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Voiceover: The following is a production of the Pritzker Military Museum and Library. Bringing citizens and citizen soldiers together through the exploration of military history, topics, and current affairs, this is Pritzker Military Presents.
Clarke: Welcome to Pritzker Military Presents with Dr. Peter Mansoor, Colonel US Army Retired, on his book Surge: My Journey with General David Petraeus and the Remarking of the Iraq War. I’m your host Ken Clarke, and this program is coming to you from the Pritzker Military Museum and Library in downtown Chicago, and it's sponsored by members of the Museum and Library. This program and hundreds more are available on demand at PritzkerMilitary.org. In February of 2007, General David Petraeus, then commanding general multinational force Iraq, returned to a deteriorating situation in Iraq. The landscape of the war was exceedingly grim at the end of 2006, and he had been tasked by President Bush to lead a coalition military surge to provide security to Baghdad and Al Anbar Province. Bush described the overall objective of the surge as establishing a unified democratic federal Iraq that can govern itself, defend itself, and sustain itself and as an ally in the War on Terror. By helping the Iraqis clear and secure neighborhoods and protect the local population, Bush hoped the surge would provide the time and conditions conducive to reconciliation between communities in the region. In his second tour in Iraq, Colonel Peter Mansoor served as executive officer to General Petraeus during the surge, and he became an invaluable resource to this incredible challenge. Mansoor's book surge is an insider's view of this decisive phase of the Iraq War, using newly declassified documents, unpublished manuscripts, interviews, and author notes, and published sources, Surge explains how President Bush, Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki, Ambassador Crocker, General Petraeus, and other leaders shaped the surge from the center of the maelstrom from Baghdad and Washington. Dr. Mansoor is a retired US Army colonel. He is the General Raymond E. Mason Junior Chair of Military History at the Ohio State University. He assumed this position in September 2008 after a twenty-six year career in the US Army that culminated in his service during the War in Iraq. A 1982 distinguished graduate of the United States Military Academy, Colonel Mansoor served in a variety of command and staff positions during his military career, including postings with the 3rd armored cavalry regiment, the 11th armored cavalry regiment, with the opposing forces at the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, and as commander of the 1st squadron 10th cavalry. During his first tour in Iraq, Colonel Mansoor commanded the 1st Brigade 1st armored division from 2003 to 2005, including thirteen months in combat in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Following, Colonel Mansoor resided at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York as a senior military fellow. He then served as the founding director of the US Army Marine Corps Counter Insurgency Center at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas where he helped edit the counterinsurgency field manual, which was used to reshape the conduct of the war in Iraq. In the fall of 2006 he also served on the Joint Chiefs of Staff Council of Colonels that reexamined the strategy for the war. Please join me in welcoming to the Pritzker Military Museum and Library Colonel Peter Mansoor.
(Applause)
Mansoor: Thanks Ken. I appreciate it. Well, thank you all for being here tonight, and thanks to the Pritzker Military Library and Museum for inviting me to speak tonight. I think a little bit of background on why I wrote this book would be in order. 'Cause when I fished my military service in order to go to Ohio State and assume a chair in military history, I thought that this book would be written maybe twenty years down the road.
