

AIR COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE

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**WHEN OPPORTUNITY ONLY KNOCKS ONCE:
LESSONS FROM GEN PETRAEUS IN IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN**

by

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CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
DISCLAIMER.....	i
ABSTRACT.....	iii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
ASSUMPTIONS.....	2
PETRAEUS IN OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM.....	3
PETRAEUS IN OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM.....	9
CONCLUSION.....	17
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	21



ABSTRACT

GEN David Petraeus' counterinsurgency (COIN) efforts failed in Afghanistan because of the unfavorable contextual elements including the lack of both popular and political support at home and abroad, the tribal history of Afghanistan, the harsh terrain and the historically finite amount of time given to the general to accomplish his objectives. This work details the lessons learned from Petraeus' bold leadership and use of COIN doctrine to bring prosperity in Iraq and failure to bring about peace to a decades-long, war ravaged land in Afghanistan. Different contextual environments and battlefield elements can stymie a war effort of an otherwise successful campaign and a capable combat commander. Therefore, the goal of this argument is to enlighten rather than lay blame or, conversely, falsely lionize arguably the most famous general of the modern era. This essay will define key terms, provide critical assumptions in the argument, discuss the national objectives in Iraq and Afghanistan, and discuss how Petraeus both succeeded and failed in the two very different modern theaters of war.

INTRODUCTION

“We don’t do silver medals. It’s gold or go home.”

General Robert B. Neller, 37th Commandant of the U.S.M.C.

GEN David Petraeus’ counterinsurgency (COIN) efforts failed in Afghanistan because of the unfavorable contextual elements including the lack of both popular and political support at home and abroad, the tribal history of Afghanistan, the harsh terrain and the historically finite amount of time given to the general to accomplish his objectives.¹ This work details the lessons learned from Petraeus’ bold leadership and use of COIN doctrine to bring prosperity in Iraq and failure to bring about peace to a decades-long, war ravaged land in Afghanistan. Different contextual environments and battlefield elements can stymie a war effort of an otherwise successful campaign and a capable combat commander. Therefore, the goal of this argument is to enlighten rather than lay blame or, conversely, falsely lionize arguably the most famous general of the modern era. This essay will define key terms, provide critical assumptions in the argument, discuss the national objectives in Iraq and Afghanistan, and discuss how Petraeus both succeeded and failed in the two very different modern theaters of war. Assumptions and definitions help provide a framework for the discussion of Petraeus’ successes and failures in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In this work several terms will be repeatedly used to guide the discussion on Petraeus’ successes and failures. Leadership is defined as the ability to influence others to accomplish an assigned goal or specific tasks.² An insurgency is “a political-military campaign by non-state actors who seek to overthrow a government or secede from a country through the use of unconventional—and sometimes conventional—military strategies.”³ Success is defined as the accomplishment of an aim or purpose.⁴ Conversely, failure is defined as “nonperformance of

something due, required, or expected.”⁵ The objective criteria for Petraeus’ success and failure within this work are based on his ability to complete the national objectives in either theater of war during the specified period of his assignment as a commander. These national objectives will be assessed in the narrative of Petraeus’ performance in both theaters. Several assumptions have been made in order to narrow the scope of the argument and concentrate focus on Petraeus’ inability to meet his goals in Afghanistan.

ASSUMPTIONS

The three major assumptions involved in this essay are that 1.) Petraeus was successful as the Multi-National Forces-Iraq (MNF-I) Commander from 2007-2008 during the famous “surge” because he brought the Iraqi nation away from a divisive sectarian civil war; 2.) Petraeus was unsuccessful in Afghanistan due to his inability to transform the government into a legitimate, inclusive governing body; 3.) the discussion of Petraeus’ successes or failures are considered within the time span when he was an assigned commander and does not take into account his work and tangential contribution to Afghanistan while he was the CENTCOM commander or one of the critical authors/enablers of the Army-Marine Corps’ 2006 COIN Field Manual 3-24, prior to this tour. Note: Petraeus’ time as the CENTCOM commander is not credited or discussed in this work during GEN Stanley McCrystal’s time as the International Security Assistance Force Commander (ISAF/CC). This is to help focus the argument and to concentrate credit or criticism towards Petraeus instead of diversifying it among other officers. While the goal is to illustrate and analyze Petraeus’ tour in Afghanistan and compare it to his much more successful one in Iraq as the MNF-I Commander, the overall assumption is that Petraeus was a successful commander at making progress in both wars and overall, and was one of the most skilled officers of this generation. It cannot be overstated that Petraeus is not a failure in terms of his tours in Afghanistan or his service

