



Iraq Fact Check: Responding to Key Myths

1. **MYTH:** The war “is lost.”



- **FACT:** Our commanders and ambassador do not believe that. Asked whether the U.S. could win in Iraq and leave behind a stable government, General David Petraeus said “If I didn’t believe that I wouldn’t be here... I think that there is good prospect for progress in the months ahead.” Ambassador Ryan Crocker says “the level of violence is down in the two areas where the ‘surge’ is focused, Anbar and Baghdad.”
- **FACT:** The surge of operations is just beginning. The additional brigades Gen. Petraeus requested have only been in place since mid-June, and the military only began major offensive operations such as Operation Phantom Thunder once that happened.
- **FACT:** We have seen promising indicators since the President announced the new strategy in January. While al Qaeda and other extremists have conducted a counter-surge resulting in numerous horrific mass-casualty terrorist attacks, and while it is too early to declare the surge a success or failure, we have seen:
 - A substantial drop in sectarian murders in Baghdad since January
 - Arms caches found at more than three times the rate of a year ago
 - Tribal sheiks in Anbar and other provinces cooperating with Iraqi and American forces against al Qaeda
 - Attacks in Anbar at a two-year low
 - Total car bombings and suicide attacks down in May and June
 - The building of “joint security stations,” where many Iraqis are coming with information on where terrorists are hiding
 - Signs of normalcy in Baghdad like professional soccer leagues, amusement parks, and vibrant markets.
 - Recruiting for Iraqi police forces drawing thousands of candidates
 - Young Sunnis signing up for the army and police
 - More Shia rejecting militias

2. **MYTH:** U.S. troops in Iraq are not fighting al Qaeda terrorists, just policing a Shiite vs. Sunni “civil war.”

- **FACT:** Gen. Petraeus says “al Qaeda's terror war is focused on Iraq,” where “they are carrying out the bulk of the sensational attacks, the suicide car bomb attacks, suicide vest attacks.” Iraqi President Jalal Talabani says “the main enemy of Iraqi people is al Qaeda and terrorists cooperating with them.”

- **FACT:** While there is certainly dangerous sectarian violence in Iraq, al Qaeda causes a vast majority of the spectacular suicide bombings that show up on U.S. TV screens and, importantly, *is trying to stoke sectarian violence* and chaos by using human beings, even young children, as bombers.
- **FACT:** Al Qaeda terrorists are targeting Iraqi Sunnis as well as Shiites and Kurds. For example, the 41 tortured Iraqis found May 27 in an al Qaeda hideout north of Baghdad were all Sunni.
- **FACT:** Al Qaeda leaders like bin Laden and Zawahiri (who last week said “victory” is near) want to “expel the Americans from Iraq” and establish a radical Islamic empire to launch a “jihad wave to the secular countries neighboring Iraq.” These killers are clearly not going to participate in the political process or work with those who do not share their murderous ideology if America gives them what they want by leaving.

3. MYTH: The U.S. is playing “whack-a-mole” in Iraq.

- **FACT:** U.S. and Iraqi forces are conducting offensive operations against terrorists while simultaneously providing security in neighborhoods with joint security stations and patrols.
- **FACT:** General Petraeus’s counterinsurgency strategy is a population-centric one that is different from what has been done before. The concept is for U.S. troops to work with Iraqi forces and secure safe havens, then maintain that security by staying in neighborhoods and building trust with the locals.
- **FACT:** The primary reason for the “surge” in troops was to give U.S. and Iraqi forces the ability and flexibility to conduct such offensive operations in and outside of Baghdad without having to shift troops out of so many areas where they were needed for security. This is why commanders held off on many of them until the brigades were in place – to avoid the problems of past offensives.