when more of the documents got declassified and there was more time, more perspective behind us. But in 2010 I was at a conference hosted by the Johns Hopkins School for Advanced International Studies, and he had literally assembled a who's who of the counterinsurgency world to discuss the surge in Afghanistan, which was--you know, that was the first year of the surge of forces to Afghanistan. And as we went around the table and started talking about the surge in Afghanistan, it was clear that most of the discussion was about the surge in Iraq and what had happened or not happened. And to me it was like the parable of the blind men trying to figure out what the elephant is. One of them feels the trunk and says it's a snake, and another one feels the foot and says, no, it's a tree. None of them had a holistic view of what had gone on during the surge, what it had done, the way it was designed, the way it was executed. And I decided then and there that if I could get the documents that were needed to write it declassified, then I would write it. And fortunately the department of Defense was forthcoming in declassifying all the reports, the weekly reports that General Petraeus had written to Secretary Gates during the surge, which I edited as well. And I was able to use them then as the basis to write Surge. I was also fortunate in that I knew all the principle actors. General Odiero, for instance, the commander multinational corps Iraq, gave me access to his unpublished manuscript on the war, and I used that as well. So having access to material that no other historian or academic or journalist had at the time, I thought this would be a worthwhile contribution to the discussion of what went on during the surge, but more broadly why the war turned out the way it did. And I begin back in 2003. I don’t discuss the decision to go to war. I think that’s been debated quite a bit. And if you ask what I think about that, I thought the war was a mistake. I argued that at the Army War College at the time. I was a student. I thought our policy of dual containment of Iran and Iraq was working, and we didn't have to go to the extent of removing Saddam Hussein from power, and but having said that, I found myself shortly thereafter at war with the Ready First combat team, 1st brigade 1st army division in Baghdad, and then a few years alter going back to Iraq with General Petraeus. So what went wrong in the Iraq War? Well, the bush administration made some key assumptions in this war, and I think every administration that enters into combat, into war, makes assumptions. And it's not necessarily wrong to do that as long as you revisit those assumptions periodically. And I think primary among those assumptions were these three: that this would be a war of liberation, that the Iraqis would by and large welcome the US presence, that we would remove a hated and despised dictator, free Iraqis from the grip of the Baathist dictatorship, and then bring a new style of government to their society. And while that was true for perhaps seventy to eighty percent of Iraq, it was not true for the people that had benefited from Saddam Hussein's regime. And this then was a problem, because that's a pretty significant minority who are gonna be angry about what we had done, and we had really no plan how to deal with them. The second assumption was that the infrastructure in Iraq would remain intact. The government by and large would remain intact. We would remove the very top leaders, perhaps the first three levels of the Baath party, the top maybe thousand Baathists. But by and large the civil service would remain at their posts, the government would remain functioning, and we would simply overlay a new leadership on top of it, and it would continue to run. Moreover our bombing campaign would not be targeted at the Iraqi infrastructure. We wouldn't destroy the electrical grid or the water system or anything of that nature. But although our own bombing campaign id not destroy the Iraqi infrastructure, it turned out the Iraqis were more than capable of doing that themselves once the constraints of the police state were lifted and once they found themselves unleashed. The Iraqis engaged in large-scale looting of the resources of their country, beginning with the government facilities and the infrastructure. This should not have been a surprise to us, even if you
don’t read history. In the living history of the people in power in 2003, we had seen massive looting every time a government had collapsed. Panama 1989, the LA riots in 1992, Haiti in 1994, Bosnia in 1996, Kosovo in 1999. Every time government authority was removed, there would be massive looting. And yet our own rules of engagement had nothing to say about what we do with looters. Do we shoot them? Do we apprehend them? Do we do anything to protect the infrastructure of Iraq? There was no thought put into it. And as a result even though our own bombing campaign did not destroy the government infrastructure it was nevertheless destroyed. The third, and I think probably the most important of these assumptions, was that the Iraqis would freely support a transition to a liberal democracy. The unwritten assumption here was that a liberal democracy and a capitalist market system are universally shared values, that if all constraints on a people are removed, that this is the form of government that they would freely choose, and therefore we wouldn’t have to keep a large force for security or to occupy Iraq because they would--the Iraqis would self organize around this new democratically elected government of their own choosing. And that was, I think, and assumption that got us into real trouble, because it’s not true that necessarily this is the form of government