to the United States. His unflappable leadership during two seemingly hopeless American ground campaigns and ability to acquire talent, focus a campaign and accomplish real progress on the ground is something officers of every grade strive for in their careers.

When discussing Petraeus' efforts as a commander in the Iraq and Afghanistan campaigns, it is imperative to discuss the political climate (internationally, nationally, and within the host nation), terrain, enemy forces, and populace. These contextual elements illustrate Petraeus' ability to lead the Coalition Forces and nimble execution of the COIN doctrine he and his COINdinitas wrote.⁶ Much like a poker player, these were the cards he was dealt and these contextual elements are ultimately where Petraeus found success or suffered his failures in command. The first war discussed is Petraeus' time as a commander during Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF).

PETRAEUS IN OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

The principal strategic failures during OIF were issued by the head of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) Paul Bremer in May 2003. Order Numbers 1 and 2 were infamously known for banning all but the lowest members of Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist party and the dissolution of the entire Iraqi army.⁷ These historic "ham-fisted" orders are germane to the conversation about Petraeus' leadership and doctrinal success in Iraq as these orders devastatingly destabilized the country, and ultimately the region, down to its foundational core. The De-Ba'athification forced experienced Iraqi government employees, laborers and even teachers into joblessness during an invasion of foreign forces and the disbanding of the army took away any hope for Iraq's national security. Shia militants took advantage of this by blocking Sunnis from positions of power, marginalizing them and in extreme circumstances forced Sunnis from their homes and/or killed them.⁸ This witch's brew created a professional and bitter insurgency as early

as 2003 to fight the Coalition Forces and would lead the country into a bitter, sectarian civil war and destabilize the entire region. This insurgency was purposefully ignored by then Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld until it was too late.

“Petraeus took command of MNF-I on 10 February 2007, and begun his 3rd tour and started his 28th month in Iraq. He served in Iraq from February 2007 to September 2008.”⁹ Petraeus’ “surge in Iraq” was a doctrinal and leadership success because the country was politically willing to allow peace. Additionally, Iraqi’s were accustomed to rule by a centralized government and the urban environment allowed Coalition Forces the ability to control security efforts to all the government to provide basic services with the assistance of increased funding from Congress. Ironically, the inverse of these contextual pieces is what later led to Petraeus’ failure in Afghanistan. During his time as the Commander of MNF-I, the Iraqi people faced a lethal threat from al Qa’eda operatives who were seeking to divide the country through the use of targeted sectarian violence primarily pitting Sunnis and Shia Muslims against one another.

Petraeus was specifically selected for the assignment as MNF-I Commander and replaced GEN George Casey, Jr. out of the normal cycle of commanders. Petraeus was renowned for being an ambitious, hyper-competitive, opportunistic officer throughout his career in the Army. Petraeus vastly differed from his rival GEN Casey’s strategy. At this point in OIF, Casey wanted to hand over the fight to the Iraqis whereas Petraeus wanted to defeat the insurgency in order to establish the Iraqi government as a legitimate ruling body.¹⁰ Another important leadership difference between the two generals is that Petraeus was able to synchronize the efforts of junior leaders such as the COL H.R. McMaster, LTG Ray Odierno, LTG McChrystal, and others where lesser leaders such as GEN Casey fell short at orchestrating junior leaders and efforts into one unified campaign plan. One of Petraeus’ most respectable qualities was his ability to identify talented, intellectual

and aggressive officers and academics and to channel their combined efforts into improving the war campaign. This talent helped synchronize the flailing efforts during OIF and should be considered a positive leadership trait that helped further the creation and execution of Petraeus' successful COIN doctrine.

