

Why is Petraeus an Expert on Mosul?

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He's back: General Petraeus in happier days

General (retired) [David Petraeus](#) was on PBS the other day to explain the current Iraqi offensive on Mosul. Sure, his military “surges” in Iraq and Afghanistan had no staying power, and he disgraced himself by [sharing classified information](#) with his mistress during an extramarital affair, but nevertheless let’s call on him as an unbiased “[expert](#)” on all things military. Right?

Anyway, I thought the following [words of Petraeus](#) were revealing:

But that’s the extent of what we [the U.S.] can do [in Iraq today]. We can encourage, we can nudge, we can cajole [the Iraqi military and Kurdish forces]. We can’t force. And it is going to have to be Iraqis at the end of the day that come together, recognizing that, if they cannot, fertile fields will be planted for the planting of the seeds of ISIS 3.0, of further extremism in Iraq.

Wow. There’s no sense here that the U.S. is to blame for planting the seeds of Iraqi extremism (or, at the very least, fertilizing them) in those “fertile fields.” Overthrowing Saddam Hussein in 2003 and demobilizing Iraqi military forces predictably left a power vacuum that facilitated factionalism and extremism in Iraq, which was only exacerbated by an extended and mismanaged U.S. occupation. Petraeus’s “Surge” in 2007 papered over some of the worst cracks,

but only temporarily, a fact that Petraeus himself knew (consider all his caveats about “gains” being “fragile” and “reversible”).

But no matter. Petraeus is now saying it's up to the Iraqis to get their act together, with some “nudging” and “cajoling” by the U.S. I'm sure Iraqi leaders are happy to learn that U.S. experts like Petraeus are behind them, ready to encourage and nudge and cajole. They're likely happiest with U.S. Apache helicopters and direct tactical assistance via Special Ops teams (yes, there are U.S. boots on the ground, and they're in harm's way).

And Petraeus's reference to ISIS 3.0: Isn't it strange to compare a terrorist organization's evolution to a new software product roll-out? Petraeus might have added that ISIS 1.0 came as a result of the extended U.S. occupation of Iraq, and that ISIS 2.0 came as U.S. forces pulled out, leaving behind Iraqi security forces that the U.S. claimed were ready to defend Iraq, but which [fled in 2014](#), abandoning their weapons and equipment to ISIS forces. Put plainly, U.S. bungling helped to launch ISIS 1.0 and to equip ISIS 2.0. And yet Petraeus suggests if there's an ISIS 3.0, that version will be entirely the fault of the Iraqis.

Throughout the Petraeus interview, there's a callous calculus in place. For example, earlier in the interview, Petraeus casually notes the population of Mosul, originally 2 million people, is down to 1.2 million and dropping. Nothing is said about the missing 800,000 Iraqis. Most are refugees, but many are dead. Doesn't their fate suggest a colossal failure of the war and occupation you ran, General Petraeus? But questions such as this are never asked in the mainstream media.

In its long wars in the Greater Middle East, the U.S. has an incredibly short and corrupted memory. Indeed, to stay with Petraeus and his software analogies, the American memory is a circular file that is constantly overwritten with flawed data. That's a recipe not for smooth running but for catastrophic crashes. And so it has proved.