that people would choose if they have the--if they have the unlimited right to choose. Iraqis, maybe the ones that comprise the majority of the people, the Shiite Arabs, maybe they would have chosen that form of government because they outnumber everyone else and therefore they’d outnumber everyone else. But that’s not necessarily the case with the Kurds or the Sunni Arabs. For the part of the American military in terms of the way it approached the Iraq War, in the previous decade it had put a lot of thought into what the future of warfare would be in the post Cold War era. And most senior military leaders agreed that the world was undergoing a revolution in military affairs, a revolution predicated on very high-tech intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance sensors and systems, married up with guided weapons, often called precision guided weapons. And that using this combination of what’s known as ISR and guided weapons, there wouldn’t have to be a lot of troops on the ground. Forces could be more high-tech, more mobile, and you don’t need the massive forces, I’d say, we used in the campaign for Northwest Europe in 1944 and 1945. But this really didn’t take into account, I think, the history of warfare--that boots on the ground are essential to stabilizing areas of the world that are ungoverned, and that you can't do that from 10,000 feet with a predator drone. And so this concept that rapid decisive operations would lead us to victory was only true for maybe the first six weeks or eight weeks of the war, and after that the question was, okay, what next? Well, if you assume away that there will be any problems because the Iraqis would freely self organize around a liberal democracy, then there is no problem. But there was a problem. As a result perhaps of this mindset and these assumptions, there was a failure to plan adequately for the occupation of Iraq. If you go back into history and figure out when we started planning, say, for the occupation of Germany during WWII, the answer is 1942 with the creation of the Army Civil Affairs System. Three years before the war ended, before we actually had to occupy Germany. So there was a lot of thought put into it. You got to the Iraq War. The planning began in February, three months before we actually had to occupy Iraq. And as a result the organization that was tasked with conducting reconstruction operations, the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Affairs, was hastily put together under Lieutenant General Retired Jay Garner, and really was no the robust structure we needed to run the occupation. In fact it was quickly replaced by the Coalition Provisional Authority, which was perhaps even more history put together and had a lot of problems of its own. As we on the ground said at the time, the Coalition Provisional Authority or CPA stood for Can't Provide Anything. So the failure to plan for occupation led to a very chaotic first several months after the regime of Saddam Hussein was taken down and
we compounded these sort of planning errors, if you will, with our errors that were politically based mostly in the post-major combat operations phase. When ambassador Jerry Bremer, old Paul Bremer III, got on the ground and stood up the Coalition Provisional Authority, he promulgated two orders very quickly without a lot of discussion and almost no discussion at all with the senior military leader on the ground, but almost no discussion within the Bush administration as well, and in fact President Bush acknowledges this in his memoir decision points. he says, you know, really we should have put more time and effort into these major decisions and teed them up for discussion with the national Security Council, but in fact they did not, and he realizes now that that was a mistake. He says that in the end we may have come tot he same conclusion and done the same thing, but at least we would have been more aware of the second and third order effects of what could have gone wrong with these orders. And the first was the extensive de-Baathification of Iraqi society. Now Bremer likened de-Baathification to de-Nazification in WWII. We got the Nazis out of power, they weren't allowed to run the civil service anymore, and so forth. But in fact his history is a little bit off, because while that was maybe true for the immediate postwar period, the Germans, once they were given sovereignty back, immediately brought a lot of the Nazi people back into power—not the top ones of course, but the sort of rank and file who had run the government. A lot of them were pardoned, and they just moved on with their lives. They were able to fit into West German society into politics and so forth into their occupations. But what de-Baathification did was it put out of work not just the top three levels of the Baath party—say the top thousand Baathists beginning with Saddam Hussein and his immediate family, but it removed from their positions about thirty thousand-- thirty to forty thousand Iraqis who had joined the Baath party because you had to join the Baath party in order to get good government jobs. Now, who were these people? Doctors, lawyers, engineers, civil servants, university professors. All of the same people, our own war plans assumed would remain in their positions when we destroyed the regime of Saddam Hussein. And instead we removed them from their positions, and a government that was already teetering on the verge of incompetence became incompetent overnight because you removed all the civil servants that made it run and invalidated your own war plan. Furthermore these people were not given—they were not only deprived of their jobs, but they were not given their pensions, no way to take care of their families. They