In 2006, Petraeus stated, "The fundamental source of conflict in Iraq is competition among ethnic and sectarian communities for power and resources...maligning actions by Syria and, especially, by Iran fueling that violence."¹¹ Petraeus advocated that his recently codified COIN doctrine of "clear, hold, build" was necessary to promote security needed to re-establish the centralized government and basic services that Iraqis needed. Petraeus' COIN doctrine heavily borrowed from the Vietnam CORDS program and "was designed to provide security for the local population, destroy insurgent infrastructure, and to build the host nation government's capacity."¹² Furthermore, this COIN doctrine called for a, "low-tech and decentralized intuitive approach, focused on understanding and meeting the needs of local communities to win them away from the enemy."¹³ The sewage, water, electricity and trash program, known as SWET, that GEN Peter Chiarelli enacted, required consistent security efforts and had a unifying effect with the disparate populace. These efforts take care of people at the first level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the basest for human needs for survival. Additionally, Petraeus' ability to unify the military's efforts at securing basic necessities helped secure political reconciliation among differing factions. During his time as commander, Petraeus would, "often fly over the city and towns to see where electricity was present as a qualitative benchmark for the SWET and overall security in the area."¹⁴ This demonstrates Petraeus' dogged leadership efforts to obtain ground truth and qualitative information on the execution of his COIN doctrine to bring about real, lasting peace in his campaign. However in this same vein, Petraeus readily admitted that, "the Iraqis need to control

the militias and strip off the Sunni support for the insurgency. The U.S. is less of a factor.”¹⁵ This simple example shows how Petraeus was savvy enough to take advantage of the political climate and aptly used his COIN doctrine to remedy the situation. Additionally, the admission that Iraq and its citizens should be the nucleus of effort and discussion showed his extreme candor and skilled diplomacy that enamored him in the eyes of both senior civilian leadership in Iraq and the U.S.

Al Qa-eda in Iraq (AQ-I) leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi’s extremely violent reign actually helped Petraeus’ wartime COIN efforts. Zarqawi’s strategically directed violence transformed an Iraqi insurgency into a sectarian civil war. In his report to Congress, Petraeus described this situation by stating, “Since the first Sunni Awakening in late 2006, Sunni communities in Iraq increasingly have rejected AQI’s indiscriminate violence and extremist ideology.”¹⁶ In fact, the “turning point [came] in 2007 when a sheik contacted U.S. Forces and informed them that they would be attacking al Qa’eda militants who had kidnapped two Iraqi citizens.” This politically charged situation highly favored Petraeus’ COIN fight, turning the insurgents into Iraq’s national “enemy.” Additionally, Zarqawi’s elusiveness helped spawn the need for the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) to respond more quickly to globally relevant actionable intelligence. The improvement in JSOC’s speed and ability to strike in both Afghanistan and Iraq is fundamental to the successes in both countries and is attributed to GEN McChrystal as well as Petraeus for their flattening this special operations organization and making it more lethal across multiple theaters.¹⁷ Unlike more conventional U.S. Army leaders, Petraeus was willing to “break glass” in order to make rapid changes necessary to have more lethal effects in the battlefield—this cannot be overvalued in combat generals seeking political objectives against an amorphous, elusive insurgency. This leadership trait is uncommon, and helped Petraeus promptly seize the moment during the

violent sectarian fighting. Zarqawi's violent, calculated methods can be labeled grossly unsuccessful as he was partially responsible for uniting Shia and Sunni Iraqis under the new centralized government.

