

## Petraeus's Iraq

By Robert H. Scales

BAGHDAD, Iraq—I've just returned from a week in Iraq with Gen. David Petraeus and his operational commanders. My intent was to look at events from an operational perspective and assess the surge. What I got was a soldier's sense of what's happening on the ground and, although the jury is still out on the surge, I came to the conclusion that we may now be reaching the "culminating point" in this war.

The culminating point marks the shift in advantage from one side to the other, when the outcome becomes irreversible: The potential loser can inflict casualties, but has lost all chance of victory. 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 proved that culminating points aren't always military victories.

Culminating points are psychological, not physical, happenings. The commanders I spoke to in Iraq all said that there had been a remarkable change of mood in February when Gen. Petraeus announced that they were taking the fight to the enemy by taking Baghdad from al Qaeda. He pushed soldiers out of the big (and relatively safe) forward operating bases and scattered them among really bad neighborhoods. These joint security stations and combat outposts attracted locals and encouraged them to pass on intelligence about the enemy.

To bolster local security within Baghdad, Gen. Petraeus pushed the security perimeter beyond the city's limits. In May, he

began arraying combat units in four successive "belts" around Baghdad. These units painfully ejected al Qaeda influence from the suburbs and satellite cities, effectively choking off reinforcements.

In early June, the enemy miscalculated. Sensing that they were losing inside Baghdad, al Qaeda's leaders pulled out and relocated to Baquba, long an insurgent haven on the outskirts of the city. Al Qaeda propaganda refers to Baquba as the capital of "The Islamic State of Iraq." It's central to our story, because it was the last contested urban battle ground al Qaeda had within greater Baghdad. Once ejected from Baquba, al Qaeda's connection to Baghdad—the center of gravity of the coalition's campaign—would be broken.

Given the stakes, both sides fought fiercely for Baquba. The enemy carefully prepared a defense that included concentric rings of improvised explosive devices. Leaks from al Qaeda sympathizers within the Iraqi Army kept the enemy informed of the coalition's intentions.

The U.S. operation, called Arrowhead Ripper, began with a series of carefully orchestrated house to house assaults. This was an intelligence-driven battle with precise information, gleaned from overhead surveillance using unmanned aircraft, signals intercepts and willing Iraqis who came forward. The combat was sharp and at times furious. American casualties rose in late June; the enemy fought knowing full well that losing Baquba would force them to retreat into the empty northern deserts. By the end of July, al Qaeda's decision to regroup in Baquba left it a fractured, relatively leaderless force, stripped of concealment and popular support. Once in the open terrain of the deserts, al Qaeda

fighters became easier targets for surgical hits from Special Operations teams.

But successful counterinsurgency operations don't capture fixed objectives. They create what soldiers call "white spaces," areas devoid of influence, political vacuums that compel occupancy by either an enemy seeking to rebound after defeat or by legitimate government forces seeking to establish regional control.

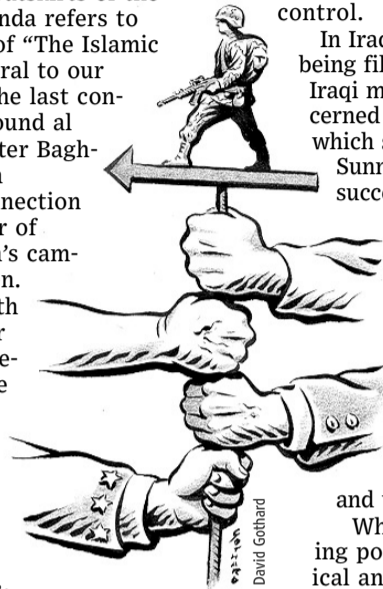
In Iraq now, the white spaces are being filled with a newly resurgent Iraqi military and clusters of Concerned Local Citizens Councils, which sprouted spontaneously as Sunni tribal sheikhs smelled both success and commitment from coalition forces.

To be sure, Baghdad and the surrounding belts are not yet safe. But culminating points are psychological events. What I witnessed firsthand in Iraq was a shift in opinions and a transfer of will among Iraqis, not a classic military takedown. This change was palpable and unmistakable.

Whether this military culminating point can translate into a political and economic culminating point remains to be seen. But the campaign that took place from spring until late summer reinforces the classic tenet of warfare, that success on the ground sets the conditions for diplomatic and political success.

Gens. Petraeus and Ray Odierno have achieved success on the ground at an unprecedented speed in the history of counterinsurgency warfare. Now it's time to apply the same sense of urgency and commitment to the task of reuniting the tragically fractured nation and bring it back from the brink of annihilation.

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## A Precarious Peace

By Zachary Abuza

Last week saw an important breakthrough in the talks between the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, one of two groups fighting for an autonomous Muslim homeland. While details of the draft agreement are still vague, one thing's for sure: for this deal to work, both Manila and the MILF will have to get serious about good governance. If they don't, the southern region could once again descend into violence. And spoilers on all sides abound.

The two sides had been deadlocked for 14 months over the thorny issue of "ancestral domain"—the territory that will be included in the new autonomous body known as the Bangsamoro Juridical Entity. That body, according to the draft agreement, will assume all local governmental functions for the Moro, the Philippines' largest Muslim ethnic group. While the details are yet to be worked out, Manila would retain control of national issues that affect the region, like defense and monetary policy.

