
ALL IN

THE EDUCATION OF
GENERAL DAVID PETRAEUS

PAULA BROADWELL

WITH VERNON LOEB

THE PENGUIN PRESS

New York

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DESIGNED BY NICOLE LAROCHE

[*Map of Afghanistan*](#) by Jeffrey Ward

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ALWAYS LEARNING

PEARSON

**TO MY THREE FAVORITE TROOPERS,
SCOTT, LUCIEN AND LANDON BROADWELL,
AND TO THOSE WHO SERVE**

To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

—Alfred, Lord Tennyson, “Ulysses”

“This isn’t double down, Mr. President. It’s all in.”

—General David Petraeus to President George W. Bush in the Oval Office, January 23, 2007, on the eve of the surge in Iraq

AFGHANISTAN



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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

- ABP** Afghan Border Police
- A-CAAT** Afghan Counterinsurgency Advisory and Assistance Team
- ALP** Afghan Local Police program
- ANA** Afghan National Army
- ANP** Afghan National Police
- ANSF** Afghan National Security Forces
- APRP** Afghan Peace and Reintegration Program
- BCT** brigade combat team
- CAAT** Counterinsurgency Advisory and Assistance Team
- CENTCOM** U.S. Central Command
- CERP** Commander's Emergency Response Program
- CFSOCC-A** Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command-Afghanistan
- CIA** Central Intelligence Agency
- C-IED** counter-improvised explosive device
- CIG** Commander's Initiatives Group
- CINC** commander in chief
- CJCS** Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
- CJIATF** Combined Joint Interagency Task Force
- CNAS** Center for a New American Security
- CODEL** congressional delegation
- COIN** counterinsurgency
- COMISAF** Commander, International Security Assistance Force Afghanistan
- CORDS** Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support
- CPN** criminal patronage network
- DHS** U.S. Department of Homeland Security
- DOD** U.S. Department of Defense
- EKIA** enemy killed in action

EOD explosive ordnance disposal

FAO foreign area officer

FATA Federally Administered Tribal Areas (Pakistan)

FOB forward operating base

GIRoA Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

GMIC Government Media and Information Center

GOVN Government of the Republic of Vietnam

GPS Global Positioning System

HASC House Armed Services Committee

HQN Haqqani network

ICG International Crisis Group

IED improvised explosive device

IJC ISAF Joint Command

INL Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs

ISAF International Security Assistance Force

ISR Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance

JRTC Joint Readiness Training Center

JSOC Joint Special Operations Command

KIA killed in action

MEDEVAC medical evacuation

MLRS Multiple Launch Rocket System

MNSTC-I Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq

MOI Ministry of the Interior

MRAP Mine-Resistant Ambush-Protected vehicle

NAC North Atlantic Council

NATO North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NCO noncommissioned officer

NDS National Directorate of Security (Afghan)

NGO nongovernmental organization

NOFORN no foreign nationals

NROLFSM NATO Rule of Law Field Support Mission

NSA National Security Agency

NSC National Security Council

NSS National Security Staff

NTC National Training Center

NTM–A NATO Training Mission–Afghanistan

ODA (Special Forces) Operational Detachment Alpha

OP observation post

OSD Office of the Secretary of Defense

OTAN Organisation du Traité de l’Atlantique Nord

PICC Palace Information Coordination Center

PID positive identification

POTUS President of the United States

PRT Provincial Reconstruction Team

PTDS Persistent Threat Detection System

RC Regional Command

ROLFF–A Rule of Law Field Force–Afghanistan

SASC Senate Armed Services Committee

SEAL Sea, Air, Land teams

SHAPE Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe

SIGACTS significant activities

SMU Special Mission Unit

SOCOM Special Operations Command

SOTF Special Operations Task Force

SRAP Special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan

TBI traumatic brain injury

TF task force

UAV unmanned aerial vehicle

UNAMA United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

USAID U.S. Agency for International Development

VTC video teleconference

VSO Village Stability Operations

WIA wounded in action

CAST OF CHARACTERS

David M. Axelrod: White House senior adviser.

Joseph Biden: Vice president of the United States (January 2009–present).

Lieutenant General James Bucknall: ISAF deputy commanding general at ISAF headquarters.

Lieutenant General William B. Caldwell: Commander, NATO Training Mission–Afghanistan; commander, Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan (November 2009–present).

David Cameron: Prime minister of the United Kingdom.

Major General John F. Campbell: Commander, ISAF Regional Command East (June 2010–May 2011); 101st Airborne Division commander. Promoted to lieutenant general in September 2011.

Hillary Clinton: U.S. secretary of State (January 2009–present).

Ryan C. Crocker: Ambassador to Iraq during Petraeus’s time there—his civil-military “wingman” in Iraq—and now ambassador to Afghanistan.

Karim Dad: Malik of Khosrow Sofla village in Arghandab District, Kandahar Province.