The timing and political climate in Iraq during the Sunni awakening in Anbar province is largely responsible for the success of Petraeus' Sons of Iraq program. This program included, "91,000 Sons of Iraq—Shia as well as Sunni—under contract to help Coalition and Iraqi Forces protect their neighborhoods and secure infrastructure and roads."¹⁸ This event combined with the execution of this social works program led to a marked decrease in sectarian violence.¹⁹ Petraeus had impeccable timing as a commander as he enjoyed additional Congressional funding, enabling him the ability to directly "pay for peace." The Sons of Iraq program helped turn would-be insurgents into viable security and labor for governmental construction programs, helping rebuild a war torn country. In fact, "in late 2006, 35 tribes and subtribes joined forces against al Qa'eda and started cooperating with the Americans instead of fighting them."²⁰ The final element that favored Petraeus' success in Iraq was the terrain and general landscape that he needed to secure the country for the government's success.

Petraeus' primary objective was to bring peace to the Sunni Triangle, the most violent sector and the heart of the Iraqi insurgency.²¹ This center of Iraq included an urban sprawl environment, ripe with improvised explosive devices (IEDs), explosively formed penetrators (EFPs) and ambush sites with the use of apartment building and other city structures. This urban environment came with challenges; however Petraeus' COIN doctrine of clear, hold and build worked well and were like a drink of cool water to the war weary Iraqi people. Petraeus' commanders helped seal the borders with neighboring countries to reduce the flow of weapons and foreign fighters. He also encouraged the construction of wall barriers between Sunni and Shia

neighborhoods to prevent violence and the flow of weapons and fighters into adjacent neighborhoods. This tactic was a chapter taken from the British Boer War.²² Additionally, Petraeus' implementation of joint security stations secured the Shia populace from attacks, negating the need for Shia militias to defend their sects and which would further escalate the use of violence between Shias and Sunnis.²³ Additionally, Petraeus use of information operations (IO) through the media, Iraqi senior leaders and the community also helped rapidly distribute positive information of Coalition efforts and negative reports of militant atrocities. Although this was not always the case, Petraeus masterfully used IO to his advantage, both a positive leadership trait and effective use of his COIN doctrine.

Petraeus' success in Iraq can be attributed to the following reasons: "1.) U.S. Forces secured the population; 2.) Ethno-sectarian cleansing that had already forced Sunnis out of some areas of the city and created separate Sunni and Shia enclaves that were more easily secured; 3.) Moqtada al-Sadr implemented a ceasefire that greatly decreased fighting between his militia and U.S. Forces; 4.) U.S. Forces all moved toward the same goal (securing the population) in the same way; and 5.) Numerous Sunni insurgents changed sides."²⁴ Additionally, Petraeus benefitted by having a very supportive President in George W. Bush and the most seasoned State Department official available in the Middle East in Ambassador Ryan Crocker. Crocker served in "Lebanon, Kuwait, Syria, and Pakistan prior to his appointment to Iraq. Additionally, he was fluent in Arabic and had decades of service in the Middle East."²⁵ Petraeus and Crocker regularly attended meetings together with Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, presenting one U.S. face and a necessary unity of effort for from the U.S. to help recover Iraq from its civil war. This teamwork was especially helpful to reduce Maliki's pro-Shia leaning policies that further polarized the Kurds and Sunnis against the centralized government. This political and collaborative dynamic between Crocker and

Petraeus speaks in large part to Petraeus' professionalism and adept ability to combine war planning efforts with the State Department's diplomatic efforts. This leadership trait is fundamental to Petraeus' success in Iraq.²⁶ Although Petraeus seized multiple opportunities in Iraq, he would soon find the battlefield of Afghanistan was much different and even more hostile than the Sunni Triangle.

