

GREAT DECISIONS

GDTV 2008 Extended Interview

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On the relationship between civilian and military leaders...

It's a very clear relationship in that the president's the commander in chief and the secretary of defense is the assistant coach and when the coach puts you in and tells you to do the job, you do the job. When the coach asks you as the quarter back what you think about the team, you can tell him. When the coach says you're in there to put, you put, if he wants you to go in to throw, you throw. And that is the relationship, despite the difference between some who wear the uniform and some who don't; it is a chain of command. And it is civilian leadership and we just wouldn't have it any other way in America.

I think that the relationship changed after the Vietnam War. I think the Republican Party became the party despite the Republican Party's role in the long drawn out end of Vietnam, there was still a sense that the Republicans were more loyal to the military than Democrats. It wasn't necessarily true; it was just that the Republicans liked a bigger military whereas Democrats seemed to like to take better care of the people that were in uniform. Democrats were concerned about the people issues as well as they were concerned about the weapons issues, essentially, and the fore structure issues and the basing issues.

During the 1990s, during the Clinton administration, the Republican Party made a big push to retain its role as the military-friendly, the military-supportive, the national security-supportive party. Despite the successes of the Clinton Administration and there were a number of them in foreign policy, the label never stuck to the Clinton administration. The Clinton administration took great care of the military, overcame the Bush round of defense cuts and supported raising the defense budget during the late 1990s. And still, when the Republicans were campaigning in 2000, vice president Cheney could say, "Help is on the way," as though the Clintons and the Clinton Administration had mistreated the military. It simply wasn't so. But the label stuck.

On the role of military commanders in Iraq...

Well they don't quite have the same degree of freedom because they don't have quite the same degree of responsibilities. I was in a position where I had to speak publicly

because I was not only a military leader but I was the senior representative military person for an alliance. And so I was required to speak publicly. The role of the commander in Iraq is not that role. He is a field commander; he is responsible for a 180,000 troops, of various nationalities, on the ground in Iraq. He has no responsibility for Iran, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, or any of the other countries. Those responsibilities belong to Admiral Fallon, who is the actual theater commander. And he in turn is only responsible to the white house and to the secretary of Defense. So it's a different role, so they probably don't feel the same freedom to speak out, they probably don't have the same need to speak out, that I had during that war. But I do think they feel that they have the freedom to give the advice that they need, privately, to the chain of command.

On President George W. Bush and General Petraeus...

I do think he's used General Petraeus' name in his military expertise to help him win the political fight in the United States and especially on Capitol Hill. And I've often heard members of the neo-con movement running around saying, "We can't let General Petraeus down," as though it were General Petraeus running U.S. foreign policy. But it isn't, it's President Bush, that's his job. And so I've asked why is it that president Bush doesn't take responsibility for the policy over there, because he is the man making the decisions. And I'm glad he's taking the trip to Iraq and I hope that the president will take full responsibility for the successes or failures of this policy.

On American leadership in Iraq...

Well I think that the force commander of course is General Franks. And I want to say this without any reference to General Franks' partisan nature. But I think the invasion went very well up to the point that we occupied Baghdad. I think the results after that speak for themselves. There was a complete absence of good planning and leadership. Whether that was Franks' responsibility or Rumsfeld's, it was still Franks' as the theatre commander to stand up to Rumsfeld and argue for the right number of troops, the right kinds of policies, so forth. There's no indication that he did this.

I think that after we got General Casey there, I think that General Casey and General Abizaid were executing the policies as they believe them to exist from Rumsfeld the priority was get out of Iraq, find a way to turn this over. Find a way for this to play out. It was clear that they weren't going to be able to get out and turn it over because the insurgency was intensifying rather than weakening. And so I think that the president was faced with a decision in December 2006, whether he would either go ahead and pull out regardless of what happened and acknowledge that this was basically a mistake, or try to hang tough through the remainder of his term, either succeeding or passing the problem on to the next administration, that's essentially what happened and general Petraeus is the man who's been stuck with implementing that policy.

On recent successes and challenges in Iraq...

Well what's been happening in Iraq is two things really. First we've gotten more troops in and that's very important, because we never had enough troops in Iraq. We needed several hundred thousand, four hundred thousand, five hundred thousand. We never had enough. We don't have enough now to do the job the right way. But additional troops have provided some breathing room. I think that commanders have changed some of the tactics, and I welcome that change. But I think what's also happened is that in places like al-Anbar Province, where the greatest gains have been made in security it has nothing to do with a surge in troops. It has to do with the realization with the Sunnis in Iraq. And maybe the Sunnis and neighboring countries, like Saudi Arabia and Jordan, that if the Sunnis don't cooperate with the Americans, if they fight the Americans, the Americans are going to fight them back. And that the result is going to be a Shiite takeover of Iraq.