Ambassador Karl W. Eikenberry: U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan (April 2009–July 2011).

Rahm I. Emanuel: White House chief of staff (January 2009–October 2010).

Lieutenant Colonel David G. Fivecoat: One of Petraeus’s protégés and his aide-de-camp in 2001–02 in Bosnia and during the 2003 invasion into Iraq. Commanded 3rd Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division; deployed to Ghazni and Paktika provinces.

Lieutenant Colonel David S. Flynn: Commanded 1st Battalion, 320th Field Artillery Regiment, 101st Airborne Division; deployed in the Arghandab River Valley, Kandahar Province, during Operation Dragon Strike.

General (Retired) John R. (Jack) Galvin: Longtime mentor to Petraeus. Petraeus served as Galvin’s aide-de-camp while he commanded the 24th Infantry Division, then served as Galvin’s military assistant while he was supreme Allied commander in Europe.

Major Jim Gant: Special Forces operator whose paper *One Tribe at a Time: A Strategy for Success in Afghanistan* influenced Petraeus’s thinking on the Afghan Local Police program.

Ambassador Simon Gass: NATO’s senior civilian representative in Afghanistan (April 2011–present).

Robert Gates: U.S. secretary of Defense (December 2006–July 2011).

Senator Lindsey Graham (R–S.C.): Member of the Armed Services Committee and an Air Force Reserve colonel who has served multiple short drill periods in Iraq and Afghanistan working on law-of-armed-conflict issues.

Colonel Bill Hickman: Petraeus's executive officer in Afghanistan.

Richard Holbrooke: Special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, former U.S. ambassador to the UN.

Chief Warrant Officer Four Mark Howell: Head of Petraeus's personal security detachment (PSD).

Hamid Karzai: President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

General (Retired) Jack Keane: Mentor to Petraeus, former vice chief of staff of the Army.

David Kilcullen: Australian-American defense intellectual and COIN theorist, key adviser to Petraeus during the Iraq surge.

Ambassador Hans Klemm: Coordinating director of Rule of Law and Law Enforcement, U.S. Embassy, Kabul, Afghanistan (July 2010–present).

Peggy Knowlton: Petraeus's mother-in-law.

General William A. Knowlton: Petraeus's father-in-law, superintendent of West Point when Petraeus was a cadet there.

Senator Carl Levin (D–Mich.): Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee; ex-officio member of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence.

Senator Joe Lieberman (Ind.–Conn.): Senior member of the Armed Services Committee.

Major Fernando Lujan: Adviser, ISAF Counterinsurgency Advisory and Assistance Team.

Lieutenant General (Retired) Douglas E. Lute: National Security Staff coordinator for Afghanistan-Pakistan policy.

Nouri al-Maliki: Prime minister of Iraq (May 2006–present).

Brigadier General Mark S. Martins: Commander, NATO Rule of Law Field Support Mission; commander, Rule of Law Field Support Mission–Afghanistan. Worked in Afghanistan in various roles in CJIATF-435 from October 2009 to September 2011.

Senator John McCain (R–Ariz.): Senior member of the Armed Services Committee; ex-officio member of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence.

General (Retired) Stanley A. McChrystal: Commander of USFOR–A/ISAF (June 2010–June 2011).

General (Retired) David McKiernan: General McChrystal's predecessor, commander of ISAF from June 2008 to June 2009.

Brigadier General H. R. McMaster: Director of Combined Joint Interagency Task Force–Shafafiyat, author of *Dereliction of Duty*, Petraeus acolyte.

Colonel Mike Meese: ISAF deputy chief of staff (August 2010–July 2011), head of Social Science Department at West Point, Petraeus's peer at Princeton.

Brigadier General Scott Miller: Commander, Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command–Afghanistan (March 2009–June 2011).

Haji Shah Mohammed: Arghandab District governor during Operation Dragon Strike.

Saad Mohseni: Founder of Tolo TV and CEO of its parent organization, Moby Group.

Admiral Mike Mullen: Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (October 2007–September 2011).

Lieutenant Colonel (Retired) John Nagl: Counterinsurgency theorist and Petraeus acolyte. President of CNAS.

General Mohammad Naim: Kandahar's chief of the National Directorate of Security during Operation Dragon Strike.

Colonel (Retired) Keith Nightingale: Longtime mentor of Petraeus, who served under him in Vicenza, Italy, as a second lieutenant. Nightingale had commanded a company in the 1/75th Rangers when Petraeus first met him. He later served as a leader of the Iran Hostage Rescue Mission and the Grenada invasion and helped form the Army Ranger Regiment.

Barack Obama: President of the United States of America.

Michael O'Hanlon: Defense analyst at the Brookings Institution.

Lieutenant Colonel (Retired) Douglas Ollivant: Senior civilian adviser in Regional Command East for the Counterinsurgency Advisory and Assistance Team and former Army officer who worked closely with Petraeus during the surge in Iraq.

