

THE MOMENT OF TRUTH

Are we at the 'moment of truth' in the Mideast? New actors: Admiral Fallon at Central Command and General Petraeus as Ground Commander in Iraq. Irrational puppets (Hamas/Fatah) perform in Israel -the torn relic of Roadmap to Peace forgotten. Taliban revisited in Afghanistan augurs for more troops while Baghdad smolders in the cauldron. Sectarian violence seems to abate in the waiting game.

Political momentum like a spicy gumbo offers a taste for those who wish to 'win' in Iraq and those who wish to set a timetable to leave and let the chips fall or be played alone by the Iraqis. Foreign Relations committee abounds with the voice of dissent and the majority view that this 'new tactical' plan (to clear, hold and build) in Baghdad, Ramadi (An- bar province) may be the 'end game' for US and Coalition forces. Success may be relatively moot to those who have tired of the never-ending war and gain support from the body politic. Presidential aspirants run the gamut of those who never supported the attack of Iraq, others who voted for, but now favor a quick withdrawal of troops and some who argue to 'give the new plan' a chance and perceive an overwhelming trauma in the 'fight against terror'. Nuclear shadow of Iran and North Korea hover.

President Bush seems to be the one "who is walking alone, keeping his head up high, and not afraid of the dark". His recent address to Congress argues 'that we must win in Iraq', that though the support for the Iraqi government is not open-ended, to prematurely leave would open door to real civil war, terrorist chaos and a quasi-sick Mideast.

Much of the Counter-Insurgency tactical plan it is said comes from Iraqi impetus and desire and the so-called 'surge' (increase in US troops) is seen as a necessary element in tactical flexibility. Petraeus agrees. Success appears relative to the end game! Forgotten in the scramble for this 'moment of truth' is an apparent 'last gasp' rationale by most Democrats and some Republicans. Senator John Warner, former Chair of the Foreign Relations, reminds: 'whether the plan succeeds or fails, mission against terrorists and those who harbor them continues'; a question of the 'dual command' concept appears.

Dual-command fits in the mantle of Counter- Insurgency and is not a new concept; rather it has found roots in wars past and in Vietnam. Task Force South, a combined headquarters (two US airborne battalions and the ARVN(Army VN)23rd Division) was created under the command of Colonel John Cleland. Operationally the two commanders worked together as a vehicle to aid the VN commander in tactical and support decisions in a combat theater. This was known as Vietnamization -the planned turn over of command to the Vietnamese in 1968. This appears identical to the 'new plan' in Iraq where embedded officers/NCOs will work together in US/Iraqi units aimed at the psychological and actual assimilation by Iraqi leaders of combat leadership.

As a part of Task Force South I watched a dynamic commander create a competent counterpartI visualize no less from General Petraeus.....