

Statement for the Record

Senate Foreign Affairs Committee

MG (Ret) Robert H. Scales, Jr.

President, Colgen, Inc.

April 2, 2008

After the Surge: A Responsible Ending

Once the dogs of war are unleashed all consequences, political, diplomatic and domestic are shaped by what soldiers call “ground truth” and the truth on the ground has changed enormously over the past year in Iraq. Through Herculean efforts the military command under the leadership of General David Petraeus has quite literally wrenched military advantage from what a year ago was the beginning of catastrophic defeat. Increasing the number of “boots on the ground” was an important factor contributing to recent successes. But perhaps a more significant reason for the change of circumstances on the ground was Petraeus’ change of strategy. For the first time since the invasion in 2003 he has been able to approach the war as an insurgency, granted an insurgency of a very unique Middle Eastern character.

A year’s effort and the loss of nearly 900 lives have placed the military situation at what soldiers refer to as a “culminating point.” The culminating point marks the shift in military advantage from one side to the other, when, with all other variables fixed, the military outcome becomes irreversible: The potential loser can inflict casualties, but has lost the chance for victory on the battlefield. The only issue is how much longer the war will last, and what the butcher's bill will be.

Battles usually define the culminating point. In World War II, Midway was a turning point against the Japanese, El Alamein was a turning point against the Nazis and after Stalingrad, Germany no longer was able to stop the Russians from advancing on their eastern front. Wars usually culminate before either antagonist is aware of the event. Abraham Lincoln didn't realize Gettysburg had turned the

tide of the American Civil War. In Vietnam, the Tet offensive was a teachable moment for the situation today in that it proved that culminating points aren't always military victories particularly in an insurgency.

In an insurgency culmination just buys time. The temporal advantage gained on the battlefield can be squandered if time isn't used to turn a military advantage into a successful political outcome. Another lesson from the past is that the military advantage can be lost if the dynamics of the conflict change over time. After the surge the United States will begin to leave and the Iraqis will assume responsibility for their own defense. The battlefield advantage won at so costly a price can only be continued if this change of players is managed with the same strategic genius that gave us the battlefield advantage we now enjoy.

While the military advantage clearly resides with the coalition very little can be done on the battlefield for the remainder of the surge to accelerate the pace of military operations. The counterinsurgency strategy implemented by Petraeus is the right one and cannot be substantially altered. The crucible of patience among the American people is emptying at a prodigious rate and very little short of a complete shift in conditions on the ground is likely to refill it.

The military balance of power cannot be changed very much throughout the remainder of the surge. Al Qaeda has been pushed into a northern corner of Iraq and constant harassment by the US military supported by the Sons of Iraq effectively limits how much mischief they can cause. But their numbers though small have remained fairly constant. The United States has run out of military options as well. The Army went in to this war with too few ground troops. In a strange twist of irony for the first time since the summer of 1863 the number of ground soldiers available is determining American policy rather than policy determining how many troops we need. All that the Army and Marine Corps can manage without serious damage to the force is the sustained deployment in both Iraq and Afghanistan of somewhere between 13 to 15 brigade equivalents. Assuming that Afghanistan will require at least 3 brigades troop levels by the end of the surge in Iraq must begin to migrate toward the figure of no more than

twelve brigades...perhaps even less. Reductions in close combat forces will continue indefinitely thereafter.

So regardless of who wins the election and regardless of conditions on the ground by summer the troops will begin to come home. The only point of contention is how precipitous will be the withdrawal and whether the schedule of withdrawal should be a matter of administration policy. Adhering to a fixed schedule is not a good idea in an insurgency because the indigenous population tends to side with the perceived winners. However, some publicly expressed window of withdrawal is necessary for no other reason than to give soldier's families some hope that their loved ones will not be stuck on a perpetual rollercoaster of deployments.

By the end of the surge much will have been accomplished. The ethno-sectarian competition for power and influence will continue. The hope is that all parties by then will seek to resolve these contests in the political realm and not in the streets. The campaign against al Qaeda and the Sunni Extremists will continue to show success although insurgent groups will remain lethal. Militia and criminal violence will continue to be a thorn in the side of the Maliki regime as gangs roam the streets of cities occasionally killing on the order of rouge militia leaders. No solution to this festering problem is possible by the time the troops start coming home.

The influence of Iran will loom very significant - and will seem "conflicted," given Iran's desire to bloody America's nose but not let the Shia-led Government of Iraq fail. By this January about the time the drawdown begins in earnest pressure will build to show some progress toward reconciliation nationally and within warring ethnic groupings.

Governmental capacity will still be inadequate though it will continue to develop. It will resume only when the dust settles from the recent flare-up connected with the Iraqi army operations in Basra. Basic services will remain inadequate but presuming a lull after Basra will slowly improve as long-term electrical and oil projects gather momentum.

In sum after the surge much will remain to be done and nothing substantial can be done without the ability of the Iraqi military to maintain security after American forces begin to depart. This task is so important for the creation of a stable state that the establishment of an effective Iraqi National Security apparatus will become a new center of gravity for the remaining phases of the war. Can the Iraqi Defense Forces grow competent and confident enough to take up the task in the time remaining to them? So far the answer to this question, like so many questions about American policy in Iraq, remains clouded in uncertainty.

