

a way to get out of there regardless of the consequences?

Here is General Jones's answer:

I don't believe that there is a commissioner that feels that way. But let me just take a poll right now.

He turned around and surveyed the Commissioners, and they all agreed with General Jones.

Then General Petraeus and Ambassador Corker came before us last week to give their report, which detailed progress on a number of different levels. General Petraeus is one of our most distinguished officers in the Armed Forces. He graduated as an academically "distinguished cadet" from West Point. He was the General George C. Marshall Award winner as the top graduate of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, class of 1983. He also has a master's and a Ph.D. from Princeton, and he served as a professor at West Point. He is on his third tour in Iraq.

I know a lot of people in this body think they have figured out how to deal with Iraq. He spent 2 full years there and now over a half a year again in Iraq dealing with these circumstances. He is a very capable person, as anyone can well see.

Well, I have been to Iraq six times. On the first trip, I met General Petraeus. He commanded the 101st Airborne in Mosul. They were achieving some fine success and reconciliation. They were able to catch Saddam's sons, Uday and Qusay. He worked with Alabama engineering National Guard units impressively, in my opinion, to bring them on line in an effective way. I was impressed in my meeting with him.

The next year, he came home, and then they asked him to go back to train the Iraqi Army. He went back and took charge of that operation and spent a year doing that in Iraq, meeting people in Baghdad and getting a real feel for that country. Then he came home.

When he got home, he wrote the counterinsurgency manual for the U.S. Department of Defense, which details the principles and tactics that can work to defeat an insurgency. In fact, insurgencies can be defeated if you have a sustained and intelligent policy that is well led. So he wrote that manual, and President Bush met with him and decided to send him back a third time in January, and he asked him to lead this effort. He has been doing so with integrity, skill, and effectiveness. As a matter of fact, one commentator said even in the early months you could feel that there was a new atmosphere and a new strategic vision and new leadership. It was filtering down throughout the system.

So to have a group like MoveOn.org suggest—not suggest but call him a traitor and a liar, that is despicable. I cannot imagine anybody who would not condemn such a statement. This is a patriot of the highest order. We have asked him to go into harm's way for the third time to serve the national in-

terests of the United States, not serve President Bush—to serve this Congress, by a 80-to-14 vote in May.

So I am telling you that we need to get serious. We sent him there by a unanimous vote, confirmed him to be commander, and we voted to fund the operation, fund the surge. That wasn't President Bush who put up the money; we put it up. We asked him to come back and give us a report on how well it is going. We asked an independent commission to give us another report. We asked the GAO to give us a report. We have gotten those reports, and it is now time for this Congress to make some decisions. It is just that serious. This is a very important matter for the United States. It is important for us.

You tell me about the morale of the military. People say the morale of the military is not well. They are doing beyond anything I could expect. Reenlistments remain very high. I have to be amazed at that, and I know others are. We have a good reenlistment rate, and we are able to retain people and bring people into the military. They are going to Iraq and serving ably. As a matter of fact, in a moment, I will share a report from some of our Alabama people who came by to see me and what they had to say about their tour there. So we have done this, and we are now at a point where we have to make some decisions.

I have been asked: Well, has the situation changed since General Petraeus has made his report? I think it has, mainly because of what he said, not how he said it. I asked him back in January at his confirmation hearing would he always be truthful with the Congress and the American people about the status of this war and would he tell us if he didn't think he could be successful. He said that he would.

I asked him at this hearing: General Petraeus, when you came before us in January, before you went to Iraq, you had previously told me that no matter what happened, you would tell the Congress the truth. He told me that in private the night before. So the next morning, I asked him: Will you tell the truth to the American people? He committed that he would. So at this hearing last week, I asked him:

Have you, to the best of your ability, told this Congress the truth about the situation in Iraq today?

He said:

I have, yes, sir.

You can call him a liar if you want to. I don't. I believe he gave us the truth as he had the ability to give it to us.

I asked him further:

General Petraeus, in your opinion, is there a circumstance in which—in your opinion, is this effort in Iraq such that we cannot be successful, that we would be putting more effort in a losing cause if we continue it, or, in your opinion, do we have a realistic chance to be successful in this very important endeavor?

He replied:

Sir, I believe we have a realistic chance of achieving our objectives in Iraq.

So we received the reports and the information. What did some of that information tell us? I cannot tell my colleagues or the American people that this will continue, but, remarkably, violence in Baghdad is down dramatically. Remember, it was the President and everybody who acknowledged that if the large capital city could not be stable and was sinking into violence, there is no way we could have a peaceful settlement in Iraq and reconciliation and make progress. We had to reduce violence in Iraq. The report General Petraeus gave us and the charts he produced showed that civilian deaths in Iraq, in Baghdad, were down 70 percent. In his report, he declared that civilian deaths throughout the nation of Iraq were down 55 percent. Now, that is really big. Remember, the surge didn't reach full strength until June or July. He has only had the full surge in place for a month or two. So this is really big.

Mr. KERRY. Will the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. SESSIONS. Yes.

Mr. KERRY. On his own charts, he showed that two-thirds of the reduction of violence took place before our troops even got there; isn't that right?

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I will respond to that. I don't believe that is accurate.

Mr. KERRY. That is the chart, Mr. President.

Mr. SESSIONS. The most dramatic reductions in violence occurred in the last months of August and September. Regardless of that, I would say the Senator is making a point I think I can agree to—that it is not just the number of troops that are affected. General Petraeus is executing a strategy utilizing counterinsurgency tactics that are more suited to the problems in Iraq and are proving to be more effective in reducing violence and protecting the civilian people in Iraq.

Mr. KERRY. I further ask the Senator, if the civilian deaths are down to such a degree that Baghdad is such a security success, why did the Iraqi Legislature not reconcile on the issue of oil or deBaathification?

Mr. SESSIONS. I will give my best answer to that. We had the President of the United States and the majority leader in the Senate say we had to have an immigration bill. They tried to pass it right here on the floor of the Senate. They could not pass it. The President could have stood on his head, and that bill would not pass.

Just because we think we can order the Iraqi Parliament to vote out some law doesn't mean they can do that. So I am really worried about it, frankly. I am fully willing to acknowledge that it is a very troublesome development that the Iraqi Parliament hasn't been able to pass laws to carry out some of these needed reforms. But I don't think they are going to be more likely to be effective in passing legislation if we precipitously withdraw, allowing violence to increase again and whatever