Mullah Mohammed Omar: Leader of the Afghan Taliban movement.

Colonel Bill Ostlund: One of Petraeus's platoon leaders when he commanded the 3rd Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division.

Leon Panetta: Director of Central Intelligence (February 2009–June 2011), U.S. secretary of Defense (July 2011–present).

Anne Petraeus: The general's daughter.

Hollister "Holly" Knowlton Petraeus: Wife of General Petraeus.

Miriam Howell Petraeus: Petraeus's mother.

Sixtus Petraeus: Petraeus's father, a Dutch sea captain.

Stephen Petraeus: Petraeus's son, an infantry platoon leader in Wardak Province with the 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team.

Robert Pittman: Retired master sergeant who worked as an adviser for the Asymmetric Warfare Group. Died from wounds suffered in an attack in Kandahar Province on July 30, 2010, during the Battle for Bakersfield.

Anders Fogh Rasmussen: NATO secretary general.

Colonel Abdul Raziq: Key leader in the Afghan Border Police. Later would become interim Kandahar provincial chief of police after a Taliban assassination.

Lieutenant General David M. Rodriguez: Commander, ISAF Joint Command (March 2010–July 2011).

Donald Rumsfeld: U.S. secretary of Defense (November 1975–January 1977; January 2001–

December 2006).

Mohammed Zia Salehi: Chief of administration for the Afghan National Security Council.

Ambassador Mark Sedwill: NATO's senior civilian representative in Afghanistan (February 2010–April 2011).

Captain Andrew Shaffer: One of Lieutenant Colonel Flynn's company commanders in the 1st Battalion, 320th Field Artillery Regiment, 101st Airborne Division.

Rear Admiral Gregory J. Smith: ISAF deputy chief of staff for communications (June 2009–February 2011).

Specialist Michael L. Stansbery: Soldier of the 1st Battalion, 320th Field Artillery Regiment, 101st Airborne Division, who died from wounds suffered in an IED attack on his unit in Kandahar Province on July 30, 2010, during the Battle for Bakersfield.

Sergeant Kyle B. Stout: Soldier of the 1st Battalion, 320th Field Artillery Regiment, 101st Airborne Division, who died from wounds suffered in an IED attack on his unit in Kandahar Province on July 30, 2010, during the Battle for Bakersfield.

Lieutenant Colonel J. B. Vowell: Commanded 2nd Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division; deployed in Kunar Province, along the Pakistan border, during Operation Strong Eagle I.

General (Retired) Carl Vuono: Chief of staff of the Army (June 1987–June 1991). Petraeus served as Vuono's aide-de-camp and assistant executive officer during this time.

Haji Sayed Fazlullah Wahidi: Kunar provincial governor during Operation Strong Eagle.

Chris White: Petraeus's roommate at West Point.

PREFACE

I first met General David H. Petraeus in the spring of 2006, when I was a graduate student at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government. After two tours in Iraq, including command of the 101st Airborne Division during the 2003 invasion, he was visiting Harvard to speak about his experiences and a new counterinsurgency manual he was developing as the three-star commander of the Army's Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. It would get its first real test run a year later, during the surge in Iraq, with Petraeus himself in command.

I was among the students invited by the school to meet with the general at a dinner afterward, because of my military background. I, too, was a West Point graduate, and I had been recalled to active duty three times to work on counterterrorism issues in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. I had since joined the Army Reserve and begun graduate studies with the intent of returning either to active duty or to the policy world. I introduced myself to then-Lieutenant General Petraeus and told him about my research interests; he gave me his card and offered to put me in touch with other researchers and service members working on the same issues. I later discovered that he was famous for this type of mentoring and networking, especially with aspiring soldier-scholars. He immediately responded to my e-mail, inviting me to bounce ideas off him. I took full advantage of his open-door policy to seek insight and share perspectives.

Soon after his visit to Cambridge, Petraeus assumed command of the Multi-National Force in Iraq and the plan to "surge" nearly thirty thousand additional U.S. forces to pull the country back from the brink of civil war. The focus of his command would be comprehensive civilian-military counterinsurgency operations—protection of the Iraqi population from insurgents' intimidation, coercion, violence and murder. To accomplish this task, he moved U.S. forces off big bases and into small outposts in the community. Violence escalated and casualties soared, forcing even advocates to question whether the surge would work. But living among the people paid dividends in trust, familiarity and better intelligence. By midsummer, with Petraeus also supporting reconciliation that would grow to include more than one hundred thousand former Sunni insurgents and Shia militia members, violence had started to fall. By the following summer, the country had stabilized and the surge forces had started coming home. Petraeus had believed the surge could work, and he had overseen its successful execution together with a team of U.S., coalition and Iraqi civilian and military partners.