couldn’t get government work in the future. They couldn’t run for office. All of this was denied by the de-Baathification decree. And in my estimation with one stroke of a pen, Jerry Bremer created the political basis for the insurgency, because most of these people were Sunni Arabs, and they decided at that point that there was no future for them in the new Iraq, and that they would take up arms instead to protest. The second decision was to disband the Iraqi army. Now in his memoirs he says, "Well, I was only acknowledging the obvious. The soldiers had taken off their uniforms and they had gone home. And so we just disbanded the army," it's a pretty disingenuous statement though, because what he doesn’t say is the soldiers took their weapons home with them. And that if you wanted to call them back to the colors, you could. In fact when we realized that having several hundred thousand armed young men on the streets of Iraq, or Iraq cities with no job and no future was probably not a good thing, we offered to pay them a stipend--three months back pay, three months forward pay, six months pay total--just to get them started on a new life, and they all showed up. And it would have been easy enough at that point to sign them back into the service if they chose to do so after all jobs were scarce and we needed people to do things like guard the infrastructure that was being looted. This again was part of our own war plan. It assumed that the Iraqi army would remain in their barracks, would remain in place, and that we could use it in a security role in the postwar period. And our own government produced an order that
invalidated our own government's war plan, 'cause there was very little thought put into it. Now that was with the rank and file of the soldiers. What this also did was put out of their jobs the officer corps, for whom being a soldier was an honorable profession. You know, I was a soldier for twenty-six years. I'm very proud of my service, and I'm sure the Iraqi officers were as well. And so they obviously were denied their jobs. They were denied their pensions as well. But most importantly in Iraqi society they were deprived of their honor. Many of them took at that point took their not-inconsiderable military talents with them into the insurgency, and with the second stroke of a pen, Jerry Bremer created the military basis for the insurgency. And the final thing he did was to create an Iraqi governing council that was composed of politicians, most of whom had served the time--in fact almost all of them had served the time under Saddam Hussein's regime outside of the country plotting their way back in. They were very holy sectarian, and as a result they simply proceeded to divide the Iraqi government ministries among themselves, kick out any employees remaining after the Baathification decree, and pack their ministries with their party faithful. And as a result the government became completely inept at that point. I like this cartoon. You know, you all--I miss Gary Larson and the Far Side, but this is one of my favorites. Shows a Tyrannosaurus rex with four stars on his shoulder, so that's our generals before the Iraq War, and their view of strategy. And then every day on the calendar, it's "Kill something and eat it." And my division commander Marty Dempsey and the corps commander Ricardo Sanchez all had the same sort of mantra. Stay on the offensive, stay on the offensive. And although that worked for a certain period of time, in fact what we needed was a more holistic construct to deal with a situation that quickly turned from a reconstruction operation to a counterinsurgency operation. We groped for a way ahead. We didn't have enough forces on the ground, so we didn't have enough resources, and we, like I said, lacked an operational concept to using them in a manner that would be conducive to achieving our goals. Nevertheless we had several successes during this first year. We killed Uday and Qusay Hussein, the hated sons of Saddam. We defeated the first Ramadan offensive in October/November 2003. By--this was the first of annual Ramadan offensives by the insurgents. In fact as we did that President Bush was in a National Security Council meeting saying, "I don't want to hear that we're facing an insurgency. I'm not there yet." and this is right in the middle of this period where we are confronting the insurgents' first major offensive. And again shows you how the Bush administration was unable to readdress it's assumptions, at least not until 2006, which led to the surge. We captured Saddam in December of that year, and then all of this really took the wind out of the sails of the insurgency for a while, and I asked some of the Iraqis in my area, you know, what do you think happens next, and they said, "Well we think the insurgency will just wither away." That might have been the case had we made a new outreach to the Sunni Arabs, who we had alienated with the de-Baathification decree and the disbanding of the army and the creation of a highly sectarian Iraqi governing council. But in fact that outreach was never made, at least not that year. It was finally made during the surge. We'll get to that. Instead we decide that the problem is not the growing insurgency. We're the problem. It's not them, it's us. That we are--we were a virus infecting Iraqi society, and the longer we stayed inside Iraqi cities, the more antibodies in the form of insurgents we would create. And so really to tamp things down, all we had to do was remove our presence from Iraq's urban areas, which we did in 2004. But in fact all this did was left ungoverned space in these cities. And nature pours a vacuum, and into that ungoverned space poured Shi'ite militias that were forming and increasingly Sunni insurgents and Al Qaeda in Iraq, the terrorists who Jihadist, who flocked into Iraq and after we took down the Hussein regime. And then we decided, well, okay, we're gonna--we've removed ourselves from the cities, and now all we have to do is turn the government over to the Iraqis. If we have elections they'll elect