Some signs are encouraging.

The Iraqi Security Forces have shown strength in recent weeks. The Iraqi high command deployed elements of the 14<sup>th</sup> Division to Basra to destroy the Shia militias and criminal gangs that have held the city hostage for years. Iraqi motor transport units moved one national police and three army brigades on short notice from Baghdad to Basra a distance of about 400 kilometers with less than a week for planning and execution. During the operations Iraqi special forces units were transported, some in Iraqi C-130 aircraft, from the very northern most regions of Iraq to the vicinity of Basra. An Iraqi Base Support Unit, roughly the equivalent of an American combat service support battalion, has so far managed to sustain the Basra operation with some help from American supplied civilian contractors. There have been problems. Some units in the 14<sup>th</sup> have not fought well. There have been some sectarian infiltration and desertions. But for all its problems the division has not lost fighting effectiveness or cohesion.

These accomplishments might seem at first glance to be less than impressive. But it's important to recall that only a year ago it would have been virtually impossible to pull an Army division from one province and move it to another in shape (and willing) to fight.

Officer leadership at the small unit level is improving. Sadly the process of leader development is driven by the wasteful Darwinian process of bloody self-selection that always attends armies that must learn to fight by fighting, the only way to build an Army from scratch in wartime. The American Army in the Civil War experienced a similar baptism of fire at a cost of more than half a million dead.

Non commissioned officers are the backbone of the American Army but NCOs are an alien concept in areas of the world ruled by strict hierarchies. The Iraqi Army is no exception. Only last year did the Iraqis start divisional schools to teach and build corporals, squad and platoon leaders. Some of these newly minted NCOs are filling the ranks of the Iraqi Army and initial reports of their success are encouraging.

This process of “on the job training” in combat has been made more efficient with the addition of American military training teams. These are squad sized units that imbed themselves in each Iraqi combat battalion and brigade. Equally important are partnership arrangements between American and Iraqi combat units. Emulation and example are powerful forces in combat. Iraqi soldier and leaders tend to mimic the example of American professionalism and effectiveness and when fighting side by side the Iraqis inevitably fight better. American units habitually partner with Iraqi units for the duration of their time in Iraq. These enduring partnerships have the added advantage of allowing the development of personal relationships between Iraqi and American soldiers and commanders.

But very serious problems continue to plague the Iraqi military and in spite of the best efforts of the coalition these problems will linger well after the surge. Iraqi senior leaders and staffs are reasonably competent at moving brigades and battalions from point to point but their ability to do quality planning and execution is very immature. While small unit leaders are being selected by merit higher level selections are too often based on nepotism or tribal and clan loyalty. In some units sectarianism still trumps allegiance to the nation and on occasion soldiers desert rather than fight against their tribal peers.

From the beginning the Coalition leadership focused on building close combat small units as first priority. As a consequence by the end of the surge non combat functions, what the military calls “enablers”, will be immature at best. No army can function for long without being competent in intelligence, fire support, administration, logistics, communications and medical support. The American military will not only have to train the Iraqis in these functions but remain in Iraq to provide them for a long time, perhaps several years.

The challenge after the surge will be to increase the effectiveness of training, advising and mentoring to the Iraqis as American forces depart so that the Iraqis will be able to fill the void. Rather than pulling out combat brigades whole cloth partnership units will probably follow a “thinning” strategy whereby a partner unit will thin its ranks gradually leaving the “brains” of the unit in place for as long as possible to assist with planning and employment of enablers.

Today there are 5,000 imbedded trainers and 1,300 headquarters trainers and advisors to joint, army and ministerial staffs. As the Iraqis face fighting without partners they will probably need more training teams to imbed with them. More Americans left to fend for themselves in an alien and hostile environment might also mean more casualties. It certainly will mean that if the enemy sees killing advisors and support soldiers as the surest means for getting us out of Iraq and toppling the Iraqi government.

Training, advising and assisting the army of an alien culture is now job one for the American military. History shows that we are good at this. For over a century from the Philippines to Korea, Thailand, Greece, Indonesia, El Salvador and in many other distant and inhospitable places American soldiers have successfully assisted in building armies during wartime. Unfortunately after Vietnam we lost the skill to do these tasks effectively. Rebuilding a world class advisory capacity is a cultural not an organizational challenge. This is graduate level work and advisors need time to learn the language and culture as well as the particular personal skills to do their jobs competently. Not all officers are good at training and advising foreign militaries. We must go the extra mile to find those with the cultural “right stuff” and reward the best of them with fully funded civil schooling, advanced promotion and a chance to command at all levels.

The post surge strategy should not be focused solely creating an Iraqi Army in the image of our own. The Iraqis only have to be better than their enemies. Not is the challenge to commit the blood, treasure and time necessary to train and equip a large Iraqi Army. Wars are not won by the bigger forces but by the force that wants most to win. It will in the end be the intangibles; courage, adaptability, integrity, intellectual agility, leadership and an allegiance to a cause other than

the tribe that will ultimately determine who wins. As we move into a new season of this sad war the age old axioms will prevail: we will in the end discover that our greatest task will be to inculcate in the Iraqis the will to win rather than to teach them how to win.