



U.S. Generals...Support the Draft

Student Handout #5: **FactCheck.org, "Liberal Lobby Lacks Context"**

Liberal Lobby Lacks Context

August 23, 2007

Coalition distorts the words of two generals in an ad attacking Republicans.

Summary

A liberal coalition calling itself Americans Against Escalation in Iraq is running a TV ad that says the U.S. will be in Iraq for a decade to come and that the military draft will be reinstated. But the ad supports those conclusions by twisting the words of two senior generals.

- The ad falsely claims that Gen. David Petraeus, commander of U.S. forces in Iraq, said that the U.S. will "have to stay there for 10 more" years. Petraeus didn't exactly say that. He said insurgencies tend to last that long and hinted that some U.S. forces may have to stay there for a long time.
- The ad says flatly that the draft will have to be reinstated should the U.S. remain in Iraq for a decade. But it supports its conclusion with a selective quote from Bush's war czar, who said no such thing. Lt. Gen. Douglas Lute actually called reimposing the draft "a major policy shift" that isn't currently needed. And the Pentagon said afterward that "no one in the Pentagon is considering a return to a military draft."

The ad targets four Republican lawmakers who are up for reelection next year. In addition to the ad campaign, the group says it plans to take its message about Iraq and a possible draft to young people through the popular site facebook.com.

Analysis

[Americans Against Escalation in Iraq](#) is a coalition composed of several liberal groups, including MoveOn.org, the Service Employees International Union and the [Center for American Progress](#), which is headed by former Clinton chief of staff John Podesta. The coalition [announced](#) Aug. 17 that it would run four ads as part of a broader effort to "turn up the heat on members of Congress who have opposed setting a timeline to bring a safe and responsible end to the war in Iraq." The ads use the same script to target four members of Congress. They are being run in Kentucky against Republican Sen. Mitch

McConnell and also in the House districts of Republican Reps. Phil English of Pennsylvania, Thelma Drake of Virginia and Fred Upton of Michigan.

What Petraeus Said

The ad says, "Bush's general says we have to stay [in Iraq] for 10 more" years. That's not exactly true. The ad refers to a July 9 [interview](#) that the U.S. commander in Iraq, David Petraeus, gave to British journalist John Simpson of the BBC. In that interview, Petraeus said he saw "progress on the ground" and spoke of a gradual *withdrawal* of U.S. forces from Iraq.

It's true that Petraeus also warned that pacifying Iraq is a going to be a "a long-term endeavor" and even compared it to the conflict in Northern Ireland. But he avoided saying directly how long U.S. troops would have to be there.

The ad would have been correct to paraphrase him as saying "*some* U.S. forces *may* have to stay there for 10 more" years. Here, in full, is the pertinent portion of the BBC interview:

BBC: How long, realistically, do American troops have to stay here to stabilize this country?

Petraeus: Well, I don't know if that's the right question or if it's at what level? I think your own country, anybody who, in the UK would recognize that **these are long-term endeavors**. Northern Ireland I think taught you that very, very well. My counterparts in your forces really understand this kind of operation. And arguably, it took 10 years to really scope that, 10 years to do it right, and 10 years to negotiate. Again, I may have the timeline wrong, but it took a long time, decades. **I don't know whether this will be decades, but the average counter-insurgency is somewhere around a 9- or a 10-year endeavor.**

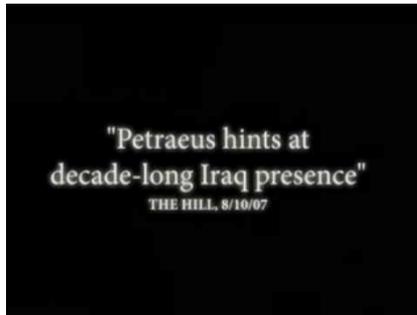
The question, though, is not that. I think the question is, at what level? And so, **really the question is how can we gradually reduce our forces so we reduce the strain on the Army, on the nation and so forth.**

Petraeus is [scheduled](#) to give an official report and possible testimony to Congress next month.

Doctoring a Headline

The ad also shows a doctored headline. It cites *The Hill*, a Washington, D.C., newspaper, as saying in an Aug. 10 headline, "Petraeus hints at decade-long Iraq presence." But the actual headline [says](#), "Rep. Schakowsky: Petraeus hints at decade-long Iraq presence."

The quote, as portrayed in the ad:



The headline in *The Hill*:

THE HILL
Rep. Schakowsky: Petraeus hints at decade-long Iraq presence

The problem here is that the words in the headline don't represent the conclusions of the newspaper; they are the words of congresswoman Jan Schakowsky, an Illinois Democrat who is a co-founder of the House Out of Iraq Caucus, an ally of the coalition running the ads.

In this case Schakowsky was probably fair in her characterization of an off-the-record briefing by Petraeus, assuming that what he said in that briefing was similar to what he said in the BBC interview. But it is still wrong to attribute words to a newspaper when they actually came from a partisan source. Doing so gives the words greater credibility than they deserve, and it can deceive viewers.

Drafting Trouble

The ad overstates the likelihood of bringing back the military draft, using an unjustified logical leap and a cherry-picked quote from the administration's war czar.

After raising the idea that U.S. troops will be in Iraq for a decade, the announcer says, "Where are we going to get the troops to stay that long? The draft." In fact, the Pentagon says nobody there is considering asking Congress to reinstate conscription.

The ad uses a clip from an Aug. 10 National Public Radio interview with the White House's Pentagon liaison, Lt. Gen. Douglas Lute, in which he says of the draft: "I think it makes sense to certainly consider it ... this has always been an option on the table." Not mentioned is that Lute also made clear that bringing back the draft would be "a major policy shift" and that he doesn't see a need for it.

Here is the pertinent part of the full [interview](#) with NPR's Michele Norris:

NPR: [C]an you foresee, in the future, a return to the draft?

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

NPR: But does it make sense militarily?

Lute: 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.

Three days after that interview the Pentagon [released](#) a statement saying "no one in the Pentagon is considering a return to a military draft," and pointing out that Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates is on record as being opposed to any return to conscription.

The ad also makes an unjustified logical connection between what Petraeus said in the BBC interview and a return to the draft. As noted earlier, Petraeus was actually speaking about a gradual reduction of U.S. troop levels in Iraq, specifically "to reduce the strain on the Army." If current levels have been reached without a draft, it simply does not follow logically that keeping *fewer* troops there over time would require one.

Who Supported What Now?

Finally, the four lawmakers targeted by the ads are said to have "supported Bush's war in Iraq for four years." That's true enough, but two congressman have since stopped backing the president's Iraq policy. Reps. Phil English and Fred Upton are Republican defectors who [voted](#) against the surge in a symbolic February vote.

Upton spoke against the surge on the [floor](#). English released a statement [explaining](#) his vote and has even [co-sponsored](#) a bill to redeploy the troops.

The AEI coalition [announced](#) that once school begins in the fall, it would follow up on the ad campaign with a digital "flyering" campaign on the popular social networking site facebook.com. Flyering is a means of messaging between members of the site. We advise students to do their homework before accepting this ad at face value.

– by *Justin Bank*

Sources

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