And so I think that what we see now is essentially a lull as the sides are preparing for the next round of combat. Geo-strategic conflict in the region, which is that the Sunnis will arm themselves they will organize, they're not yet loyal to the central government but they are concerned about their own personal security.

There are rumors in the region that other countries from outside have provided funds to the Sunnis to encourage them to side with the Americans. And so we may be seeing the beginnings of a new kind of iron curtain moving across parts of Iraq as the Sunnis organize themselves to face the Shiite power. Now it's not inevitable, nothing is inevitable in Iraq except more bloodshed right now. But certainly much of what's happened is not a function of the surge. It's just a function of the realization that the Americans are leaving, and when they're gone, there's going to be Iran and there's going to be a Shiite majority in Iraq that the Sunni minority will have to deal with.

On the U.S. military's ability to adapt...

Well I'm disappointed that we haven't adapted more rapidly to the conflict in Iraq. I've asked for four years that we train more linguists, that we engage in stronger training advisory effort for the Iraqis, that we develop the means for vetting that are required, that we really work to imbed our forces with their forces. These changes have slowly taken place and some of what I recommended in the past is now being done. But beyond Iraq there will be another challenge.

We don't know where that is, but we know that the war, the future may not look like Iraq. And so when you look at the Chinese shoot down of the satellite late last year, that was a really important wake up call for the national security establishment. So many people now look at space and say the next competition is going to be in space or maybe

it's going to be in the western pacific. We don't know where that is. The United States military has to be prepared for all nature of challenges.

On top priorities for defense spending...

Armor protection and night vision goggles and telescopic sights for the individual soldiers, every single soldier in Iraq.

On the state of the U.S. military...

Well I think if you look at the military it takes three things, four things to make it. Leadership? We've got great leadership. Combat experience and the proven effectiveness and courage in this organization? We've got that. But I think if you look at the equipment you'll find our equipment, at least for the land forces, is in a pretty rugged condition. A lot of it's been used up; a lot of it is waiting rebuild. We haven't actually yet put the money into the kind of massive, rapid overhaul, we need.

We've got a 2 to 5 year back log of repairs and with each year of combat we're building up another several months beyond that of repairs that have to be done. So the back log is actually growing. This is a problem.

And if you look at the organizations and their training, we've got a lot of organizations in Iraq who are doing exactly what they are supposed to, but others like our artillery branch, our defense branch, they're not doing what they need to do, because there's no requirement for most of the artillery over there. They're performing as infantry. There's no requirement for air defense, it's not performing that function. So there are some elements that haven't been trained, haven't been exercised and we have to look at their skills and their leadership as we build for the future.

On expansion of the U.S. military...

I think it is necessary to have a troop extension.

I'd say 80,000 to 100,000 would be a figure that I would pick because if you don't have that substantial growth, you can't maintain a training base and fix the deployable unit strength so that we can handle these kind of challenges on a more sustainable basis.

Well I think that issue is the unspoken elephant in the room. Nobody wants to use the word draft, but the truth is that nobody knows if you can expand a voluntary army in wartime conditions. We're certainly trying to do that right now, and to some extent we've succeeded beyond most people's expectations in maintaining the strength of the army during four years of continuous combat.

If casualties were to decline, if tours were to shorten, than recruiting becomes easier. If casualties go up, if tours lengthen, than strength becomes more of a problem. So it's not a simple, clear cut answer. It's really a function of what is it that you expect the force to do and how will you use the force in accomplishing this.

On European military capabilities...

What we have now is a reaction force on the part of the European Union, we have a reaction force on the part of NATO. And then we have the national pools of forces and many of these national pools support both the EU force and the NATO force. And people say they're training to common standards. The closer we can come to an integration of these capabilities, the stronger the Transatlantic link will be, and the stronger we'll be.

So what I'd like to see is a new Atlantic charter, an historic agreement at the highest political levels in which the president of the United States and the American people commit themselves to the security not only of America but also of Europe. And the Europeans respond in return by recognizing that American security is in their best interest and we are indivisibly bound together in the security sense. I think that's the kind of pledge we need to reunite our two halves of NATO.

On NATO and Afghanistan...

Well I think that the issue in Afghanistan is complicated in several respects. Number one is that there's not yet a real strategy for success. Nobody knows how to deal with the opium production, and nobody has a real answer upon Pakistan.

In the meantime we know that we don't have enough troops, the Europeans, some of the troops they committed under NATO have national reservations attached to them. So some can't work at night, some can't work in certain areas, some can't undertake certain types of operations, some can't take certain risks. All this is dysfunctional. There's a reason for it of course. It's to deal with national political concerns in these countries. And it's not that this is irrational, when you have an alliance of democracies, you have these kinds of concerns that come up.

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