



Written by [Sheldon Richman](#) on November 21, 2012

Petraeus Fell for the Wrong Reason

David Petraeus has fallen — but not as he should have. Before being disgraced by an extramarital affair, the retired four-star general and ex-CIA director should have been shamed out of public life for his horrendous military record in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Are we talking about the same David Petraeus who is said to have heroically saved Iraq with the famous surge and then salvaged a floundering military effort in Afghanistan?

That's the one. But those "accomplishments" are merely the products of sharp public relations.

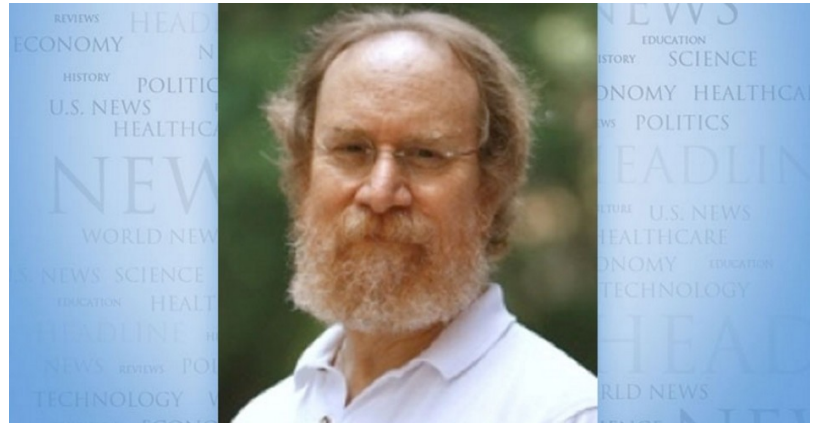
The fact is that Petraeus presided over the brutal occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan, complete with torture, terrifying night raids, and violent sectarian cleansing. If Americans knew the truth — which the news media are uninterested in disclosing because it detracts from their narrative — they would not see heroism in David Petraeus. They would see the villainy of a man who carries out the orders of his imperial superiors and the ruthlessness with which the American empire treats whoever gets in its way. Alas, unfaithfulness in his marriage is the least of Petraeus's offenses.

Journalist [Eric Margolis](#), who has vast experience covering the Middle East, notes that

Petraeus and his fellow generals used every weapon in the US arsenal against Iraq's eleven resistance groups (deceptively misnamed "al-Qaida" by Washington), including the mass ethnic cleansing of two million Sunni Iraqis, death squads, torture, and brutal reprisals....

Petraeus was then sent to work his magic in Afghanistan before returning to Washington to head CIA. There, the brainy general, who had a knack for self-promotion and public relations, tried again to crush the Pashtun resistance by massive bombardments, billions in high tech gear, reprisals that wiped out entire villages, search and destroy missions.

What's to show for all this? A quagmire, still with high levels of violence, that the U.S. military will be





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stuck in for at least another decade. Yes, President Obama says the troops will be out in 2014, but that does not mean all of them or that the entanglement will end then.

Another eminent journalist, Gareth Porter of the Inter Press Service, has mined the WikiLeaks revelations, which document that under Petraeus's command, U.S. forces were ordered not to investigate Iraqi-on-Iraqi killings and torture. Worse, U.S. troops turned prisoners over to the Iraqis knowing that they would be tortured.

"The deeper significance of the order ... is that it was part of a larger U.S. strategy of exploiting Shi'a sectarian hatred against Sunnis to help suppress the Sunni insurgency when Sunnis had rejected the U.S. war," writes [Porter](#). "The strategy [developed by Petraeus] involved the deliberate deployment of Shi'a and Kurdish police commandos in areas of Sunni insurgency in the full knowledge that they were torturing Sunni detainees, as the reports released by WikiLeaks show."

This was known as the El Salvador option: training and equipping death squads to eradicate undesirables. This was the period when sectarian violence and Sunni resistance to the U.S. occupation were at their height. Every day, large numbers of tortured bodies were found on Baghdad streets as vengeful Shi'a Muslims, backed by America and Iran, engaged in sectarian cleansing of the city. Porter notes that the Bush-Cheney-Petraeus strategy was "a major contributing factor to the rise of al-Qaeda's influence in the Sunni areas. The escalating Sunni-Shi'a violence it produced led to the massive sectarian warfare of 2006 in Baghdad in which tens of thousands of civilians — mainly Sunnis — were killed."

As Porter recounts, two years earlier the Civil Defense Corps in Sunni areas of Iraq "essentially disappeared overnight during an insurgent offensive" and Petraeus's U.S. command turned to Shi'a and Kurdish police and military units to put down the resistance. Soon the U.S. order not to intervene in the abuse of prisoners was issued. "It was a clear signal that the U.S. command expected torture of prisoners to be a central feature of Iraqi military and police operations against Sunni insurgents," Porter writes. From there the American force established and trained sectarian paramilitary squads for the dirty work, the first being the Wolf Brigade. "It did not take long for the Wolf Brigade to acquire its reputation for torture of Sunni detainees," Porter writes.

That is David Petraeus's legacy.

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