In 2008, I began to pursue a Ph.D. in public policy and to conduct a case study of Petraeus's leadership. A few months into my research, General Petraeus, who was then leading Central Command, invited me to go for a run with him and his team along the Potomac River during one of his visits to Washington. I figured I could interview him while we ran. Soon I learned what Petraeus means when he says, "The only thing better than a little competition is a lot of competition!" My intent was to test him. I'd earned varsity letters in cross-country and indoor and outdoor track and finished at the top of my class for athletics at West Point; I wanted to see if he could keep stride during an interview. Instead it became a test for me. As we talked during the run from the Pentagon to the Washington Monument and back, Petraeus progressively increased the pace until the talk turned to heavy breathing and we reached a six-minute-per-mile pace. It was a signature Petraeus move. I think

I passed the test, but I didn't bother to transcribe the interview. I later learned that, at the time, he was nearing the end of eight and a half weeks of radiation treatments for prostate cancer.

I intended for my dissertation to trace the key themes—education, experience and the role of key mentors—of Petraeus's intellectual development and to examine these principles in action over his career. But when President Obama put him in charge of the war in Afghanistan in the summer of 2011, I decided to meld my research with an on-the-ground account of his command in Kabul—his last military command, as it turned out. He would again become the face of a highly unpopular war, with a surge of 33,000 U.S. troops deploying. When his command was announced, Lieutenant General David Rodriguez, the operational commander in Afghanistan and the architect of the war plan, told his staff, "Now we're going to win." But the war was at a critical juncture, and many observers both inside and outside the U.S. military weren't so sure.

Petraeus had a year to make the gains in Afghanistan that the president would need in order to begin his promised drawdown of forces in July 2011. Every minute counted. He commanded from his fourteen-hundred-person headquarters in Kabul and traveled frequently throughout Afghanistan visiting the more than 150,000 soldiers from forty-nine nations, of which 100,000 were from the United States. By the fall he seemed to hit his stride. But every day in Afghanistan was hard, and no one was certain how it would end.

This was the story I would report across several months in Afghanistan, observing Petraeus and his team, embedding with combat units, and interviewing dozens of senior officials, officers, soldiers and Afghans. I spent time with infantry, artillery, Special Operations Forces and other military and civilian elements. I reported from the headquarters of the International Security Assistance Force in Kabul, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, and the U.S. Embassy. I flew by helicopter to the sandy desert of Helmand Province, the jagged mountains of the Hindu Kush in eastern Afghanistan and Kandahar's lush Arghandab River Valley. I broke bread with Afghan ministers, businessmen and barefoot villagers. I ate MREs and T-rations in the field with our soldiers, some of whom were my former peers or West Point classmates. I traveled with retired general Jack Keane on a theater-wide assessment in February, and I covered Petraeus's trips back to Washington for his testimony on the war before Congress, his drawdown discussions with the White House, his confirmation hearing to become director of the CIA and his last week in Kabul. Throughout, I had numerous interviews and innumerable e-mail exchanges with Petraeus and his inner circle.

Beyond the strategic focus on Petraeus, his intellectual journey and his larger initiatives, this book also chronicles the year of war at the tactical level through the eyes of three battalion commanders in the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault)—the same division Petraeus had led during the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Lieutenant Colonel David Flynn commanded a repurposed artillery battalion, the "Top Guns," in the Arghandab River Valley, the Taliban's home terrain. Lieutenant Colonel J. B. Vowell led his No Slack battalion on large-scale air assaults into the mountains of Kunar Province, in eastern Afghanistan. And Lieutenant Colonel David Fivecoat, my West Point company mate and Petraeus's aide in Bosnia and during the invasion of Iraq, directed operations in Taliban-infested Ghazni Province in south-central Afghanistan. Finally, the experience of Major Fernando Lujan, a Special Forces officer and specially trained "Afghan Hand," stands as a cautionary tale about the limits of passion and expertise in the face of military bureaucracy. All of their stories are rich examples of leadership on the line.

History has yet to fully judge Petraeus's service in Iraq and Afghanistan, his impact on the U.S. military and his rank among America's wartime leaders. But there is no denying that he achieved a great deal during his thirty-seven-year Army career, not the least of which was regaining the strategic

initiative in both wars that followed the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. His critics fault him for ambition and self-promotion. I will note in the pages that follow that he is driven and goal-oriented, but his energy, optimism and will to win stand out more for me than the qualities seized on by his critics. Serving, in his mind, is winning.

One of Petraeus's favorite quotes comes from Seneca, a first-century Roman philosopher: "Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity." This has been true for Petraeus at many turns; his greatest "luck," however, might have been the opportunity to lead the world's finest troopers over six and a half years of deployments since 9/11.

I've had some luck, too, with this endeavor, and I am grateful and wiser for the journey.