a government that had more legitimacy, and then everything will be well. But in fact what
the election of 2005 did was actually increase Sunni concerns that they would be
marginalized in the new Iraq. They knew that they were a minority. Actually not all of
them did. Some believed that Sunnis were a majority. But the ones that understood,
understood they would be outvoted and therefore they would be out governed. And so
they simply didn’t vote. They did not want to legitimize a democratic election that would
removed them from power ‘cause they didn’t trust the other segments of Iraqi society to
give them their fair share of power and resources after an election. And so the elections
of 2005 made matters worse, not better. In the midst of this the Bush administration is
really groping with what to do. And President Bush finally decides that we will simply
stand up Iraqi security forces, police and army units, over time turn matters over to them,
and then we’ll withdraw. And the famous phrase, “as the Iraqis stand up, we will stand
down.” It really was not a strategy for victory. It was a strategy for withdrawal. You can
see here on this slide it maps the security incidence in Iraq from two thousand--January
2004 to August of 2008. And you can see in January 2004 after we caught Saddam that
the security incidences are less than three hundred per week. And these--this is
nationwide. And security incidence is anything that’s of a warlike nature--attacks against
infrastructure, bombs, roadside bombs, even those found. If you find a roadside bomb,
that’s considered a security incident. Sniper ambush, small arm attacks, grenade
attacks, or mortar rocket attacks. So you can see what we’re measuring here. And you
can see that period--January, February, and into early March 2004 where we really had
an opportunity to reach out to the Sunni Arabs, and we didn’t. But from that point on with
blips here and thee, usually upward during the Ramadan periods, the number of security
incidents rises steadily and relentlessly until by early 2006 the security incidents are
more than 1300 per week, and Iraq is really coming apart. And the key episode in this
unraveling was the bombing of the Al Askari shrine, the golden-dome mosque in Samara
in February of 2006. This was the fourth holiest shrine in Shiite Islam. Samara by that
point in time was a holy Sunni city, so the Shiites blamed this destruction, the lack of
security around the shrine, on the Sunnis. And at that point I had told Ali al Sistani made
the statement that if the security forces aren’t going to protect our holy sites, the faithful
will. And that was all the Shiite militias needed, that was al the impetus they needed to
sweep through Sunni neighborhoods, kill Sunni young men and women, capture them,
torture them, conduct sectarian cleansing of Baghdad's neighborhoods, force them out
of their neighborhoods where they had grown up, and really begin a civil war in Iraq
between Sunni and Shiite Arabs. By December 2006 more than 3,500 Iraqis were being
killed each month to ethno sectarian violence. And in the midst of this our politician were
saying, "Oh, the solution to their problem is simple. All they have to do is reconcile." If
you reconcile--if they reconcile then everything will be well. Well, imagine if 35,000
Americans were being killed each month to politically motivated violence, and to have
some foreign power say, "All you need to do is reconcile. Everything will be okay." It
wouldn’t happen, and it wouldn’t happen in Iraq either unless the level of violence came
down. And that was one of the reasons for the surge, that unless we brought the level of
violence down, Iraq would unravel and a civil war would tear the country apart. The
problem is that multinational force Iraq at this point in time under the command of
General George Casey did not adjust its strategic approach to the war, which was
focused on killing and capturing terrorist and insurgent operatives. Stay on the offensive,
right? Tyrannosaurus rex, kill something and eat it. And a rapid transition of security
responsibilities to Iraq security forces--Iraqi security forces that in part, in the case of the
national police, we complicit in the sectarian violence tearing Iraq apart. And his solution
to this problem in 2006 was to increase the very thing that was creating the problem in
the first place. You can tell this from the joint campaign plan that was promulgated in
April of 2007, and—I'm sorry, 2006. And this was two months after the Al Askari shrine had been destroyed, after civil war breaks out, after sectarian violence breaks out. And in that campaign plan, there was this wonderful phrase on page eleven. And the planners were considering wild cards. These are black swan type events what could go wrong that we're really not thinking about? And their very first one that they outline was a trigger event sparks widespread sectarian violence, which spirals into civil war. Potential trigger events include a desecration of a Shia religious symbol. Something that had happened just two months before, and they--it was right under their noses, and they were not assessing it properly. And you can see here in this slide how civilian deaths spiked upward at that point from February 2006 to December, and like I said more than 3,500 Iraqis being killed every month. So as we were designing the surge, what were we looking at? What were the security challenges we were looking at? If you can see on this map obviously we're looking at the sectarian violence in Baghdad, and that was the heart of Iraq. That was the part we needed to get under control most quickly. Al Qaeda at that point was in control of the Euphrates river valley out in Al Anbar province, except for the major urban areas. But even in the some of the major urban areas they controlled much of the neighborhoods. There were Arab Kurd tensions up on the green line, especially the city of Kirkuk. Al Qaeda's main effort was actually up in Tal Afar and Mosul. And you wonder why we had to fight ISIS, the successor group to Al Qaeda in Iraq up in Mosul. 