or the other traditional national
or religious celebrations, this unrest surfaces again
and is posing enormous difficulties because it starts
to create cracks in the edifice of the security
structures that maintain order in Iran.

DR. KAGAN: Speaking of those security
structures, and indeed, of Kassim Suleimani and the
Qods Force, have you actually seen a pattern whereby
Kassim Suleimani, who seems to control a portion of
CENTCOM for Iran, actually shifts resources from one
theater to another, as the United States does?

GENERAL PETRAEUS: Well, I think -- you know,
I don't know if it's a shift of resources or
occasionally a little less here, maybe more here, that
kind of thing. I mean, there's no question that the
level, we think, went down after the militia were
defeated in March and April of 2008 in the battles of
Basra, Sadr City, and a couple of other places.

And so in the wake of that, I mean, they just
did -- and the leaders, many of the leaders, went back
to Iran. Many of the fighters went back to Iran. A number of others were killed or captured or detained. And it's never, I think, come back to the levels that the assistance reached prior to those particular battles. And I think Iraq is very sensitive to that. I mean, the Iraqis don't want their political decisions made under the threat of rockets of EFPs or what have you that have come from Iran.

Remember that prior to those battles, in fact, in the fall of 2007, two or three southern Iraq governors were assassinated and two or three police chiefs were killed by EFPs provided by Iran that were used in those particular attacks. And that was very well known by the Iraqi leaders, and then, needless to say, they more than resented that. They were very disturbed by that when, on the other hand, they'd have cordial relationships with the leaders.

So again, there is the dynamic that's present in that case. I've seen a fairly constant level of support, I think, to Lebanese Hezbollah, to, again, Hamas -- although there have been interdictions of this, too, by the way, I should note. I mean, this has
by no means been easy for them to do in all cases.

And there's a calculation you can see going on about, you know, what happens if you get caught in this. What are the down sides, and all the rest of that.

**DR. KAGAN:** What is the likelihood that nuclear proliferation, should Iran become a nuclear power, would actually occur within the Arab world as a whole?

**GENERAL PETRAEUS:** Well, I think that's one of the big concerns that, you know, strategic thinkers that hang out at places like this present, that if Iran were to get nuclear weapons, that some of its Arab neighbors would figure out how to get them as well.

You know, you can -- again, you can head down this road. I mean, it's almost as if the wizards of Armageddon have, you know, a new reason to live here now after being somewhat -- you know, a lot of us were in grad school in the mid-'80s and all that period when, indeed, all of these discussions about various forms of deterrence and so forth took place.

And, you know, you could sense some of that
kind of discussion coming. But of course, there are also some substantial unknown out there. And, of course, the biggest is that a country in that region, not in the Central Command area but that feels that Iran poses an existential threat to it, that Iran has, you know, said it doesn't have a right to exist and has questioned the existence of, you know, the Holocaust and so forth, that indeed that country wouldn't stand by and allow Iran to have nuclear weapons.

So again, you have those aspects of the situation out there as well. And I think -- I don't think this is on quite the same timeline as perhaps some do. It's a little bit -- you know, there's a little bit further to the right, if you will, to your right in terms of a timeline. But at some point over the course of this year or next year, there's going to have to be some very, very hard decisions made on these issues.

**DR. KAGAN:** Let's take some questions about Iran.

**QUESTION:** General Petraeus, Louis Clemente. I do have a question about Iran. And what is
America's strategy to try and prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons? And do you think the Israelis may actually take action? I think that's what you were alluding to. If we don't do something, are the Israelis going to step in and say, enough's enough?

GENERAL PETRAEUS: Well, first of all, of course, it's not just the U.S. strategy. It's obviously an international strategy. It's the actions taken by the IAEA, by the UN Security Council, with various resolutions to impose a whole variety of sanctions, a number of which are intended to make it much more difficult for Iran to get materials that could be used in various nuclear programs that could ultimately lead to the production of nuclear weapons, and also with some missile technology-related items and so forth.

So I think, again, those are the big components, and so those have been the diplomatic economic elements that have been employed. You know well, I'm sure, that the Perm-5-plus-1 have recently had more discussions on the possibility of additional sanctions, and what form those sanctions might take,
and so forth.

The IAEA has had additional conversations with Iran on whether or not there's a deal possible to take the more than I think it's a thousand kilograms of low enriched uranium that have been produced in Natanz and then send it to a third country for the production of somewhat more highly enriched uranium, but that could only be used in the research reactor that Iran has.