GROUND TRUTH

General David H. Petraeus sat deep in thought as he made the short drive from the Pentagon to the White House. The next three hours could change the course of his life, the course of a war, maybe even the course of the nation. He hadn't a clue what was going to happen. The only comment he made to Chief Warrant Officer Four Mark Howell, his personal security officer since the surge in Iraq, was that he hoped General Stan McChrystal had survived his meeting with President Obama. McChrystal, the four-star commander of the war in Afghanistan, had been called back to Washington the previous day for comments he and his aides had made to a reporter from *Rolling Stone* that some thought came close to insubordination. On this hot and muggy Wednesday morning, June 23, 2010, McChrystal had reported to the White House an hour and a half before Petraeus. By the time Petraeus's black GMC Yukon Denali pulled up at the West Wing security gate, McChrystal had already come and gone. Howell and the rest of the general's inner circle knew they could be heading for Afghanistan if McChrystal had been fired. "We were in a state of denial," Howell said.

Once inside the White House, Petraeus went to a small office down the hall from the Situation Room to see his longtime friend Doug Lute, a retired Army lieutenant general who served as senior adviser and the National Security Council's coordinator for Afghanistan-Pakistan policy. As head of the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM)—and McChrystal's boss—Petraeus was at the White House that morning for his once-a-month meeting with the president and his national security team on Afghanistan and Pakistan. He was disappointed about how the situation had unfolded for McChrystal and was concerned for a trusted colleague. They were old friends and battlefield comrades and had worked closely together over the past year on Afghanistan, the president's "war of necessity," after serving together for several years in Iraq. Afghanistan was at a critical juncture, politically and operationally. "How'd it go for Stan?" Petraeus asked Lute. Lute demurred. It was not a good sign. They made awkward small talk for a few minutes, waiting to head to the Situation Room. Then one of the president's assistants stuck his head in the door. "Has anyone seen General Petraeus?" he asked. "He's wanted up in the Oval."

Petraeus headed upstairs. As he entered the Oval Office, Robert Gates, the Defense secretary, and Hillary Clinton, the secretary of State, were coming out, along with other members of the president's national security team. Obama was alone. Petraeus knew then that Obama had just fired McChrystal without a replacement confirmed, hours before he likely would appear in the Rose Garden and explain his actions to the nation. He and Petraeus sat down together. Obama cut to the chase. "I am asking you, as your president and commander in chief, to take command of the mission in Afghanistan." Petraeus believed that for anyone in uniform, there is only one answer when a president asks such a question, and he said as much. Then, he responded, "Sir, it would be an honor." Petraeus could see the burden Obama and the nation faced at that moment. The discussion was sober and frank as they discussed the way ahead in Afghanistan. Obama explicitly told Petraeus to avoid clearing areas that his troops could not hold, and he reviewed the policy that had been announced at West Point the past

December, including the plan to begin reducing surge forces in July 2011. Obama described his expectations of a military commander, and Petraeus pledged fealty to the civil-military hierarchy, assuring the president that he would also provide forthright military advice. When the general returned downstairs forty-five minutes later, he said to Howell, “Chief, get my wife on the phone.”

Howell figured the die had been cast—McChrystal was out, Petraeus was in. Why else would he be calling his wife? But Howell noticed something about his boss. He thought he saw the same spark in Petraeus’s eyes that he’d last seen when he was commanding the war in Iraq. “It’s that undeniable look in sports where the player is in the zone and he says, ‘Give me the ball, I want the ball,’” Howell said. He dialed Holly Petraeus’s number, got her voice mail and handed the phone to the general, who left a simple message: *Watch the news at 1:30 for a presidential announcement—we’ll be in the Rose Garden.* He asked Howell to send her a text message, too, gave him the phone and went inside the Situation Room just before noon.

Clinton, Gates and Admiral Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, were there, waiting for Petraeus, and the president and Vice President Biden joined them after a few minutes. “This is a bad day; a sorrowful day,” Obama said. Keeping McChrystal in command, he said, would have made it difficult to achieve unity of effort and maintain respect for the military. He acknowledged that replacing him might slow momentum in Afghanistan, though replacing him with Petraeus would mitigate that risk. He wanted no sniping in the press. They needed to be focused, as a team, on the way ahead.

Obama said he had had long conversations on the subject with Gates and Mullen, and now with General Petraeus. The best way forward, he told the room, was for Petraeus to step in as commander of Afghanistan. He noted that he had already committed additional troops to show that America would not allow al-Qaeda to return to Afghanistan. *We’ll see next July if the strategy is working,* Obama said. *If not, we’ll redesign it. It’s important that we deliver a clear message about what we’re trying to do,* he continued. *We have to acknowledge the real tension that exists between how long we stay and how much it costs.* There were rumors of tension with Petraeus, but Obama noted that he had asked Petraeus to meet with him and share his views candidly. *We’ve agreed to trust each other,* Obama said, *and to share assessments in private.* Vice President Biden added that it was the right decision, and a sad day, to let McChrystal go. But it would be an opportunity to clarify civil-military relations. The president said he would call Afghan president Hamid Karzai, British prime minister David Cameron and the NATO secretary general, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, to let them know of his decision.