'Cause it was their main effort then and it was their main effort today as well. You had foreign fighter flow coming in from Syria. This was the Jihadists mostly. Lethal aid pouring in from Iran and then inter-Shiite competition in the Euphrates and Tigress river valleys south of Baghdad. And even in the oil-rich city of Basra, Shiite militias in control. So by late summer of 2006 it was pretty clear that the United States was headed for defeat in Iraq. As Ken had mentioned I was on the council of colonels that helped the Joint Chiefs of Staff rethink the strategy for the Iraq war. And in one of our briefings to them, we said, "We are not winning, therefore we are losing, and time is not on our side." and this really took them by surprise, because the joint staff did not put it in those terms to them, that we are losing the war. They thought things were okay. This is what they were being told from Baghdad. There were parallel strategic views being taken at the National Security Council by Steve Hadley. That was probably the most important one. The joint chiefs I mentioned, and then the state department also had an effort. But President Bush is the one who made the final decision to surge forces into Iraq. And he should get the credit. It was a very politically brave thing for him to do when every political headwind was blowing against him at that time. The Democratic Party wanted us out of Iraq, the international community wanted us out of Iraq, most Iraqis wanted us out of Iraq. And even his own party was wavering at the time. And instead, he said, "No, I'm in the war to win." And in his words, "We're gonna double down and surge." And General Petraeus had a meeting with him in the oval office and said, "Respectfully sir, it's not double down. It's all in." The reference to the Texas Hold'em poker where you put your whole pot of chips into the center of the table for one final bid for victory. But more importantly this was not just a surge of forces. In General Petraeus's words, this was a surge of ideas. The forces, these twenty-five to thirty thousand troops that surged into Iraq would be used differently in accordance with a new counterinsurgency doctrine that was published in 2006 in which I had a hand in editing the final version. And what that manual said, field manual 23-4, was that the cornerstone of any COIN effort, any counterinsurgency effort, is establishing security for the civilian populace. Without a secure environment, no permanent reforms can be implemented, and disorder spreads. And, oh, by the way, lots of people get killed, civil war continues, society unravels. And so this is hat we were going to implement with the surge was new counterinsurgency concept. And the surge had a lot of components. I'll try to walk
through them fairly quickly here. I mentioned one, and that was the reinforcements that enabled a change in this strategic approach towards the war. That meant the movement of forces off of the big bases that had grown up over the previous three years and back out into the communities. Now we realized, you know, it's not about us. It's about the militias and the terrorists and the insurgents and about this sectarian infighting and sectarian cleansing that's going on. And unless we get our forces out there, things are gonna go from bad to worse. And so we moved from these large forward operating bases, three or four of them on the outskirts of Baghdad, into seventy-six joint security stations and combat outposts and patrol bases within Baghdad. And this was happening in other cities as well, say for instance Ramadi and Fallujah. And that was—enabled us to help secure the people where they lived. You can't do it by driving convoys out of camp victory or camp liberty twice a day. In the words of one sergeant, "driving around waiting to get blown up." You have to be where the people live, conduct foot patrols, get to know them. And as they got to know them, and as they got to know them then and they positioned out in the communities, low and behold the people would start to give them information on who the bad guys were which enabled our offensive operations to succeed. And the Iraqis surged right along with us. Now we added twenty to thirty thousand troops. During this same period of the surge, January 2007 to July 2008, Iraqi security forces increased by 135,000. And increasingly they were more capable because of our advisory effort that was finally gaining some traction and because we were getting rid of some of the bad actors. For instance we got rid of all of the brigade commanders in the Iraqi national police. Most of the battalion commander—two thirds of them—and some of them more than once. And we put in more technocratic leadership and leadership that was more interested in the country rather than their sector ethnicity. And so the Iraqi forces got better, they could partner with more US forces, 'cause there were more US forces to partner with, and they could model their behavior after our soldiers who are very disciplined and competent. We improved how to control the population. We built