That deal hasn't been struck. That could have an important stabilizing effect to it. And we'll just have to see whether Iran, you know, has any sincerity at all about pursuing that or is slow-rolling.

But certainly, you know, the diplomacy has intensified. It has been complicated probably a bit just because of the preoccupation of Iran with its internal affairs. I mean, there are literally organizations within Iran that just, frankly, haven't met the way they used to, certain of the important Iranian security bodies and advisory bodies that help the Supreme Leader and so forth, because -- in some
cases because of internal divisions among the senior members of these different groups. So that has made things more difficult, I suspect, as well.

As to the latter part of your question, I mean, that's obviously, you know, something that only Israel can answer. Needless to say, there are communications with Israel on a host of different levels.

And indeed, a number of individuals, very senior individuals -- the Secretary of Defense, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and others -- have all pointed out the various ramifications, just in a general sense of what could result from strikes. And again, you know, who knows what the impact could be on the global economy or on infrastructure in the area or what have you.

So again, you know, we're sort of staring at some very, very difficult areas, the ramifications of which could be enormous for the entire world, not just for the region.

**Dr. Kagan:** I'd actually like to turn the conversation to Pakistan and Afghanistan, and make sure
that we have a little bit of time to talk about them.

GENERAL PETRAEUS: Okay. Sure.

DR. KAGAN: And Pakistan first. Have the Pakistani military operations over the course of the past year defeated the TTP?

GENERAL PETRAEUS: Well, I don't know that you'd characterize it as having defeated the TTP and/or the other elements that are associated with the Pakistani Taliban. But they have certainly set them back very considerably.

They cleared and have held Swat Valley, Swat District, really, the Malakand Division of Northwest Frontier Province. They've conducted important operations in Bajaur, Mohmand, and Khyber in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas; and then most recently, of course, about three or four months ago, launched an important operation in eastern South Waziristan, the tribal areas controlled by the extremist element that was led by the former Baitullah Mehsud, who was killed in the Fatah last year, a very important action.

And that has put considerable pressure on,
again, the Pakistani Taliban and some of its affiliates. It has been, I think, of enormous importance that we recognize this important development because until about ten months ago, I think there was generally an assertion by a number in Pakistan that the Pakistani military was being coerced into fighting the U.S. War on Terror.

And somewhere around that 10 or 11 months ago, there was this significant shift in public opinion, the political leadership, even many of the senior clerics, that the Pakistani Taliban was becoming the most pressing threat to the very existence of Pakistan. And it was really supplanting even India, at least as the most urgent threat that needed to be dealt with.

That is, again, a very, very significant shift, and it provided considerable support for the Pakistani Army and Frontier Corps as they launched the operations into Swat Valley after the extremists there had literally begun to encroach on the settled areas, as they're called, and to really threaten, again, the very writ of governance of Pakistan in a very
And the Pakistani Army and the Frontier Corps have carried out really quite impressive counter-insurgency operations. There are certainly limitations in the resources available to them. There are limitations in the governmental agencies and resources that they can bring to the rebuilding effort because, of course, it's not just clear and leave, it's clear, hold, and build, and even transition. And again, the Pakistani military's approach has been quite impressive.

So I think all in all, they have shown quite a facility for carrying out these operations, a recognition that you have to hang onto what you fought to clear. You know, the act of taking over that area of eastern South Waziristan, where there was so much infrastructure that contained explosives, and IED factories, and car bomb factories, and arms and ammunition storage sites, and planning locations, training facilities, all the rest of that -- that's not in their hands now, in TTP's hands. It's in the hands of the Pakistani Army.
They may be able to reach a deal that allows
the traditional tribal elements to return to that area
less those that were part of the extremist forces that
had hijacked those tribal areas that also, of course,
were engaged in the assassination of Benazir Bhutto,
blowing up the Marriott Hotel, blowing up a visiting
cricket team, and innumerable innocent Pakistani
civilians in Peshawar and Pakistani officials and so
forth.

So this has been a very significant
development, but again, very much a work in progress,
to be sure. And certainly there are numerous other
extremist elements that threaten Afghanistan and our
forces and efforts there that, over time, we want to
see, of course, additional pressure brought on as well,
even as there are other campaigns that are pressuring
the leaders of those organizations very significantly,
too.