Obama walked out of the Oval Office and into the Rose Garden an hour later. Petraeus stood to his immediate left, flanked by Gates. Biden and Mullen stood to Obama’s right.

“Today I accepted General Stanley McChrystal’s resignation as commander of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan,” Obama began. “I did so with considerable regret, but also with certainty that it is the right thing for our mission in Afghanistan, for our military and for our country. I’m also pleased to nominate General David Petraeus to take command in Afghanistan, which will allow us to maintain the momentum and leadership that we need to succeed.”

Obama said he was “extraordinarily grateful” that Petraeus had agreed to serve. It would be Petraeus’s fifth overseas assignment since 2001—including some four years during three tours in Iraq—for a man who was possibly the most well-known general officer in America since Dwight D. Eisenhower. He’d already been deployed over five and a half years since 2001, managing to miss most of his son’s time in high school—although Afghanistan would offer a reunion of sorts: Stephen Petraeus had recently graduated from MIT and was serving as an Army lieutenant in Afghanistan.

Holly’s phone had been in her purse, on vibrate, while she attended a business luncheon at the

Mayflower Hotel. “Chief, what’s up?” she asked when she finally called Howell back. Howell explained the details. She was used to her husband being asked to serve the nation. She listened, then said simply, “Roger, Chief, thanks.”

On the drive back to the Pentagon, Petraeus called Holly to update her and then called his executive officer, Colonel Bill Hickman, who was at the Pentagon. Petraeus told him to clear the schedule, except for two speeches the next evening in his hometown of Cornwall, New York—one for Purple Heart recipients and the other a commencement address at his old high school, marking the fortieth anniversary of his class’s graduation. He scribbled a to-do list—start assembling a team, cancel future events, write an opening statement for a confirmation hearing, review rules of engagement, start drafting his first-day letter to the troopers in Afghanistan, develop a timeline. He paused, then started jotting down the names of all those he needed to call—Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, General McChrystal, Secretary Clinton, and Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker, his diplomatic partner in Iraq. He told Hickman to call Central Command’s congressional liaison and line up meetings with members of the Senate Armed Services Committee for the following Monday, and to get his enlisted aide to start packing his bags back in Tampa. *And if you’re willing to deploy one more time*, he told Hickman, *you’re needed*. Hickman didn’t hesitate. He would go to war with Petraeus again—for the fourth time since 2003. Petraeus turned to Howell and said they had to start preparing for his confirmation hearing the following week. He asked Howell if he was ready to go, too. “Might as well,” Howell said. “We’ve spent more time together over the past three years than I’ve spent with my wife.”

“I know, Chief,” Petraeus agreed. “We have. . . .”

THE WHITE HOUSE was full of skeptics—chief of staff Rahm I. Emanuel and senior adviser David M. Axelrod among them. They had come to see Petraeus as an inflexible commander who wanted as many troops as possible for Afghanistan and was never interested in giving the president options for fewer troops, despite clear requests for this during the 2009 Afghanistan policy review. They had suspicions that he was a Bush general, given his close personal relationship with the former president.

Petraeus also had his detractors in a military in which every service was fiercely committed to its own new high-tech weapons systems. None of them particularly benefited from Petraeus’s advocacy of counterinsurgency, which didn’t rely on new ships or tanks or fighter jets. Generals from the heavy Army built to defeat the Russians at the Fulda Gap thought his belief in counterinsurgency bordered on religious zeal. They were worried that he was taking the Army down a path that was diminishing its ability to fight a formidable opponent such as China. Others who had crossed paths with him during his relentless rise to the top saw him as an overly ambitious self-promoter.

But there was little doubt among most active and retired generals, and the American public, that he was a highly capable combat commander and arguably the Army’s most influential general officer since World War II. In his first combat command, he had led the 101st Airborne Division during the 2003 invasion of Iraq with skill and determination. He then took the Screaming Eagles north to Mosul, where most observers credited him with successfully overseeing post-combat operations in northern Iraq for the rest of the year. The war in Iraq consumed six years of his life. After pacifying Mosul and returning briefly to the United States, he was soon back in Iraq, in charge of the effort to recruit, train and develop the Iraqi military. He returned to the States for fifteen months, overseeing the drafting of the Army/Marine Corps *Counterinsurgency Field Manual* and helping overhaul

numerous aspects of the Army's preparation of leaders and units for deployment. He will be most remembered, however, for commanding the "surge" in Iraq in 2007, when the country was enveloped in violence and on the brink of civil war. The added troops, Petraeus's counterinsurgency strategy and a reconciliation effort he designed that convinced 100,000 Sunni and Shia insurgents to support the new Iraq all helped to stem the violence and salvage some measure of success for the Bush administration.

