



U.S. Generals...Support the Draft

Student Handout #3: **NPR, "'War Czar' Concerned over Stress of War on Troops"**

[All Things Considered](#), August 10, 2007 .

Lt. Gen. Douglas Lute, assistant to the president and deputy national security adviser for Iraq and Afghanistan, says he is concerned about the toll the war in Iraq and extended deployments are taking on U.S. forces.

The man who is widely known as the "war czar" also says that from a military standpoint, a return to a draft should be part of the discussion.

On the ground in Iraq, Lute tells Michele Norris that there has been "demonstrable progress" on the security front. But on the political front, the Iraqi government is lagging behind, though he does cite progress at local and provincial levels.

How heavy a toll is the war taking on American forces? Do you agree with other military leaders who have expressed worries that U.S. forces are near the breaking point?

As an Army officer, this is a matter of real concern to me. Ultimately, the American army, and any other all-volunteer force, rests with the support and the morale and the willingness to serve demonstrated by our — especially our young men and women in uniform. And I am concerned that those men and women and the families they represent are under stress as a result of repeated deployments.

There's both a personal dimension of this, where this kind of stress plays out across dinner tables and in living room conversations within these families, and ultimately, the health of the all-volunteer force is going to rest on those sorts of personal family decisions. And when the system is under stress, it's right to be concerned about some of the future decisions these young men and women may make. I think our military leaders are right to be focused on that.

There's also a professional and broader strategic argument to this, and that is that when our forces are as engaged as they have been over the last several years, particularly in Iraq, that we're concerned as military professionals that we also keep a very sharp edge honed for other contingencies outside of Iraq.

When military leaders, though, talk about the breaking point, what are they talking about? What's the real worry there?

I think that most who have talked about the stress on the force are concerned that in today's all-volunteer force, especially with the sort of quality individuals that we're interested in attracting to the all-volunteer force, that we're actually competing in the marketplace — in the labor marketplace — for a very narrow slice of high school graduates without records with the law who come to us with a clean bill of health and the potential to serve this country in some very demanding missions.

So when you're competing in that marketplace, I think the concern is that these people are challenged and feel the respect to the nation and feel a calling to something beyond themselves, beyond just a personal calling, and that these things remain in place and, therefore, make the all-volunteer force viable in the long run.

You know, given the stress on the military and the concern about these extended deployments for an all-volunteer military, can you foresee, in the future, a return to the draft?

You know, that's a national policy decision point that we have not yet reached, Michele, because the —

But does it make sense militarily?

I think it makes sense to certainly consider it, and I can tell you, this has always been an option on the table, but ultimately, this is a policy matter between meeting the demands for the nation's security by one means or another. Today, the current means of the all-volunteer force is serving us exceptionally well. It would be a major policy shift — not actually a military, but a political policy shift to move to some other course.

Do you agree with that assessment that there is a real pressure point in the spring — that that's when the Pentagon will face some tough decisions about either extended deployments or reducing the time spent at home?

Yes, I do agree that come the spring, some variables will have to change — either the degree to which the American ground forces, the Marines and the Army in particular, are deployed around the world to include Iraq, or the length of time they're deployed in one tour, or the length of time they enjoy at home. Those are, essentially, the three variables.

It's interesting, because we often hear the president back away from discussions of any kind of timetable, because he says that it would show our cards to our enemies. But it seems that they would know this also, that the current force strength has its limits.

Well, remember that I said that there are three variables. So there's not a hard and fast stop to any level of commitment of American forces.

Now your title is assistant to the president and deputy national security adviser for Iraq and Afghanistan. Could you explain exactly what you do?

What I do is work alongside Steve Hadley, the president's national security adviser, giving full-time attention to the issues surrounding our policy and the execution of those policies in Iraq and Afghanistan and essentially give Steve Hadley a teammate who can attend full time to the demands of those two missions.

How often do you talk directly to President Bush?

Daily.

And when — are you the point person there that gives the president the daily war briefing on progress in Iraq and Afghanistan?

I have daily contacts with the president alongside Steve Hadley, and of course that relationship is very important because, while I'm responsible for — as the point man on Iraq and Afghanistan in advising the president, Steve and I have to make sure that Iraq and Afghanistan are placed appropriately in the regional context.

I'm just curious — what do you think of the term war czar?

It's actually an unfortunate term because it doesn't describe my job at all.

But it's often how people describe you.

That may be, but it wouldn't be my choice of how I describe the job. What I'm trying to do here is actually facilitate the very hard work that's taking place on the ground and link it to the very hard work that's being done here in Washington across the departments of the executive branch with the priorities of what's required on the ground reflected in the efforts here in Washington. I'm in charge of about 15 people. Now that's not exactly very czar-like, but what I am able to do is make sure that efforts are aligned properly.

Well, you know what they say in Washington sometimes — that power is concentrated.

[Chuckles.] Well, I have 15 very qualified people, and we're working very hard to do our best to contribute to this effort.