**DR. KAGAN:** As we talk about those
organizations based in Pakistan or with bases in
Pakistan, of course, Al-Qaeda Central comes to mind,
and one of the things, one of the dynamics that we've
seen very much on the -- throughout our fight in
Afghanistan and throughout our fight in Iraq is that
Al-Qaeda has a better apparatus for distributing
information to the populations of -- of Afghanistan, of
Iraq, than we do.

Do you have the authorities that you need and
the capabilities that you need actually to counter the
information operations campaign of Al-Qaeda globally or
in -- or its affiliates in areas where we're fighting
against insurgencies?

GENERAL PETRAEUS: Let me go back to Iraq and
talk about some very important lessons that we learned
there and as you go after an organization like Al-Qaeda
in Iraq and the other semi-extremist elements that were
its confederates, you had to have again a very
comprehensive approach.

Again, you don't just deal with them just
with your high-end Special Ops or even your
conventional forces. You have to get host nation
forces. You have to do politics. You gotta get laws
and legislation and promote reconciliation and generate
Sons of Iraq and you have to get smarter about how you
fuse, gather and fuse intelligence. You have to deal
with detainee operations so that extremists aren't
running your training camps and then you have to help
the host nation deal with the basic reasons why
individuals might be prone to extremism in the first
place: lack of adequate education, basic services,
health, opportunity, and so forth, and then work on the
source countries and the way foreign fighters can flow
into the country. But a huge element of this is
information operations.

Now, this is not propaganda. This is living
within the admonition that was part of our counter-
insurgency guidance that was titled Be First With The
Truth and that's what we sought to do and we tried to
operationalize that concept.

We didn't lie to folks like Al Gordon. We
tried to provide him the honest facts as we knew them.
We sought to expose them. Yeah. Sure. We'll let him
see some good news stuff, but, I mean, we weren't
trying to pump it to him and he saw some plenty of bad
news stuff, too, and when we had bad days, we went out
and said we had a bad day, here's what we're trying to
learn from it and how we'll try to mitigate the chances of it in the future.

But we also had to build a structure that could carry out a true information operation campaign plan and this is strategic communications. It's providing content for radio, television, print media. It is having a rapid-fire channel, if you will, so that if someone sees a story in the news, you can respond very quickly.

It's not unlike what political campaigns have with perhaps the lack of some of the spin that occasionally might characterize political campaigns. I'm sure in other countries, not in ours.

(Laughter.)

**GENERAL PETRAEUS:** And so we set about building a very substantial structure and we did. We combined all of the capabilities and aspects of our military information support teams in CYOPS elements. We used Public Affairs, certainly kept a distance from some of those -- the information operations elements that are now part of our structures, did a fair amount of contracting of various folks in that kind of
business, and -- and again this made a big difference because, over time, as the extremists carried out various activities, we were able to hang around their neck three labels.

Those labels were indiscriminate violence, extremist ideology, and also oppressive practices. Now think about that. The indiscriminate violence, they blow up an innocent -- bunch of innocent civilians in a market. We immediately hammer them with that, ideally through helping Iraqis to do that.

The oppressive practices. They cut the fingers off somebody smoking in Anwar Province and, boy, that's a great one to, you know, Sunni Arabs know that they just lost their inalienable right to a cigarette. That is a great one.

That's when I knew we might be able to turn this thing around, you know. Al-Qaeda had done something so stupid as that or forced marriages or a variety of other things.

And then just the sheer extremism that did indeed characterize their ideology and so that was done, though, you know, again this wasn't luck. It
wasn't serendipity any more than reconciliation was, I might add. It was done with, you know, an explicit campaign. It took us well over a year to truly build this organization and I should tell you that we're now doing the same thing in Afghanistan.

It is not pure coincidence that Rear Admiral Greg Smith, who came to Iraq, I think, for three weeks and ended up staying for 18 months, thanks to Admiral Mullen, then as Chief of Naval Operations, now the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, who then, not coincidentally, of course, came to Central Command, and who now is in Afghanistan, and Rear Admiral Greg Smith is helping to establish this overall information operations task force that will endeavor to do in Afghanistan what we sought to do in Iraq.