At Petraeus's change of command in Baghdad in the summer of 2008, Secretary Gates claimed that "history [would] regard Petraeus as one of the nation's great battle captains." Upon Petraeus's assumption of command of U.S. Central Command in October 2008, Gates offered that "he is the preeminent soldier-scholar-statesman of his generation, and precisely the man we need in this command at this time." Petraeus's success on the battlefield, his status as a military intellectual and his will to succeed allowed him to shape not only doctrine but also organizational design, training, education and leadership development in the Army and, in many respects, the broader military. He was clearly charting the Army's course for the kind of war the nation was fighting.

Obama had in one important way done Petraeus a huge favor, given the drama surrounding McChrystal's firing. Petraeus had always used his reputation to help capture the imagination of those he led. "Given what I was facing in Iraq and then Afghanistan," Petraeus reflected some months later "I've had a certain affinity for leaders who have been given seemingly lost or at least very difficult causes." He thought of Grant in the Civil War, Matthew Ridgway in Korea and British field marshal William Slim, who led the Allied Forces' efforts to retake Burma in World War II, as described in his aptly titled autobiography, *Defeat Into Victory*. Nations had turned to them to help salvage critical war efforts. All three commanders came to execute the strategies they had helped design. Thanks to Obama, Petraeus was being asked to do the same, having already done so in Iraq under President Bush.

The following Tuesday, Petraeus testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee. Ostensibly there to be confirmed to his new post, Petraeus also had to defend the war effort and the time and commitment it would take to make progress in Afghanistan. He sat alone at a large rectangular witness table in the cavernous hearing room in the Dirksen Senate Office Building, across from the U.S. Capitol. His wife, Holly, sat in the first row of seats in the gallery, making her first appearance at one of her husband's confirmation hearings. Holly preferred to stay out of the public light, but she was there this day to show support and represent the sacrifice of military families—to "show the flag," she would later say. Petraeus wore his dress green uniform, with decorations on his left breast, the Ranger tab on his left shoulder and the patch of the 101st Airborne Division, the unit he'd commanded in combat in the early days in Iraq, on his right.

Senator Carl Levin, a Michigan Democrat, gaveled the hearing to order and thanked Petraeus for his "willingness, at the president's request . . . to take charge of the campaign in Afghanistan. We appreciate your sacrifice and that of your family." He acknowledged Holly's presence and thanked her for her commitment and sacrifice. Senator John McCain of Arizona, the committee's ranking Republican, also thanked Holly, adding, as a personal aside, "We think you made a wise decision more than thirty-four [*sic*] years ago to accept a blind date with a young cadet."

Hollister Knowlton was the daughter of the West Point superintendent, Lieutenant General William Knowlton, when she arrived one football weekend in the fall of 1973 and wound up attending the game with David Petraeus, a cadet who was the assistant brigade adjutant and who would graduate that spring in the top 5 percent of his class, a "star man." After an initial wariness passed, they quickly hit it off; they were married in the chapel on West Point's campus on July 6, 1974.

Beyond their warm reception for the general and his wife, McCain and his Republican colleague

were on a mission. They wanted to expose what they thought was the folly of Obama's July 2011 drawdown date. And they tried their hardest to create a rift between Petraeus, who was believed to be no fan of the July 2011 drawdown commitment but had publicly defended it, and the president, who considered it an imperative. Petraeus proved an elusive target.

"I am, needless to say, humbled and honored to have been nominated by the president to command the NATO International Security Assistance Force and U.S. forces in Afghanistan," Petraeus responded, reading from a prepared statement that he had written over the weekend and carefully vetted with his most trusted aides, including nonmilitary colleagues.

"As we take stock of the situation in Afghanistan, it is important to remember why we are there," he said. Petraeus took advantage of the bully pulpit to try to convey to the public why the mission mattered. "We should never forget that the 9/11 attacks were planned in southern Afghanistan and that the initial training of the attackers was carried out in camps in Afghanistan before the attackers moved on to Germany and then on to U.S. flight schools. It was of course in response to those attacks that a U.S.-led coalition entered Afghanistan in late 2001 and defeated al-Qaeda and the Taliban elements that allowed al-Qaeda to establish its headquarters and training camps in Afghanistan."

Petraeus had been watching international terrorist organizations since his days as the executive officer for the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the 1990s. He understood the challenging battle against an extremist ideology. There was resignation among many policy makers that there would be no "victory" over extremists. Petraeus acknowledged as much when he noted that the ongoing conflicts were not ones that would be ended by "taking the hill, planting the flag, and going home to a victory parade." Rather, he saw the efforts in Afghanistan and elsewhere as elements in what was a long, tough fight against extremists who were ideologically committed to attacking the United States, its Western allies and even many of the governments in power in the Middle East. Afghanistan was a key location in this fight, a country that had been a sanctuary for al-Qaeda before and had to be sufficiently "hardened" to enable it to avoid becoming one again.