PETRAEUS IN OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM

Afghanistan, properly dubbed "the graveyard of empires," is a vast country composed of over 652,230 square kilometers made up of warlords, tribalism, and extremely inhospitable terrain and has been in a constant state of war since the late 1970's.²⁷ Three great empires to include the British, Soviet Union, and the U.S. have unsuccessfully attempted to tame this austere country whose war weary populace historically view all foreigners as invaders. These empires have waged the three Anglo-Afghan wars, the Soviet invasion and finally the American war of revenge targeting Osama bin Laden and his al Qaeda operatives immediately after the 9/11 terror attacks.²⁸ This amalgamation of factors has been the caused several scholars to dub it a country that in terms of warfare is unwinnable. Therefore, they promote the U.S. quickly exit the country in order to save physical and political resources. Other scholars have labeled Pakistan the real enemy, responsible for creating the violence in Afghanistan and for giving sanctuary to all levels of terrorists to include their senior leaders such as Mullah Omar and Osama Bin Laden.²⁹ However, Petraeus, the talented and determined combat commander who was generally lauded for his quick turn-around of the Iraqi civil war, could not simply avoid the war in Afghanistan by omission like the aforementioned scholars. Petraeus was tasked to "clear the Taliban from important, long-held safe havens and then hold and build in them." Additionally President Obama specifically told Petraeus to build "an Afghanistan that could secure and govern itself sufficiently to avoid once

again becoming a safe haven for al Qa'eda.”³⁰ These national objectives would be elusive goals, even for America's most famous modern combat field general.

On 23 June 2010, Petraeus replaced GEN McChrystal, a Special Forces veteran and vastly experienced CT warrior, after the *Rolling Stones* article was published giving insight into the negative opinions of McChrystal's key advisors that defamed Vice President Joseph Biden and the Obama administration's decision making with regards to the war in Afghanistan.³¹ The President's swift decision to fire McChrystal surprised Secretary of Defense Roberts Gates when Obama cited McChrystal's lack of respect for civilian control.³² Firing a capable commander like McChrystal placed pressure on the Obama administration to both select the right commander that could bring success to an administration with a plummeting approval rating and to bring enough peace to stabilize the country before another major combat withdrawal of American forces. It is worth noting that GEN McChrystal successfully helped capture Saddam Hussein and kill the brutally violent al Qa'eda operative Abu Musab al-Zarqawi with TF 714. McChrystal was considered a talented, yet aggressive “pit bull” of a commander that had a solid working relationship with the corrupt and often labeled “two-faced” Afghan President Karzai. In military circles, Petraeus' move from CENTCOM Commander to ISAF Commander could have been viewed as a demotion but simply was the President's way of putting forth a last ditch football-like “hail Mary” effort to win in Afghanistan before recalling U.S. Forces from this protracted conflict. What is interesting about the surge in Afghanistan is that the primary architect was GEN David McKiernan, who was fired by Secretary Gates and President Obama because he was “too cautious and conventionally minded.”³³ McChrystal and Petraeus both benefitted in time by their predecessors' request for additional forces to help tame the flourishing Taliban and other dissident groups. In line with FM 3-24, the execution of a successful COIN doctrine required more troops to adequately secure

pockets of Afghanistan so peace could spread. Ironically, the Taliban's resurgence was because Petraeus had diverted "troops, airpower, technology and focus from Afghanistan" to support the successful Iraq surge.³⁴

At the time Petraeus took command of ISAF, he was responsible for 42 Coalition Force nations that totaled over 61,000 troops (of which comprised 28,850 Americans) and an additional 57,600 American troops under the U.S. Forces-Afghanistan.³⁵ Petraeus was the 13th ISAF Commander, whose last two predecessors had both been fired, a historic precedence not regularly seen since WWII. There was an implicit pressure placed on Petraeus to succeed, and succeed quickly. "Petraeus was painfully aware he did not know Afghanistan nearly as well as he had known Iraq when he assumed command of the surge in Baghdad in 2007. Petraeus, who had studied international relations at Princeton, devoured quantifiable statistics and talked to subordinate field commanders to gain the necessary situational awareness he needed to understand the dynamics in Afghanistan. These topics ranged from the Taliban to Pakistan, the fragile economy, the unique geographical challenges, as well as the various tribal disputes and power plays."^{36,37} Although harsh, the point must be made that Petraeus was much more experienced with Iraq's history, culture and government versus Afghanistan. Mirror imaging Iraq with Afghanistan was a major fault of Petraeus even though he spoke to close aides about the contextual differences that posed different challenges in the two wars. Karzai became noticeably frustrated at one meeting when Petraeus compared Kabul to Baghdad. This failing was a human one, but one that should be noted as a lesson we can learn from the experience of this combat commander. Petraeus' COIN strategy evolved, in part because it was McChrystal's war plan, to counterterrorism (CT) which was uniquely different from the COIN executable SWET efforts Petraeus was so successful with in Iraq. Throughout his tour in Afghanistan, Petraeus felt considerable political pressure from the