4. MYTH: The U.S. has an indefinite commitment in Iraq and should shift to training Iraqi troops.

- **FACT:** The current strategy in Iraq is a temporary surge in military, civilian, and diplomatic resources driven by the views of our commanders on the ground. The objective is to establish the conditions for a reduction in U.S. forces without risking catastrophe and wider regional conflict. As the President said July 4: “We all long for the day when there are far fewer American servicemen and women in Iraq... Yet, withdrawing our troops prematurely based on politics, not on the advice and recommendation of our military commanders, would not be in our national interest.”
- **FACT:** The U.S. military is heavily invested in training Iraq’s security forces and fighting al Qaeda right now — “shifting” to such pursuits would not be a change in course. Since the President announced the new strategy in January, the U.S. has increased the embedding of American advisers in Iraqi Army units, partnered coalition brigades with every Iraqi Army division, and accelerated the training of Iraqi forces.

5. MYTH: Setting a timeline and pulling troops out of Iraq regardless of conditions on the ground would be a responsible end to the conflict and/or would put needed pressure on Iraq’s

government.

- **FACT:** The collective judgment of our intelligence community is that this would increase, not decrease, the violence and hinder national reconciliation. In fact, the National Intelligence Estimate [NIE] some cite as evidence of dire conditions in Iraq said that “Coalition capabilities, including force levels, resources, and operations, remain an *essential stabilizing element in Iraq*,” and rapid withdrawal “*almost certainly would lead to a significant increase in the scale and scope of sectarian conflict in Iraq, intensify Sunni resistance to the Iraqi Government, and have adverse consequences for national reconciliation.*” [emphasis added]
- **FACT:** Leaving Iraq to al Qaeda terrorists would endanger both Iraqis and Americans, embolden Iran, and solve no problems at all. The NIE concluded that “massive civilian casualties and forced population displacement would be probable” were we to rapidly leave, and “AQI [al Qaeda in Iraq] would attempt to use parts of the country—particularly al-Anbar province—to plan increased attacks in and outside of Iraq.”
- **FACT:** The argument that the U.S. could leave behind a “residual force” in Iraq’s Kurdish region or Kuwait before Iraqi Security Forces are ready to take over and still fight al Qaeda makes no sense, since the very crux of al Qaeda’s strategy is to cause a civil war by bombing markets, mosques, and bridges. The very reason Gen. Petraeus asked for the troops he now has was so U.S. forces could raid al Qaeda strongholds without having to leave areas where they were providing security.

6. MYTH: Gen. Petraeus does not believe the U.S. military can make a difference in Iraq.

- **FACT:** Democrats sometimes quote Gen. Petraeus when arguing that the U.S. should give up in Iraq, but they completely misrepresent the General’s views. While Gen. Petraeus has indeed said the ultimate solution to Iraq’s problems is a political one, he has consistently argued that such a solution can only come with the improvements in security he is trying to achieve.
- **FACT:** Gen. Petraeus told the Senate that securing Iraq is “necessary” since the government will find it difficult to “come to grips with the toughest issues it must resolve while survival is the primary concern.” He also said he needed all the additional troops he requested to get the job done.

7. MYTH: U.S. troops are “arming” Sunni insurgents in Iraq.

- **FACT:** Commanders are taking advantage of an important opportunity to reach out to locals who want to fight against al Qaeda and are recruiting them into the government of Iraq. Some tribal elements are being recruited as police support units with the blessing of the Maliki government. US forces are not arming Sunni insurgents and have only provided non-lethal assistance with the agreement of the government of Iraq.
- **FACT:** As we come to agreement with these individuals who are fed up with al Qaeda terrorists and willing to fight against them and/or show U.S. forces where they hide, we gather biometric data on them, identify and vet them, have them pledge allegiance to the government of Iraq and go through a training program, and then quickly bring them along as part of the Iraqi military or Interior police forces.
- **FACT:** This is in no way about working with al Qaeda members or foreign fighters. It is about

taking advantage of an opportunity to join with Iraqis against irreconcilable enemies.

8. MYTH: Timelines and dates for withdrawal are consistent with the views of outsiders like the Baker-Hamilton Iraq Study Group.