We're also trying to replicate some of that at Central Command, Headquarters. Obviously, it takes resources. We're working through that in Washington. Again, those who, you know, bemoan the fact that our message doesn't seem to get out sometimes -- by the way, again, it's a truthful message. This isn't spin. It's not propaganda.
But those who, you know, are frustrated that it's hard to operationalize the concept of Be First With The Truth, then also have to come to grips with the fact that it does take resources to do that. There's a very impressive Under Secretary in State now for Public Diplomacy, a woman who really helped with the discovery of not just the channel but the corporation become all that it has become who -- with whom we are partnering on this, as well, because certainly we very much want to do this as a -- as an interagency, as a whole of government effort. And now, then when -- so that's the first element of it, but that is in the traditional communications media.

There's a new battle space now and it is, of course, cyberspace and I think that as a government, we are very much still coming to grip with the policy issues, the, you know, areas in which legislation is needed, oversight, and resources to come to grips with the challenges in cyberspace and to ensure that the extremists don't have free reign in cyberspace. This is, of course, why Secretary Gates,
needless to say, has promoted the idea of a CyberCommand with -- and has nominated a commander of it to be initially a sub-unified command under Strategic Command, very important initiative.

In all, we've had some very good discussions among all the combatant commanders and Joint Chiefs with the Secretary just in the course of the last week or so, actually, and so that is, you know, for -- I mentioned to some university audiences recently, you know, if you're looking for a great thesis or dissertation topic, cyberspace and activities in it, while protecting again the inalienable rights that we recognize and codify in our Constitution and Bill of Rights and so forth, but also ensuring that we can protect the American people from security threats which can be generated and aided and abetted in cyberspace.

Indeed, I mean Anwar al-Awlaki has, you know, how did he attract Major Hassan's attention? I mean, it was through cyberspace. How presumably did he link up with the Detroit bomber? Probably again through cyberspace, and there's no question that there's a lot of command control, a lot of literally proselytizing
and sharing of lessons learned, discussions of tactics, techniques, and procedures for extremism activities and so forth, all taking place in cyberspace, and we have to figure out how to come to grips with that and over time I'm sure that will be the subject of legislation and a lot of policies.

**DR. KAGAN:** One last question about Afghanistan. As we go into the London Conference next week, we have begun to hear much talk of reintegration and perhaps reconciliation of enemy groups within Afghanistan.

Don't we have to win first?

**GENERAL PETRAEUS:** Well, I think that -- let's define here what we're talking about because these terms are a little bit new for Afghanistan. They're a bit different from what -- the way they're employed in Iraq.

Reconciliation in the Afghan context typically means senior Taliban leaders, commanders, even Mullah Omar, reconciling with the Afghan Government, agreeing to lay down their arms, agreeing to become again part of the process in a constructive
manner rather than a continuing part of the problem.

And reintegration of reconcilable elements of
the Taliban and other extremist elements operating in
Afghanistan is indeed just that. It is more junior
members of it, sub-commanders and so forth, and
actually we see examples of this, you know, on a fairly
regular basis in Afghanistan and, of course, the more
there is pressure on them.

Again, a lot of people talk about the, you
know, positive incentives for reconciliation or
reintegration. There are also, you know, some other --
you know, you bring them about by what they see as
negative actions, of course.

I mean, there's no greater incentive to
reconcile than the fact that, you know, you might be
killed if you don't reconcile. So one of the reasons
reconciliation started to -- to -- to gain progress in
Iraq, among a variety of others, was that, indeed,
there was greater pressure on those who were even
tacitly or actively involved with the extremist
elements with Al-Qaeda and its affiliates.

And so you're exactly right. I mean, why
would senior members of an insurgent movement come to
terms or reconcile if they think that they are in the
resurgent mode as opposed to under enormous pressure
and certainly one of the objectives that we have for
this coming year is to put the kind of pressure on the
senior members and on the junior members, as well, so
that there can be certainly reintegration and perhaps
the prospect for some true reconciliation as it's
defined for Afghanistan, although that probably is a
bit more remote than the very likely possibility that
there will be a continuation of what we have seen and
that being the reintegration of lower-level members of
the Taliban and the other groups.

DR. KAGAN: General Petraeus, thank you so
much for spending time today with the Institute for the
Study of War, and thank you so much for your service to
the United States, to our security, and to our Armed
Forces.

GENERAL PETRAEUS: Well, thanks, thanks for
yours, as well, Kim, and thank you all very much.
Thanks.

(Applause.)