Petraeus knew that the president, as commander in chief, felt the burden of command for this war. He also knew how strongly the administration was committed to beginning the drawdown of forces in Afghanistan in July 2011. In an attempt to preempt the Republican assault on Obama's pending drawdown of forces a year hence, Petraeus tried to make it clear that he and Obama were in synch, something he felt was important for the Republicans—and Obama's wary aides—to hear. "I was part of the process that helped formulate the president's strategy for Afghanistan, and I support and agree with his new policy," he said. This was a delicate issue, since it was known that the White House had not fully embraced the advice that he, McChrystal, Mullen and Gates had offered the previous fall. But he knew what he needed to do to support a policy decision after it had been made. "During [the policy's] development, I offered my forthright military advice, and I have assured the president that I will do the same as we conduct assessments over the course of the months ahead. He in turn assured me that he expects and wants me to provide that character of advice."

His assessment of the conditions in Afghanistan was sober. He worried about insurgent sanctuaries in Pakistan, corruption in the Afghan government and Taliban strongholds in Kandahar Province. "There is no question that levels of violence in Afghanistan have increased significantly over the last several years. Moreover, the Taliban and their affiliates had, until this year, steadily been expanding the areas they control and influence. This year, however, ISAF has achieved progress in several locations." Petraeus went on to describe the main effort in Helmand Province, a Taliban stronghold in southwestern Afghanistan, while admitting that it had been two steps forward, one back in many locations.

To Petraeus, a sign of progress earlier in the spring had been his ability to walk through markets in Marjah with the district governor. The area had been Taliban-infested just six months prior, with only four market shops open. By summer there were dozens of shops, and the displaced population was returning home. With heavy fighting ongoing and casualties mounting, however, it was hard to convey the feeling of progress he had witnessed. To him it was a bit of *Fingerspitzengefühl*—the German word for “fingertip feel.” Though he knew he had a lot to learn about the country, he had been devouring intelligence on operations and threats in Afghanistan daily for nearly two years, which had helped him understand the way the campaign was heading. It was hard to convince Congress of progress by describing what his *Fingerspitzengefühl* told him, however, so he talked about the slowly expanding security bubbles and the successful operations by Special Forces that General McChrystal had increased with Petraeus’s support at Central Command. There was only so much he could say in an unclassified forum, but he had been able to meet with nearly all the senators on the committee prior to the hearing, and he had shared classified assessments with them in those sessions.

With a glance over his shoulder, he concluded his remarks by thanking his wife, seated behind him. “As you noted, Mr. Chairman, my wife, Holly, is here with me today,” he said. “She is a symbol of the strength and dedication of families around the globe who wait at home for their loved ones while they’re engaged in critical work in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere. She has hung tough while I’ve been deployed for over five and a half years since 9/11. So have untold other spouses, children and loved ones as their troopers have deployed and continued to raise their right hands time and time again. Clearly, our families are the unsung heroes of the long campaigns on which we have been embarked over the past decade.”

He closed with a flourish. “One of America’s greatest presidents, Teddy Roosevelt, once observed that far and away the best prize that life has to offer is the chance to work hard at work worth doing. There are currently nearly 140,000 coalition troopers and over 235,000 Afghan security force members engaged in hard work very much worth doing in Afghanistan,” Petraeus said. “If I am confirmed by the Senate, it will be a great privilege to soldier with them in that hard work that is so worth doing in that country.”

Petraeus had spent hours preparing for this testimony and, beyond the Republican attempt to attack Obama, was not anticipating tough questions from either side. He’d been in this seat many times before. He also commanded the high ground. Both Obama and his Republican opponents were committed to salvaging the war effort in Afghanistan, if not prevailing outright.

Levin began the questioning. “General, you’ve commented on these questions in your testimony and I want to ask them again to get very clear, direct answers to them. Two fundamental elements of the Afghanistan strategy that the president announced in December 2009 are, first, a surge of thirty thousand additional U.S. troops by the end of the summer to help regain the initiative and, second, the setting of a July 2011 date for the beginning of the reduction in our combat presence in Afghanistan, with the pace of a reasonable drawdown to be determined by the circumstances at that time. Do you agree with the president’s policy?”

“I do,” Petraeus said.

“Do you agree that the setting of that July 2011 date to begin reductions signals urgency to Afghan leaders that they must more and more take responsibility for their country’s security, which is important for success of the mission in Afghanistan?”

“I do,” Petraeus said.

But McCain, who went next in the questioning, was undeterred.

“General, at any time during the deliberations that the military shared with the president when h

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