

RADIO INTERVIEW:

General David Petraeus, Commanding General, Multi-National Force – Iraq

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PARTICIPANTS:

GEN PETRAEUS

BILL BENNETT

UM1

PROMO: This morning in America, Bill Bennett's "Morning in America." Join the conversation at 866-680-6464. Online at www.bennetmornings.com. Click on e-mail Bill. And now, live, from the Bulova Studio, here's Bill.

BENNETT: It is Friday, February 15, 2008, the one year anniversary of the surge. We are joined, honored by the presence of General David Petraeus, Commanding General of the Multinational Force in Iraq. Good morning, General Petraeus.

**GEN
PETRAEUS:** Good morning, Bill. Good to be with you.

BENNETT: Good morning. How are you sir?

**GEN
PETRAEUS:** Doing fine, thanks.

BENNETT: And uh can you just say to the audience what you said to me off-air about the show and, (laughing) I just got such a kick out of it.

**GEN
PETRAEUS:** Well I know. I'm honored to be on the show in the same morning that you're interviewing the legendary Skunk Baxter.

BENNETT: You know Skunk Baxter's work, do you, sir?

**GEN
PETRAEUS:** I do. I do. Steely Dan, in my youth.

BENNETT: Oh, it's not the missile defense work. It's the Doobie Brothers and Steely Dan, right? Okay. (Laughing).

**GEN
PETRAEUS:** It is indeed. That's right.

BENNETT: Did you get a Valentine's Day message home and one from home, by any chance?

**GEN
PETRAEUS:** Well, I did. My wife was able to send some boxes this way with a recent visitor. And I not only got a message home, but managed to get book cards for Barnes and Noble to my daughter and my wife both.

BENNETT: Great. And now the big question that all of the men are listening in on, did you get, did you get to get the flowers to your wife?

**GEN
PETRAEUS:** No, in fact...we deliberately decided to go for the book card.

BENNETT: Ok.

**GEN
PETRAEUS:** Big splurge, \$50 this year.

BENNETT: All right, but it wasn't a unilateral decision on your part. It was agreed to by your wife? We just need to get this clear.

**GEN
PETRAEUS:** Actually I must confess. This was unilateral, Bill.

BENNETT: Ok. (Laughing). We caught the General. All right, fine. There's a second delay, folks, due to the satellite that's, that's...but it's fine. By the way, I have to tell you I just by luck in the last month in anticipation of this interview, I run into a couple of West Pointers who wanted to send their regards. I think you'll know the names. Rollie Stichweh and Pete Dawkins.

**GEN
PETRAEUS:** Yeah, those are some famous names right there, as you well know. Those are the gridiron.

BENNETT: Heroes of the gridiron and in the field of battle, too. Anyway, they all salute you as we do, sir. Congratulations on the surge. Yesterday was the anniversary. What's the condition? What are...tell us about things.

**GEN
PETRAEUS:**

Well, as you know, there has been significant progress in the security arena. In the last seven months or so, overall attacks have decreased by some 60% or so. Civilian deaths down by 60% as well. The ethno-sectarian component of that, of deaths, has decreased even more. In fact, between 80-90%. So, there have been significant steps forward. There's been quite a bit of progress against al-Qaida Iraq and against other extremist elements. But having said all that, again, I want to be very cautious up front and note that there's nobody here doing victory dances in the end zone or talking about "turning the corner" or "seeing lights at the end of the tunnel." There's still a lot of hard work still to be done.

BENNETT:

Let me deal with something. It's been in the air. I've heard it a couple of times, and I just want you to deal with it. There are very people who argue or quibble with the success. But a couple of people have said, this hasn't had much to do with the surge or our guys. This is really due to a decision by the Sunni leaders, that you know, they just decided to take our side this time. And that's really what's made the difference. You know, we didn't have that big of role. It was a change of mind of the Sunnis.