new Obama administration that hindered his ability to meet the administration's national objectives.

In a speech at West Point Military Academy, President Obama ironically agreed to a surge of an additional 30,000 American troops but in the same speech said that he planned to draw down U.S. Forces in 2011.³⁸ Declaring a drawdown of forces while surging troops into Afghanistan was a strategic failure by the Obama administration because it allowed the Taliban insurgency the advantage of knowing the date they needed to merely survive in order to declare victory over the counterinsurgents in their country. Although this is not attributable to Petraeus, it ultimately hurt his war efforts at securing a lasting peace. President Obama "had withdrawn from Iraq after seven and a half years at war and had promised to reduce the surge in Afghanistan in 2011. This promise was derived from political pressure from the left viewing Afghanistan as an unending war."³⁹ Petraeus did not enjoy the same political latitude given to him by the somewhat desperate Bush administration, who was trying to salvage the Iraq war effort from defeat. "Petraeus had backing from [Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff] Admiral Mullen, Secretary Gates and even Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. However, a powerful group of members from Obama's inner circle of Rahm Emanuel, David Axelrod, Dennis McDonough and others felt the military was "unrelenting" in their push for more troops."⁴⁰ The latter individuals would make Petraeus' ability to achieve success more difficult by their mistrust and political maneuvering that helped the insurgents and hampered Petraeus' ability to affect his strategic objectives for Afghanistan. This divisive nature of the relationship between Petraeus and the President's administration was fueled by rumors that Petraeus would later retire and possibly run against Obama for President. This division was a huge difference for Petraeus between the Bush administration who he had a direct line to the White House. This division clearly divided Petraeus from his Commander-in-Chief and hampered the

overall war effort from being more successful at completing the national objectives because of the lack of unity of effort. Additionally, “Petraeus had repeatedly warned--at Central Command, in the press and behind closed doors in the various policy reviews over the previous two years--that he never thought the situation in Afghanistan could be “turned” as quickly as U.S. efforts were able to turn in Iraq. The conditions were different. But President Obama was firm on July 2011 as the date by which he would begin to draw down the American surge forces.”⁴¹ Karzai actually voiced his complaints to the administration that the public announcement of the withdrawal of force gave the Taliban a “morale boost.”⁴² An additional political complication to Petraeus’ war efforts was the U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan, Karl Eikenberry.

Eikenberry privately expressed numerous criticisms of the counterinsurgency approach of the Afghan war and in particular to a surge of U.S. forces in cables to Secretary of State Clinton. Additionally, he virulently criticized the Karzai administration as well as the Afghan government’s ability to govern. His criticism specifically included the government’s ability to lead through a centralized government. He also criticized the high level of corruption pervasive throughout the government and throughout the country.⁴³ What was most disconcerting in Eikenberry’s criticism is the fact that these cables were leaked to the press, blindsiding McChrystal, Petraeus and Admiral Mullen. These leaked cables “infuriated” these officers as it showed a lack of coordination between the military and civilian COIN campaign and was especially disconcerting from a retired Army 3-star general.⁴⁴ This vignette, compared to Petraeus’ smooth, cooperative partnership with Crocker, in Iraq illustrates Eikenberry as an additional obstacle while fighting a COIN campaign. Eikenberry’s relationship with Karzai was so poor that, “Ultimately, Petraeus stopped including Eikenberry in most of his personal meetings with Karzai because of the unhelpful atmosphere generated by his presence...Karzai had a visceral reaction to Eikenberry’s presence” that was