- **FACT:** The Iraq Study Group's report specifically said on page 46 that the group opposed "timetables or deadlines for withdrawal."
- **FACT:** On page 50, the group said they could support a "surge of American combat forces to stabilize Baghdad, or to speed up the training and equipping mission, if the U.S. commander in Iraq determines that such steps would be effective."
- **FACT:** Iraq Study Group Co-Chairman James Baker says Gen. Petraeus and the new plan for securing Iraq "ought to be given a chance" and that "setting a deadline for withdrawal regardless of conditions in Iraq makes even less sense today because there is evidence that the temporary surge is reducing the level of violence in Baghdad."

9. MYTH: Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki is an agent of Iran and/or Muqtada al Sadr.

- **FACT:** Nouri al Maliki is the democratically elected Prime Minister of all Iraqis.
- **FACT:** There is no evidence that Maliki or his wing of the Da'wa Party is an agent or puppet of Iran. Maliki is an Iraqi nationalist who has few ties to Iranians. He has been critical of Iranian meddling both publicly and behind the scenes.
- **FACT:** In January, Maliki pledged to hunt down all militia groups and pointed out that he had only met with Muqtada al Sadr twice in the past four years. Moreover, Sadr withdrew his Cabinet ministers in part because he was protesting Maliki's alliance with the Coalition.

10. MYTH: U.S. troops are sent to Iraq without proper training, equipment, or rest.

- **FACT:** U.S. troops are the best trained and equipped military forces in the world. While the War on Terror is no doubt stretching the military and its resources, no troops are ever sent to Iraq without adequate training. As the Army's director of force management Maj. Gen. Richard Formica said when the surge brigades were being deployed, "Our deploying units will be manned, trained and equipped, and they will be ready for their specified missions."
- **FACT:** The Department of Defense does not allow any units to deploy to Iraq unless they are certified as trained and equipped for the mission by their chain-of-command. Some of the units now in Iraq were recently extended to 15 months to allow a minimum of 12 months before deployments.

11. MYTH: Iraqis are going on a two-month holiday and are not defending their own country.

- **FACT:** Iraq's Parliament decided not to take a two-month recess and instead will continue working on legislation critical for Iraq's future.
- **FACT:** Iraqis are enduring two to three times the casualties U.S. forces are.
- **FACT:** Our commanders report that Iraqi Security Forces are growing in number, becoming more capable, and assuming more responsibility. Iraqis are often leading raids and stopping suicide bombers at checkpoints. As Gen. Petraeus puts it: "The Iraqi army has, in general, done

quite well in the face of some really serious challenges. In certain areas it really is very heartening to see what it has done.”

12. MYTH: Iraq’s Parliament passed a resolution calling for U.S. forces to leave.

- **FACT:** The opposite is true. The U.S. is in Iraq at the invitation of the Iraqi government, and Council of Representatives (COR) recently voted for Americans to continue their work in Iraq.
- **FACT:** There was never a vote on the widely reported Sadrist “petition” calling for withdrawal. That petition was clearly not a reflection of the views of Parliament, as some who supposedly signed it later said they were deceived about what it meant and actually want the U.S. to stay in Iraq until Iraq’s security forces are better trained.

13. MYTH: The U.S. is in Iraq only because of Congress’s 2002 resolution authorizing the invasion to topple Saddam Hussein’s regime.

- **FACT:** The U.S. is currently in Iraq at the invitation of a sovereign government and the unanimous approval of the United Nations Security Council
- **FACT:** UN Security Council Resolution 1723 extended the mandate of multi-national forces until December 2007. That resolution came at the request of Prime Minister Maliki.
- **FACT:** The 2002 Congressional war authorization referred to the use of force in enforcing U.N. Security Council resolutions. It clearly envisioned subsequent U.N. Security Council resolutions, and Senators understood that a President has the authority to enforce such resolutions.

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