

Winning In Iraq  
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Winning In Iraq And losing in Washington  
By Ralph Peters

To a military professional, the tactical progress made in Iraq over the last few months is impressive. To a member of Congress, it's an annoyance.

The herd animals on Capitol Hill -- from both parties -- just can't wait to go over the cliff on Iraq. And even when the media mention one or two of the successes achieved by our troops, the reports are grudging.

Yet what's happening on the ground, right now, in Baghdad and in Iraq's most-troubled provinces, contributes directly to your security. In the words of a senior officer known for his careful assessments, al Qaeda's terrorists in Iraq are "on their back foot and we're trying to knock them to their knees."

Do our politicians really want to help al Qaeda regain its balance?

Gen. David Petraeus and his deputies sharply prioritized the threats we face in Iraq: Al Qaeda is No. 1, and Iran's Shia proxies are No. 2. Our troops hunt them relentlessly. And we don't face our enemies alone: Iraq's security forces have begun to pick up their share of the fight.

A trusted source in Baghdad confirmed several key developments that've gone largely unreported. Here's what's been happening while "journalists" focused on John Edwards' haircuts:

\* Al Qaeda lost the support of Iraq's Sunni Arabs. The fanatics over-reached: They murdered popular sheiks, kidnapped tribal women for forced marriages, tried to outlaw any form of joy and (perhaps most fatally, given Iraqi habits) banned smoking. In response, the Arab version of the Marlboro Man rose up and started cutting terrorist throats.

\* Since the tribes who once were fighting against us turned on al Qaeda, our troops not only captured the senior Iraqi in the organization -- which made brief headlines -- but also killed the three al Turki brothers, major-league pinch-hitters al Qaeda sent into Iraq to save the game.

Oh, and it emerged that the Iraqi "head" of the terrorists was just a front -- in the words of one Army officer, Omar al Baghdadi was "a Wizard of Oz-like creation designed to give an impression that al Qaeda has Iraqis in its senior ranks."

\* Al Qaeda has been pushed right across Anbar, from the once Wild West to the province's eastern fringes. The terrorists are still dug in elsewhere, from the Diyala River Valley to a few Baghdad neighborhoods - but, to quote that senior officer again, "our forces have been taking out their leaders faster than they can find qualified replacements."

Even the Democrats yearning to become president admit, when pressed, that al Qaeda's a threat to America. So why didn't even one of them praise the success of our troops during their last debate?

But let's be fair: Congressional Republicans, terrified of losing their power and glory and precious perks, haven't rushed to applaud our progress, either. They'll give up Iraq, as long as they don't have to give up earmarks.

\* It isn't only al Qaeda taking serious hits. After briefly showing the flag, Muqtada al-Sadr fled back to Iran again, trailed by his senior deputies. Mookie's No. 2 even moved his family to Iran. Why? Though he's been weak in the past, Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki is now green-lighting Iraqi operations against the Jaish al Mahdi, the Mookster's "Mahdi Army."

With its descent into criminality and terror, the Mahdi Army, too, has been losing support among Iraqis - in this case, among Shias.

And Iraq's security forces increasingly carry the fight to the militia:

\* The Iraqi Police Tactical Support Unit in Nasiriyah came under attack by Mahdi Army elements accustomed to intimidating their enemies. Supported by a brave (and tiny) U.S. advisory team, the police commandos fought them off. Instead of a walkover, the militia thugs hit a wall - and got hammered by airstrikes, for good measure. Then the Iraqi police counter-attacked. The Mahdi Army force begged for negotiations.

\* In Mosul, Iraqi army and police units stuck to their guns through a series of tough combat engagements, with the result that massive arms caches were seized from the terrorists and insurgents. In Kirkuk, Iraqi police reacted promptly to last week's gruesome car-bombing - in time to stop two other car bombs from reaching their intended targets.

\* In Baghdad, the surge isn't only about American successes - Iraqi security and intelligence forces conducted a series of hard-hitting operations against both al Qaeda and Iran-backed Special Group terrorists.

What were you, the American people, told about all this? Well, The New Republic published a pack of out-of-the-ballpark lies concocted by a scammer claiming to be a grunt in Baghdad. Our soldiers, he wrote, spent their time playing games with babies' skulls, running over dogs for fun and mocking disfigured women in their mess hall.

Anyone who knows our troops or has visited Iraq could instantly spot the absurdities in this smear and the soldiers in the unit denied that any of it happened - but The New Republic (which refuses to produce its source) isn't exactly staffed by military veterans.

The editors wanted to believe evil about our men and women in uniform, and ended up doing evil to our troops. (Those editors ought to be sentenced to spend August in Baghdad with the infantrymen they defamed, cleaning out military port-a-johns in the

130-degree heat.)

Is success suddenly guaranteed in Iraq? Of course not. The situation's still a bloody mess. But it's also more encouraging than it's been since the summer of 2003, when the downward slide began.

Gen. Dave Petraeus and his subordinate commanders are by far the best team we've ever had in place in that wretched country. They're doing damned near everything right - with austere resources, despite the surge. And they're being abandoned by your elected leaders.

Maybe the next presidential primary debate should be held in Baghdad.

*Ralph Peters' book, "Wars Of Blood And Faith: The Conflicts That Will Shape the Twenty-First Century," is in stores now.*