counterproductive to the Coalition and Afghan governmental goals.⁴⁵ It cannot be overstated that Eikenberry's differences of opinion and palpable disdain for both Petraeus and Karzai had negative effects on Petraeus' failed command tour. As these men were going in different directions, the Taliban and other insurgent factions enjoyed the apparent lack of unity of effort with the two governments and took advantage of the weaknesses it wrought throughout the country. Petraeus gently voiced his frustration with the ever-changing Afghan administration when he stated, "dialogue with President Karzai has reminded us at various junctures, that we must constantly refine our activities in response to changes in the circumstances on the ground."⁴⁶ One interpretation is that this was Petraeus' veiled, yet strategic communication, to Congress and the world, explaining the complexity of Coalition Forces efforts to secure Afghanistan. President Karzai often pushed back on tactics he viewed as unfavorable to his supporters, some of which were insurgents or at least supporters of these insurgent groups. This complicated relationship highlights a country with numerous rival tribes fighting for physical, political and social survival.

Afghanistan is a country based on sub-national unity, making it difficult for the successful creation of a centralized, federal government. "The decentralized nature of the government and apparent disconnect between officials in Kabul and the people in the rural areas—more than 75% of the population—made every effort more challenging."⁴⁷ Additionally, the terrain in parts of Afghanistan is hostile to foreign forces. The extreme terrain gives the advantage to insurgents against a high-tech, mobile force whose helicopters cannot reach certain extremely, high-altitude mountain tops and whose armored vehicles cannot pass through certain deep wadis, or dried riverbeds, and austere roads. The insurgents purposefully use these simple geographic features to their tactical, operational and strategic advantage. Unlike Iraq, Afghanistan has areas that are difficult and often nearly impossible to "clear, hold and build" without an enormous commitment

of significant amounts of forces and equipment. The extreme terrain and the majority of the populace being outside city areas made Petraeus' efforts of use of IO less effective and made it more difficult for his campaign to effect rapid changes for the counterinsurgents. In fact Petraeus told a personal friend, "Afghanistan is so dynamic at the moment that it is actually very difficult to track everything going on—and it is almost impossible to track if you are looking in from the outside."⁴⁸ Petraeus continued McChrystal's efforts to make the war one unified war versus five different campaigns. However the terrain and different tribal facts made this effort extremely difficult compared to Iraq. This illustrates the major difference in the insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan—where insurgency has been a way of life for over thirty years. The tyranny of distance was also a larger factor than Iraq due to the sheer size difference of the two countries. Another seemingly insurmountable challenge that is tightly woven into the Afghan culture is the insidious amount of corruption throughout the government and general populace.

Modern Afghanistan is a nation of war. War has created the necessity for the populace to depend on war lords who regularly use extortion analogous to the American mafia to enforce their rules and profits for their factions. This apparent corruption has been a commonly accepted form of life in Afghanistan for years. In fact, "When Petraeus took over, he ordered a clampdown on corruption...The U.S. Congress had threatened to slash aid, because \$1 billion or more was annually flowing out of the country and into bank accounts in Dubai and elsewhere. In response to Petraeus' anti-corruption campaign, Karzai consolidated one-man rule and rewarded those who supported him and stole on a massive scale."⁴⁹ Eikenberry regularly accused Karzai of double-talk, both supporting the Coalition efforts privately and blasting them in the media. Additionally, Eikenberry pointed to the Karzai government as rotten to the core for allowing corruption and for supporting their tribal alliances while ignoring other sections of the country filled with rival tribes.

Eikenberry and Petraeus agreed that this was detrimental to a successful COIN campaign but differed on solutions to this problem.