**GEN
PETRAEUS:**

Well, certainly the fact large segments of the Sunni Arab

community in Iraq have rejected al-Qaida is very significant, among them a number of what used to call themselves resistance groups or other insurgent elements that have literally realized that what al-Qaida brought them was nothing but indiscriminate violence, oppressive practices, and ideology that is so extremist that they can't subscribe to it. They originally, I think, were fertile grounds for al-Qaida for a variety of reasons after liberation, feeling in a sense dispossessed or disrespected or disgusted, or whatever. And so it took them some time. But they have come to realize that you can't win if you don't play. They can't have their share of the abundance in Iraq. This is a country that has incredible natural blessings, the land of the two rivers, second or third most proven oil resources in the world, a good bit of human capital. So, the Sunni Arabs have indeed recognized that al-Qaida didn't bring anything good for them and brought a lot of bad. We helped with that. We fostered that idea with a lot of dialogue with the various tribal leaders. It started before I came back. But it reached critical mass sometime last spring and really set off a chain reaction up and down the Euphrates River Valley in Anbar province, which you'll recall was really regarded as lost back in the fall of 2006. That's a river valley, it's a dagger that points right at the heart of Baghdad in which substantial number of neighborhoods also were safe havens or sanctuaries for al-Qaida, as were the southern and northern belts,

as they're called, the areas to the south and north of Baghdad, and then other areas, indeed up the Diyala and the Tigris River Valley, all the way up to Mosul. Now, are soldiers and our Iraqis brothers in this fight—and this is all components, this is not just special operators, special mission units individuals, conventional forces as well—it's taken all of that to deal the blows to al-Qaida that have been dealt over the course of the last year. They have been significant, and we've laid out—usually we do it once a month—we say, “Here are the emirs, here are the cell leaders, here are car bomb engineers, and so forth, that we killed or captured over the course of the last month...” We did one for the entire year in January for all of 2007. But clearly, the fact that the Sunni Arab population turned against al-Qaida was a very important factor in this. So again, that is undeniable, but I would argue that, first of all, that our leaders and troopers had something to do with it.

BENNETT: Sure.

**GEN
PETRAEUS:** And then that, more importantly, that our leaders and troopers capitalized on it. In other words, we then...as there were all of a sudden Sunni Arabs willing to volunteer to fight against al-Qaida, not just no longer support them or no longer turn a blind eye to them, but now they are willing to fight to help secure their

community. All of a sudden it was possible to clear Ramadi and then hold it.

BENNETT: Yeah.

**GEN
PETRAEUS:** We've always been good at clearing areas. Now we could hold them because we have sufficient forces to do that, with the addition US forces, additional Iraqi army and police and their surge over the course of 2007 it was probably three times ours. And then, the addition of what is now nearly 90,000 of what are now called "Sons of Iraq." These are basically either armed or unarmed neighborhood watch individuals, some of 70,000+ of which are on security contracts to us and get about half the pay of an Iraqi policeman. And then we think about a quarter or so of those will move into the Iraqi police or the Iraqi army, perhaps more than that. There's already 9,000 alone, for example, that have been approved for the police in Baghdad. Another...thousands more already serving in the police in Anbar province and so forth. So again, big factor, but a lot more complex, I think, than perhaps [unintelligible—overlapping voices]. And in this way that the Jaish al-Mahdi, the Sadr militia, ceasefire. Again, that was not done just because they wanted to help us reduce the level of violence. It was done because their movement had been tarnished by actions taken

by the militia members during one of the holiest religious celebrations in the Shia Islam year at the holy city of Karbula where their militia members created an incident that resulted in the death of a couple of dozen Iraqis. And also [unintelligible—overlapping voices] having linked to the assassination of two southern governors, two police chiefs, kidnapping of government officials, and so forth. And that movement had become challenged, tarnished again, by that. So, there was a decision to say, “Cease fire, let’s try to get a grip on our movement so that the people don’t reject us in the same way that they rejected al-Qaida. Because in some...

BENNETT:

General, we need to...excuse me...we need to go to a break. A great answer absolutely. I mean, they changed, but we were one of the arguments for the changing, obviously providing them cover and a convenient, convincing force. These factors are all in Iraq. We got to go to break. When we come back, we want to ask about the Iraqi government, political reforms, things that have happened this week that are very, very important. We’re talking to General David Petraeus, Commanding General Multinational Force – Iraq. We have a little delay, a little buzz from the satellite. But this is well, well worth it. Stay with us folks. It’s morning, right here in America. Stay with us folks. It’s morning, right here in America.

