

April 15, 2008

TO: Interested Parties
FROM: Matt Bennett, Jonathan Morgenstein and Scott Payne
RE: Backfire: The Petraeus/Crocker Hearings and the New Rift between Bush and His Military Commanders

The Bush administration sought to use the latest Petraeus/Crocker hearings to strengthen their case for stalling the drawdown in Iraq. It is now clear that their strategy backfired, and that the hearings, and the months-long prelude to them, exposed a deep split between the President and his Iraq commander on the one hand, and many of the military chiefs on the other. ***With the President and his allies now on the defensive, progressives must go on the offense and hammer relentlessly at this split.*** In this memo we outline the three critical areas that progressives should focus on to continue to expose this fault line.

Bush vs. the Commanders: Three Areas of Disagreement

In addition to the Petraeus/Crocker hearings last week, the President made a speech to the nation on Iraq, and Congress heard testimony from Secretary Gates and Joint Chiefs Chairman Mullen, much of which echoed comments heard in recent testimony from the Army Chief and Vice-Chief of Staff. What emerged from those public comments, and from less-noticed press accounts, was a substantial rift on the Iraq War and its implications for America's national security. This split included:

1. The Crisis in the Army: A Four-Star Alarm Unheard in the White House

Buried within a recent *Washington Post* piece on the Petraeus hearings lurked a jaw-dropping admission from the White House: the paper noted that President Bush had "expressed impatience with military concerns over the health of the force." This level of indifference to the severe national security dangers posed by a deeply over-stretched force sets the President directly at odds with our military leaders. According to Joint Chiefs Chairman Mullen, the war is putting US national security in a state of "particularly high risk for the next two years." This echoes the four-star alarm that has been ringing for months, with Army leaders repeatedly telling Congress that the force is at its breaking point and cannot sustain the strain for much longer.

Indeed, perhaps not since McArthur's challenge to President Truman during the Korean War have military leaders risked their careers by so openly challenging the President's perspective on war-time military issues. Army Chief Casey again last week risked his career by insisting, as he has repeatedly since last autumn, that: "the current demand for our forces is not sustainable... We can't sustain the all-volunteer force at the pace that we are going on right now."

The alarm is not confined to the uniformed leadership. Even Secretary Gates, while accepting the need to conduct an assessment once we hit the level of 140,000 troops in

Iraq this summer, challenged General Petraeus' contention that the drawdown from Iraq should be stalled, saying he hoped we could "reduce our presence further this fall."

2. The President's New Troops Plan: An Empty Promise

Perhaps sensing the growing split between his White House and his commanders, the President announced last week that he would reduce Army tours in Iraq from 15 months to 12 for deployments beginning in August and that he would "ensure that our Army units will have at least a year home for every year in the field." These steps are a welcome change in direction - the President and his congressional allies have vehemently opposed the Webb/Tauscher amendment that would have imposed such a minimum 1:1 dwell time ratio. (Senator McCain said that this policy "would do more harm than good.")

Once again, however, the President is out of step with his military leaders, who have made clear that his newly proposed dwell time provisions are not enough. Army Vice Chief of Staff Cody said that the ideal ratio of time deployed vs. time at home to rest and train is a minimum of 1:3, and that a smaller ratio is dangerous to the health of the force: "Our rotational goals for a steady security posture of the Army is one year in combat or deployed, three years back for the active force, and one year mobilized and five years back for the reserve component. *Continued deployments below these goals will put the all-volunteer force at risk in a time of persistent conflict.*"

But the current ratio for the active duty Army is an absurd 5:4, with 15 months deployed followed by just 12 months at home. In going to 1:1, as Michelle Flournoy, of the Center for a New American Security, has noted, the President merely has shifted the military's deployment schedule "from the insane to the unsustainable."

Moreover, the President did not reveal how the Pentagon would make up the difference—where would the additional troops come from, if troop levels in Iraq are to be maintained at 140,000? As the commanders have made clear, they have no active duty units that are ready to deploy. Will more National Guard units be activated to make up for the troops returning home three months earlier than they do now? If so, this would be deeply problematic for the Guard and for the security of the states facing the onset of fire, hurricane and flood seasons.

3. Iraq vs. Afghanistan: The Stall Strengthens Al Qaeda and the Taliban

During his speech to the nation last week, President Bush stated that if we did not stall troop withdrawals in Iraq, not only would al Qaeda "gain safe havens in Iraq from which to attack the US, our friends and our allies," but also that this would allow "the Taliban in Afghanistan and al Qaeda in Pakistan [to] grow in confidence and boldness."

But according to the President's own uniformed and intelligence experts, this assertion gets the situation precisely backward—it is the stall, not the drawdown that is greatly harming our efforts to defeat al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan.

First, the NATO/US commanding General in Afghanistan, Dan McNeill, said in February that he has only about 15% of the troops he needs to complete his mission: "No question it's an under-resourced force... you need a huge force, well over 400,000." (There are fewer than 60,000 NATO and US forces currently in Afghanistan.)

Joint Chiefs Chairman Mullen admitted to National Public Radio that the US does not have enough troops in Afghanistan and that the Iraq War was to blame. "Should we be in a

position where more troops are removed from Iraq, the possibility of sending additional troops [to Afghanistan]—where we need them, clearly—certainly it's a possibility. But it's really going to be based on the availability of troops. We don't have troops ... sitting on the shelf, ready to go." In his testimony last week, he also linked that problem to Iraq. Saying he is "deeply concerned" about Afghanistan, Mullen noted: "With the bulk of our ground forces deployed to Iraq... we cannot now meet extra force requirements in places like Afghanistan."

Finally, Ambassador Crocker testified last week that if he were forced to choose between fighting al Qaeda in Afghanistan versus Iraq, he would "pick al Qaeda in the Pakistan-Afghanistan border area." Because our military resources are finite, this clearly has become an either-or proposition: we fight in Afghanistan, or we continue our current policy in Iraq; we just do not have enough troops to do both effectively.

The stall in Iraq will exacerbate our inability to defeat the global strategic core of al Qaeda and the Taliban. They can now operate in 92% of Afghanistan and control about 10% of the country—a percentage that is rising. US military commanders understand that the President's warning is totally empty—our enemies in Afghanistan/Pakistan have plenty of confidence already.

The Message

- **The President's hopes—that General Petraeus' testimony would help him sell his plan to stall the troop withdrawal from Iraq—have backfired.**
- **Indeed, the hearings in Congress have revealed a huge and historic rift between the President and top military commanders.**
- **The military leaders have signaled their belief that the Bush stall policy in Iraq is endangering our war-fighting capacity, our efforts in Afghanistan and our national security.**
 - **The commanders have been raising a frantic, four-star alarm about the dangerous state of the US Army, but the President has expressed that he doesn't want to hear any more about it.**
 - **The commanders have been pleading for more time at home for the troops to rest and train, and they believe that the President's proposal of one year home for every year in combat will not fix the Army crisis and that it is far too little, too late.**
 - **The commanders believe that the only way we can send badly needed reinforcements to the fight in Afghanistan is to continue the troop drawdown in Iraq, but the President refuses to listen.**
- **By ignoring the increasingly dire warnings and pleadings of his top military commanders and implementing a stall policy in Iraq, the President is gravely endangering the national security of the United States.**