

# One Surge Does Not Fit All

By DONALD H. RUMSFELD  
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THE surge in Iraq has been one of the most impressive military accomplishments in recent years. It has been so successful that the emerging consensus is that what may now be needed in Afghanistan is a similar surge of American forces. President-elect Barack Obama campaigned on his intention to do so, as did his former opponent, John McCain.

As one who is occasionally — and incorrectly — portrayed as an opponent of the surge in Iraq, I believe that while the surge has been effective in Iraq, we must also recognize the conditions that made it successful. President Bush's bold decision to deploy additional troops to support a broader counterinsurgency strategy of securing and protecting the Iraqi people was clearly the right decision. More important, though, it was the right decision at the right time.

By early 2007, several years of struggle had created the new conditions for a tipping point:

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Al Qaeda in Iraq's campaign of terrorism and intimidation had turned its Sunni base of support against it. The result was the so-called Anbar Awakening in the late summer of 2006, followed by similar awakening movements across Iraq.

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From 2003 through 2006, United States military forces, under the leadership of Gen. John Abizaid and Gen. George Casey, inflicted huge losses on the Baathist and Qaeda leadership. Many thousands of insurgents, including the Qaeda chief in Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, were captured or killed and proved difficult to replace.

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The Iraqi Security Forces had achieved cohesion, improved operational effectiveness and critical mass. By December 2006, some 320,000 Iraqis had been trained, equipped and deployed, producing the forces necessary to help

hold difficult neighborhoods against the enemy. By 2007, the surge, for most Iraqis, could have an Iraqi face.

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And the political scene in Iraq had shifted. Moktada al-Sadr, the firebrand cleric, declared a cease-fire in February 2007. The government of Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, seated in May 2006, moved against militias and Iranian-backed militias and has imperfectly, but notably, rejected narrow sectarian policies.

The best indication that timing is everything may be that there had been earlier surges without the same effect as the 2007 surge. In 2005, troop levels in Iraq were increased to numbers nearly equal to the 2007 surge — twice. But the effects were not as durable because large segments of the Sunni population were still providing sanctuary to insurgents, and Iraq's security forces were not sufficiently capable or large enough.

The decision to conduct a surge came out of an interagency review in the fall of 2006. By mid-December, as I was leaving the Pentagon, there was a rough consensus in the Defense Department that deploying additional combat brigades to Iraq was the right step. Some military leaders raised reasonable questions about the potential effectiveness of a surge, in part because of a correct concern that military power alone could not solve Iraq's problems. I agreed, and emphasized that a military surge would need to be accompanied by effective diplomatic and economic "surges" from other departments and agencies of the American government, and by considerably greater progress from Iraq's elected leaders.

During my last weeks in office, I recommended to President Bush that he consider Gen. David Petraeus as commander of coalition forces in Iraq, as General Casey's tour was coming to an end. General Petraeus and his deputy, Gen. Ray Odierno, had the experience and skill to recognize and exploit the seismic shifts that were taking place in Iraq's political landscape. And United States troops had the courage to win the alliance of Iraq's people against a common enemy — and the benevolence to win their friendship.

At the critical moment — a moment when the Iraqis were able and willing to be part of the surge with the American forces — the United States surged into Iraq with the right commanders, additional forces and a fresh operational approach rooted in years of on-the-ground experience. Americans can be proud of what has been accomplished in Iraq over the last five-plus years. They

should also be impressed by the results of the surge, which, thus far, has outstripped expectations, including mine.

President Bush's decision to increase combat troop levels in Iraq in January 2007 sent a clear message that he was determined not to abandon a people to death squads and terrorists. We will need the same commitment to helping the people of Afghanistan succeed, but that does not mean we will achieve it with the same tactics or strategies.

The way forward in Afghanistan will need to reflect the current circumstances there — not the circumstances in Iraq two years ago. Additional troops in Afghanistan may be necessary, but they will not, by themselves, be sufficient to lead to the results we saw in Iraq. A similar confluence of events that contributed to success in Iraq does not appear to exist in Afghanistan.

What's needed in Afghanistan is an Afghan solution, just as Iraqi solutions have contributed so fundamentally to progress in Iraq. And a surge, if it is to be successful, will need to be an Afghan surge.

Left unanswered in the current debate is the critical question of how thousands of additional American troops might actually bring long-term stability to Afghanistan — a country 80,000 square miles larger than Iraq yet with security forces just one-fourth the size of Iraq's. Afghanistan also lacks Iraq's oil and other economic advantages. It is plagued by the narcotics trade. Its borders are threatened by terrorist sanctuaries in Pakistan. Fractured groups of Pashtun tribesmen on both sides of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border do not yet appear willing to unite and take on the insurgents in their midst, as Arab tribes did in Iraq.

Further, Afghanistan has a long history of defeating foreign armies that sought strength in numbers. The Soviet Union tried to occupy Afghanistan with hundreds of thousands of troops — and withdrew, defeated and broken. More United States troops could raise tensions, particularly in Afghanistan's Pashtun south, where the insurgency is strongest.

Only capable indigenous forces can ultimately win an insurgency. Afghan forces, backed by coalition troops, will need to move into the most violent areas to secure and protect the local population, enabling Afghans to cooperate with their government without losing their lives.

To do this, the size of the Afghan National Army will need to be increased well beyond its 70,000 or so troops and its training accelerated. More American

forces will need to undertake the unglamorous work of embedding with Afghan soldiers as advisers, living and fighting together. Kingpins and senior facilitators in the thriving poppy industry that helps to fuel the insurgency will need to be treated as military targets, as Qaeda and Taliban leaders are. Reconstruction projects should be focused on provinces and towns that are cooperating with the Afghan government, instead of making blanket commitments to increase foreign assistance across Afghanistan and possibly fostering a culture of dependence.

The current suggestion of “opening negotiations” with the Taliban may well win over some low- and mid-level supporters, but if history is any guide, offering the hand of peace to hardened fanatics is not likely to prove successful. Aggressive action against Taliban and Qaeda sanctuaries in Pakistan will need to continue. Pakistani officials will have to isolate any factions in their military and intelligence services that are sympathetic to the Taliban.

In a few weeks, the new commander in chief, Barack Obama, will assume the responsibility of leading a nation at a time of war. Time and flexibility are the two constants of military success. In a struggle with an adaptable, thinking enemy, there is no single template for success. More is not always better. One size does not fit all.

The singular trait of the American way of war is the remarkable ability of our military to advance, absorb setbacks, adapt and ultimately triumph based upon the unique circumstances of a given campaign. Thus it has been throughout our history. And thus it will be in Iraq and Afghanistan, if we have the patience and wisdom to learn from our successes, and if our leaders have the wherewithal to persevere even when it is not popular to do so.

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