Petraeus had large successes during his tour as the ISAF/CC. His most notable success was the death of Osama Bin Laden. This action was taken by SEAL Team Six and announced on 2 May 2011 in Abbottabad, Pakistan. An argument can be made that Petraeus' original COIN doctrine successfully implemented in Iraq morphed into CT doctrine when he was the ISAF/CC. This was in large part because of the immediate dismissal of McChrystal during the execution of *his* campaign plan. The *Rolling Stones* article crisply described this transition between commanders. "Taking over from McChrystal, Petraeus moved quickly to institute his own, more aggressive version of COIN—one that calls for lots of killing, lots of cash and lots of spin. He loosened the restrictions McChrystal had placed on rules of engagement, giving U.S. soldiers the green light to use artillery, destroy property and defend themselves more vigorously. He drastically upped the number of airstrikes, launching more than 3,450 between July and November--the most [airstrikes] since the invasion in 2001. He introduced U.S. tanks into the battle, unleashed Apache and Kiowa attack helicopters, and tripled the number of night raids by Special Forces. The fighting was calculated to force the Taliban to the bargaining table and reduce NATO casualties."⁵⁰ Petraeus defended this escalated use of extreme violence as a method to convince the Taliban and other rival factions that peace was better than war with a rejuvenated counterinsurgency force. The problem with this escalated violence was the fact that the country did not have the political will produced during the Sunni Awakening against AQI to bind them together in support for such use of force. Therefore, this increased use of force could be seen as punishing the populace similar to the Soviet Union, rather than securing the peace. Although tactically and operationally successful, this can be seen as a major failing in Petraeus' command as the ISAF/CC.

CONCLUSION

Iraq and Afghanistan are extremely different countries in almost every way. These differences ultimately led to both success and failure for Petraeus. Using the axiom that, “COIN is not just thinking man’s warfare, it is the graduate level of war,” demonstrates the need for Petraeus as a field commander in both Iraq and Afghanistan.⁵¹ In fact it has been regularly noted that Petraeus helped flatten government bureaucracies and “Whenever [Petraeus] took command, the pace seemed to noticeably pick up.”⁵² These leadership traits are necessary to turn around the huge ship that is the Coalition effort in either Iraq or Afghanistan. Therefore Petraeus strong leadership and use of effective subordinate leaders and the decentralization of effort to execute the overall unified COIN campaign was extremely effective in Iraq. His ability to empower subordinates was a positive leadership trait that allowed field commanders a degree of ingenuity needed to outpace the insurgency.⁵³ Afghanistan simply had too many contextual barriers to Petraeus in such a finite amount of time as the ISAF/CC. In fact his own analysts concluded that, “Afghanistan’s governing apparatus...was basically a network of malign actors.”⁵⁴ The major impediments to Petraeus’ success in Afghanistan were the lack of popular and political support at home and abroad, the tribal history of Afghanistan, the harsh terrain and the historically finite amount of time given to the general to accomplish his objectives. Petraeus could not rebuild what he had done in Iraq because he did not have the same tools from the U.S. government. He could not build peace when there was war back in the U.S. regarding the strategic direction of the war and how that war should be fought. Although Petraeus is one of the most capable modern military commanders, he is not a miracle worker and could not produce a peaceful, centralized government in Afghanistan simply because the country was not at that stage in its development in history.

PETRAEUS TIMELINE OF KEY EVENTS

2003: 101st Airborne Division keeping the peace in Mosul, IZ

May 2004-September 2005: Petraeus Serves as MNST Command/CC, IZ

October 2005-February 2007: U.S. Army CAC/CC, Leavenworth, KS

February 2007-September 2008: Petraeus Serves as MNFI/CC, IZ

October 2008: Petraeus Appointed to CENTCOM/CC

July 2010: Petraeus Appointed to ISAF/CC

September 2011: Petraeus Appointed to Director of the CIA⁵⁵

November 2012: Petraeus Admits Extramarital Affair and Resigns from CIA^{56,57}

¹ I wish to thank Lt Col Paul Clemans, Maj Bryan Schmelzer and Maj Lisa Baghal for their thoughtful comments and suggestions. All errors found herein are my own.

² “Introduction to Army Leadership.” *Mississippi College*. 1 Jan 05.

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