barriers everywhere. Baghdad became probably the greatest gated community in the planet. And at the entrances to each neighborhood we had biometric checkpoints where people would come in. we'd take a census of the neighborhood so we knew who belonged there. If someone came, they had to put a fingerprint on a scanner. And if they weren't from that neighborhood they were questioned. And, oh, by the way, we had a database of fingerprints lifted from roadside bombs that had not exploded, and we matched fingerprints of people moving into neighborhoods against the database of people who had planted roadside bombs. We got more than 2,000 people that way. 2,000 insurgents who ended up then being detained with these biometric identity devices. There was more synergy between and conventional and special operations forces. We finally had enough forces to pursue the enemy throughout the breadth and depth of Iraq. There were no more safe havens, which had--there were actually parts of Iraq that had been turned into insurgent safe havens and terrorist safe havens over the previous three years, 'cause we never went into their. We didn't have enough troops to do it. The area northwest of Bagdad for instance, and we finally had enough troops to do that. But we realized you can't kill and capture your way to victory--that we had to reach out to the insurgents, those who were reconcilable, and bring them back into the political process. And General Petraeus created a force strategic engagement cell to do just that, and he staffed it with British officers who had experience in Northern Ireland doing the same thing. And finally we revamped our detention system. We realized that it was a wreck, that far too many insurgents were being turned into--who might have had a small role in an insurgency were being turned into hardcore terrorists by the hardcore faithful in these detention camps. And so we finally created high security cells to detain the worst of the offenders and rehabilitate the vast majority of the Iraqis and release them
back into Iraqi society to the recognizance so their tribal sheiks and their imams and their political leaders. And that was a very successful program. The surge was a holistic strategy. It wasn’t simply a change in tactics. If this slide shows what Al Qaeda needs to survive, and Al Qaeda was the wolf closest to the sled. They were the ones we focused on. Weapons, senior leader guidance, money, command and control, ideology, popular support. They need safe havens and foreign fighters. Then we would build a strategy to deny them these items. And there were obviously kinetic operations, military operations that were aimed at this. But there was a lot of other things as well. There were tribal awakenings, sons of Iraq movement that brought people, local Iraqis into the process of securing their own neighborhoods, increased intelligence, surveillance, and recognizance. This was the period in which Secretary Gates emphasized to the air force that they needed to start increasing the number of their armed drones significantly because this was a war-winning asset, or at least one that could help I mentioned the detainee operations. There was a nation-building component to this, but it wasn’t the primary component. It was just a piece of the strategy. And then finally there was an interagency component to engage with source countries, keep the jihadists from flocking to Iraq, and fight the battle of information. So what did the surge do in retrospect? And I contend that it was a catalyst. It was a catalyst in at least four ways. The tribal rebellion against Al Qaeda in Iraq. The surge wasn’t the cause of it, but without the surge the tribal rebellion would have confined to the confines of Ramadi, where it began in the summer of 2006. Or maybe Al Anbar province as a whole. But when General Petraeus went out to Ramadi and realized what was happening there, he ordered his subordinate commanders to support the Awaken, wherever it was. And as a result it was able to expand into the other provinces of Iraq and become a real force. And you can see here General Petraeus with the head of the Awakening, Sheik Abdul Sattar Abu Risha al Rishawi. Great guy. Killed by Al Qaeda in September 2007. Right out of Hollywood casting for the role. He could have been an extra in Lawrence of Arabia. The next thing the surge did as a catalyst was it was a catalyst for the creation of the Sons of Iraq movement. These were neighborhood watch units that reported to US military leaders. Some of them were former insurgents, but many were just concerned citizens that wanted to secure their neighborhoods. They were—came to us first and said, "You know, we're tired of Al Qaeda preying on our people. Can we secure our neighborhoods without having you shoot us in the back?" and at that point General Petraeus said, "Well, not only can I do that, but I'll support you," and ordered his commanders to support the Sons of Iraq movement. We eventually agreed to pay for their security services because we realized they needed a way to take care of their families. But it was cheap. It was sixteen million dollars a month. It was cheap at probably ten times the price, because what this gave us was 103,000 people securing their neighborhoods against insurgents and terrorists. That’s equivalent to 103 battalions of light infantry, ones that we didn't have to provide any combat service support for. Really an important movement. The surge was a catalyst too for the Jaysh al Mahdi ceasefire. I won't get into why it was called, but in August 2007 after a gun battle in the holy city of Karbala, Muqtada al Sadr declared a ceasefire. And it held for the next six months and even beyond that. But he would never have done that had his communities continued to be preyed upon by Sunni terrorists and in fact it was the security gains, the manifest security gains of the surge that enabled his movement, the Jaysh al Mahdi, to stand down, at least for a time. And finally the surge was a catalyst for the Iraqi government to confront its own problems. In March of 2008 Nouri al Maliki decided to combat Shiite militias in Basra, and then Sadr City and then Al Amarrah. In Maysan province, this was the charge of the knights. He would never have done’s that had the surge not been successful in reducing the level of ethno sectarian violence in the country. And it was a hugely important development