Although the agreement is a step forward, it is far from a comprehensive consensus. The Bangsamoro Juridical Entity overlaps with the five provinces governed under the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao, which established in 1996 by the government's peace treaty with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), another group fighting for an independent homeland. It is now unclear whether the

Mindanao autonomous region will be dissolved or superceded by the new entity.

The MNLF already seems dead set against a compromise. Earlier this month, its chairman, Nur Misuari, warned the government not to sign a peace agreement with the MILF. According to the MNLF, the 1996 peace deal is the "final agreement" and it's the MNLF who are the legitimate representatives of the Bangsamoro people. It's now up to both the Philippine government to include the MNLF in the drafting of a

New Organic Charter (the BJE's constitution) and help both sides create a common platform for the talks and to establish principles for governance of the area, which is largely located on Mindanao island.

This may be too much to expect from Manila, given the government's track record. The Philippine Congress watered down the 1996 agreement and many provisions of the agreement were never implemented. Assuming that the recent MILF agreement leads to the formal completion of a final peace agreement in 2008, it will still have to be ratified by the Senate, which could be a protracted fight. Congress will also have to pass a host of laws to implement the agreement. The MNLF or sympathetic politicians could file court cases challenging the agreement.

Then there's the problem of corruption. The United States has pledged nearly \$50 million to Mindanao upon the conclusion of a peace process. Japan, Canada and the

European Union have all pledged significant aid programs, as have the major multilateral financial institutions like the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank. But the MILF's ability to quickly and efficiently absorb the hundreds of millions of dollars that have been pledged is questionable. A master plan for sustainable economic growth and natural resource exploitation must be drawn up immediately.

If there's a bright spot here, it's that the existing draft agreement calls for a referendum for independence to be held in the Bangsamoro Juridical Entity in 2030. This is the Bangsamoro's chance to secure a homeland. But to be successful, their leaders must govern fairly, transparently and honestly; while bringing broad-based economic development. The MILF does not have extensive experience in governance, administration and providing social services. They are all too aware that their pool of human resources is thin. "Nation-building is far more difficult than running a revolutionary organization," the MILF's lead negotiator, Mohagher Iqbal, acknowledged last Thursday.

If the Bangsamoro Juridical Entity cannot overcome the obstacles of poor governance, impunity and corruption that have been the hallmarks of most Philippine governments, the Moro will lose this opportunity. Independence could be won, not through war, but through good governance. Now that would be a revolution.

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## Uighur Warning

By Rebiya Kadeer

In 2001, Chinese leaders promised to improve the country's human rights conditions in return for the honor of hosting the 2008 Olympics. With the opening ceremonies less than a year away, it's a good time to examine the situation on the ground in farther flung regions that don't enjoy much international attention.

And there's no better place to start than in East Turkestan, an area China calls the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region. On Nov. 8, the Intermediate People's Court of Kashgar sentenced four ethnic Uighurs to death, and another two to life imprisonment, on charges including engaging in "separatist activities," "training at a terrorist camp" and "illegally making explosives." These men were part of a group captured by China's security forces during a raid on an alleged "terrorist camp" last January near Kosrap, on the Pamir Plateau.

To date, Chinese authorities have not provided documentation of the alleged terrorist camp, and have produced no video confirmation, independent witness statements, or substantiation of the charges from any other source. Except for the sentences, nothing from the trial has been made public—no transcripts, no evidence, nor even the names of all of the defendants. Under the current government in Beijing, it is very unlikely that we will ever know exactly what happened in the January raid.

But given China's past behavior, it's possible to guess. We do know that in recent years, in the name of fighting "terrorism," the Chinese government has forcibly oppressed the Uighurs in East Turkestan. While in government custody, Uighurs often suffer from severe mistreatment and are subject to irregular trials in which they are often denied legal representation, access to evidence and the ability to appeal. Numerous Uighurs have been sentenced to death and executed for their "crimes." East Turkestan remains the only part of the People's Republic of China where people are executed for nonviolent crimes of political opposition to the Chinese state.

I personally spent almost six years in a Chinese prison for speaking up against the Chinese government's abuses in East Turkestan. Two of my children sit in prison as I write, their only crime being their relationship to me. But mine is just one of countless Uighur families that have suffered because of the Chinese government's appalling policies. In the past six years, Amnesty International has documented that "tens of thousands of people are reported to have been detained for investigation in the region, and hundreds, possibly thousands, have been charged or sentenced under the Criminal Law." Amnesty also noted that the vague language in China's revised Criminal Law, amended in late December 2001, could possibly be used to punish people peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression.

Sadly, these acts are only the latest incarnations of China's crimes against the Uighur people. In 1955, leaders in Beijing promised the people of East Turkestan, home to 10 million ethnically and culturally Turkic Uighurs, autonomy within the Chinese state. Today, Uighurs have little or no voice in their local government. Leaders 2,000 miles away in Beijing devise and implement repressive policies that are destroying Uighur language, religion and culture. The people of East Turkestan can only watch as the region's rich natural resources are taken to fuel growth on China's eastern coast.

I unequivocally condemn all acts of violence. Positive political change can and should be achieved through peaceful means. However, I also believe in openness and truth. Can we afford to take China at its word? As authorities detain journalists, force people from their homes, strictly control all religious activities, and use force to silence any voice that questions the government, China's broken promises are clear.

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