UM1: General Petraeus, we are going to a break right now. It's about three minutes long. I'm just going to put you on hold. Thank you so much for being with us, and I just wanted to let you know that we are all praying for you and the troops over here.

PROMO: America, back to the show. Live from the Bulova Studio, here's Bill.

BENNETT: Friday, February 15th. We are joined by General David Petraeus, Commanding General Multinational Force – Iraq. General Petraeus thanks for much for staying two segments. Two questions for you, sir. I want to ask you about the situation politically in Iraq and improvements by the government. But first, kind of a burning question. Not a political question. But people are suggesting, of various stripes are suggesting remove the troops in sixty days, ninety days, get them all out. And the military matter, what effect would that have?

**GEN
PETRAEUS:** Well, it depends what the conditions are when that decision is taken.

BENNETT: Supposing you were to do it now, or in three months, or six months.

**GEN
PETRAEUS:**

Yeah, I mean, if it hasn't improved substantially from now, then the results would be what in fact the Defense Intelligence Agency reported some months back, which you know, you would see a resurgence of ethno-sectarian violence. You would see al-Qaida regain its safe havens and sanctuaries. There's no telling what would happen with the displaced persons and a variety of other issues. So, it would be a pretty challenging scenario.

BENNETT:

Right. Thank you, sir. We know that Secretary Gates giving flexibility on the rotation on these timelines have been put on hold. But that sounds good. It gives you maximum flexibility as I understand it. One story the American people don't know, and I'll ask you this. The work that you and your men have done has provided room for the Iraqi government to enact political reforms. People say nothing's happened. But things have happened, have they not?

**GEN
PETRAEUS:**

Well, they have indeed, actually. In recent days, in fact, there was the "Grand Bargain," actually that was just reached two days ago. The Council of Representatives of Iraq passed three very important laws: the Provincial Powers Law, which is really akin to a sort of what we went through with determining states' rights in the United States, an amnesty law, which is very important for the process of

reconciliation, and then the 2008 budget, which distributes the oil revenues, so that's a very important piece of legislation as well. Now that was not easy. There was incredible brinksmanship, as you would imagine. There was a lot of emotion and everything else. But the fact is that they did reach agreement and they did go through approved those three laws, bundled together in a pretty skillful way by the speaker of the Council of Representatives. This came after they had already passed the Accountability and Justice Law, and this law was the De-Baathification Reform Bill. Now this has to be, frankly, implemented in the spirit of reconciliation, that led to its passage. And there are some concerns with it in that regard. But the Presidency Council here is determined to ensure that its implementation, and the Prime Minister, they're all determined to ensure that its implementation is in the spirit of reconciliation, as was the Pension Law that was enacted back in late December, which extended pension coverage to tens of thousands of former Baath party members who were excluded from pensions by some policies back in 2003. So, a number of different areas of progress. Another one by the, the new flag. Iraq did not have a flag that all of the ethno-sectarian groups would agree to fly. They agreed on that a week or two ago. And that is now flying over all of Iraq as well.

BENNETT: Terrific. You know, General, I'm going to take this last 45 seconds because I just, I don't know if people thank you enough. But this audience thanks you. I'm a popular historian. You made history here, sir, which you've done, you and your men. And this nation is very grateful. I know how grateful the Commander-in-Chief is. But this nation is grateful as well. It's a wonderful thing to have done what you and your colleagues have done. And we thank you for your service. You've got 20 or 30 seconds if you want to say anything final to the American people.

**GEN
PETRAEUS:** Well, if I could, I'd just say it's been a privilege to serve here again with the great young men and women in uniform. They really are the new greatest generation of Americans. And I'd like to give some special tribute to Lieutenant General Ray Odierno and members of his corps headquarters who redeployed yesterday after 14 months of terrific work here.

BENNETT: Great. Thank you. And thanks to Colonel Boylan. And I'm going to tell Skunk Baxter what you said about him.

**GEN
PETRAEUS:** (Laughing) Okay. Please do.

BENNETT: Thanks, General. Thank you. Bye bye. It's Morning in America,

folks.

GEN
PETRAEUS: Bye bye.

UM1: Thank you so much for being on with us today.

GEN
PETRAEUS: Our pleasure. Thank you.

UM1: Stay safe. Bye bye.

GEN
PETRAEUS: Okay. Bye bye.