because it showed the Iraqis that the prime minister could be a prime minster for all of Iraq and not just his political party, 'cause he was taking on members of his won sect by fighting them down in the south. You can see here how sectarian violence reduced in Baghdad from December 2006 where it was at the all time high to where by July of 2008 it was essentially at zero in Baghdad. And the same chart on security incidents--by the end of the surge in July 2008 we're at that same low level of security incidents that we were at back in January of 2004. The difference is that this time we did take advantage politically to bring the Sunni Arabs back into the fold and back into the political process. So if the surge succeeded in doing all that--reducing security incidents by ninety percent, removing sectarian violence in Baghdad and so forth--why didn’t it succeed over the long term? And this is where I think the differing viewpoints of our president have a real difference. George Bush looked on Iraq as he looked on South Korea. Sixty-five years after the Korean War, we still have US troops in South Korea. That's how he wanted Iraq to be--a US ally, a democratic state, one with a long-term security relationship with the United States. And had it morphed into that, then we would not be where we are today. The surge would have worked over the long haul. But President Barack Obama, elected to office and very much a different viewpoint. He looked at Iraq through the lens of the Vietnam War, a war that in his viewpoint was strategically misguided and one from which we should pull US troops out as soon as we could. And the result was that in my view we wont eh war, spiked the ball on the two-yard line, and lost the peace. In the election of 2010, Ayad Allawi won. Ayad Allawi was a Shiite Arab who had the backing of the Sunni Arabs as well and a lot of the secular Iraqis, but Nouri al Maliki ended up as the prime minster. And why is that? Well, our--the Obama administration decided that Nouri al Maliki was our guy, that we would back him for another term in office rather than backing the winner of the election. And that was followed the next year by pulling US forces out of Iraq. And what that did is it unleashed Nouri al Maliki to do what he wanted to do in the first place: govern Iraq in a highly divisive and sectarian manner, and the Sunnis were once again alienated from the political system. And this paved the way for the resurrection of Al Qaeda in Iraq, now rebranded as ISIS. And if you would like more of that, we can get into it in the Q and A. But I think the surge, we can learn a lot from it. Unfortunately it did not serve over the long term to achieve our national interest in Iraq, but it could have under different circumstances. So thank you for listening, and I look forward to your questions.

(Applause)

1: You say that the United States deserted Ayad Allawi. Ayad Allawi had been a walk into the British very early on, the British gave him to the United States, the United States supported him. Why did we, all of sudden after years and years of support to Ayad Allawi, why did we desert him?

Mansoor: This is a great question. Our Ambassador Christopher Hill wrote about this, and in his memoirs he talks about it. He did not believe that Allawi was a competent politician. He didn't think he could succeed in forming a coalition or governing Iraq, and yet he had already been the prime minister of Iraq the first year that we gave sovereignty back to Iraq in 2004, 2005. And he convinced his superiors in Washington that he--we could make a better Maliki. And those aren’t my words. Those are the words he used in the article. "We could make a better Maliki if we supported him." And it's astonishing because the--Maliki was also Tehran's candidate for prime minister. And so if you're a Sunni Arab, and you see the United States and Tehran and Iran agreeing that this person should be the next prime minster of Iraq, ignoring the results of the election, what are you gonna think? You know, the stuff that we've been talking about--democracy, side with us, we'll give you--make sure you get your fair share of power and resources in the new Iraq. It's all a lie. And they simply then at that point walked away. And at that
point the rise of ISIS was possible. So I can’t answer your question why we wouldn’t support the winner of the election. At least give him the chance to form a government and follow through with the democratic principles that we had helped enshrine in their constitution.

Clarke: Thank you.
Mansoor: Thank you very much.

(Appause)
Clarke: Thank you to Dr. Peter Mansoor for an outstanding discussion. The book is *Surge: My Journey with General David Petraeus and the Remaking of the Iraq War*, published by Yale University Press. To learn more about the Pritzker Military Museum and Library, visit in person or online at PritzkerMilitary.org. Thank you, and please join us next time on *Pritzker Military Presents*.

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(Theme music)
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