US commander warns Iraq war will go on for a decade

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US troops will be carrying out counterinsurgency operations in Iraq for a decade to come, Gen. David Petraeus, the senior US commander in the country, warned in a television interview Sunday.

Appearing on Fox News, Petraeus dismissed any idea that the US military will have succeeded in pacifying Iraq by next September, when he and US Ambassador to Baghdad Ryan Crocker are due to deliver a progress report to the US Congress.

Fox's Chris Wallace asked, "You surely don't think the job would be done by the surge by September?" Petraeus replied, "I do not, no." He added, "We have a lot of heavy lifting to do. The damage done by the sectarian violence in the fall and winter of 2006 and early 2007 ... was substantial."

While not denying reports that he is considering extending the escalation of troop levels in Iraq into next year, Petraeus merely declared it was "premature" to discuss the issue.

Speaking from Baghdad, the US commander declared, "Just about everybody out there recognizes that a situation like this, with the many, many challenges that Iraq is contending with, is not one that's going to be resolved in a year or even two years. In fact, typically, I think historically, counterinsurgency operations have gone at least nine or ten years. The question is, of course, at what level."

He added that the idea of a prolonged US military presence in the country "is probably a fairly realistic assessment."

The general's comment gave a glimpse into the real debate going on in Washington, behind the Democrats' talk of withdrawal timetables and the Bush administration's promises that its strategy will be reevaluated in September. Plans are being laid for the indefinite occupation of the oil-rich country.

Administration officials have in recent weeks also sought to condition American public opinion to the idea of a protracted occupation and counterinsurgency war in Iraq, with White House spokesman Tony Snow and others making ludicrous comparisons between Iraq and South Korea, where American troops have been deployed in the tens of thousands for more than five decades.

As part of that effort, there have been open attempts to downplay the significance of the report that is to be presented to the Congress in September. General Petraeus, for example, referred to his upcoming report as merely a "reasonable snapshot of the situation."

Petraeus's comment came as the Pentagon reported that all of the nearly 30,000 US soldiers and marines slated for deployment in the "surge" announced by Bush last January have arrived in Iraq.

During the first five months of the escalation, there has been no indication that the American military has been successful in its purported goal of dampening sectarian violence or in its central mission of suppressing opposition to the US occupation. A quarterly report issued by the Pentagon to Congress last week indicated that the level of violence in Iraq has actually increased since the additional tens of thousands of American troops have been poured in.

American soldiers and marines suffered the bloodiest two-month period in April and May since the US invaded the country in March 2003, with some 230 troops killed, bringing the total death toll of US forces today to at least 3,524. Meanwhile, according to the Pentagon's figures, Iraqis have been dying during the same period at the rate of over 100 day, a figure that undoubtedly is a gross underestimate of the ongoing carnage.

A further indication of the extremely limited impact

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of the surge thus far came in the form of an admission Saturday by Lt. Gen. Raymond Odierno, the commander of US ground troops in Iraq, that US troops and Iraqi puppet forces have been able to secure only 40 percent of the Iraqi capital. No doubt, this itself is an extremely optimistic assessment of the situation.

With the surge's final brigade in place, US commanders in the country announced over the weekend that they are launching a major offensive against neighborhoods and towns east and south of Baghdad.

The Pentagon is billing this operation as an offensive against Al Qaeda, but the reality is that thousands of American combat troops are being sent into predominantly Sunni areas, where the great bulk of the population is deeply hostile to the more than four-year-old US occupation. Indeed, one recent poll showed that over 90 percent of the Sunni population wants American forces out of Iraq.

Noting that the final reinforcements have arrived in Iraq, bringing the US troop total there to around 160,000, Petraeus vowed "to do everything we can with the additional forces that we have."

What is being prepared under the fraudulent banner of a struggle against "terrorism" is another bloodbath like those unleashed on other centers of resistance, such as Fallujah and Ramadi. American commanders said that the offensive in an area that had been dubbed by US troops as the "triangle of death," because of the frequent attacks on occupation forces, is to go on for several weeks. In addition to large numbers of Iraqi civilian casualties, the offensive will be accompanied by the roundup of thousands more civilians as "security detainees," who will face indefinite detention and torture.

The inevitable result of such "search and destroy" missions in heavily populated civilian neighborhoods will be the further alienation of a hostile Iraqi people and the growth of the resistance.

The clearest indication Washington plans to maintain a permanent colonial-style occupation of Iraq is the continuing construction of four massive US military bases and an American embassy compound in Baghdad's Green Zone that will be the size of Vatican City.

While the Iraq Study Group's report issued last year included the recommendation that the Bush administration publicly declare that it has no intention of maintaining permanent bases in the country, the White House has been noticeably silent on the matter. Moreover, while the draft legislation prepared by the Democratic-led US Congress providing the administration with another $100 billion to fight the war included language foreswearing such bases, the wording was removed in conference committee without any explanation before the bill was sent to Bush for signing.

The reality is that behind the public debate between the Democratic leadership and the White House over Iraq, both sides are agreed on the need to continue the pursuit of the predatory goals that drove the 2003 US invasion in the first place: the establishment of US hegemony over Iraq and its oil wealth and the utilization of the country as a base for US military presence and operations throughout the strategic region.

Also appearing on a television talk show Sunday, Senator Carl Levin, a Michigan Democrat and chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, vowed that the Democrats would renew their efforts—dropped in the passage of the $100 billion war funding bill last month—to attach language to future legislation proposing timetables for partial troop withdrawals and redeployments.

"We will try again, because we must try again," Levin said on CBS television's "Face the Nation." "We have got to change this course."

What he and the Democrats mean by a "change in course" was spelled out by Levin, who declared that the timetable would be for "a transition to a more limited mission," which, he stressed would "include a counterterrorism mission" and "continuing to support the Iraqi army with logistics and training."

In other words, like Petraeus, the Democratic leadership—which owes its leadership of the Congress to the mass opposition to the war within the American population—is envisioning the US occupation of Iraq dragging on for many more years, with many more thousands of Iraqis as well as American troops killed.

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