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Pentagon Peacocks

By [G. Murphy Donovan](#)

The Davis Petraeus saga is another urban legend; a myth about a great man felled by a single flaw or indiscretion. The truth is that Petraeus is a bit player in a larger, uglier drama, the political corruption the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) and that exclusive four star glut that sits atop the military. And the rot didn't start with Petraeus.

Recall Army Chief-of-Staff George Casey taking to the airways to rationalize the Fort Hood Islamist massacre in 2009. Somehow "diversity" and Muslim [sensitivities](#) were more important than twin dangers of domestic sedition or troop safety on American bases. Casey was thrown at the Sunday chat shows, like the more recent Susan [Rice](#) mendacity tour, to spin a politically correct message.

And then there was Admiral Mike Mullen leading the [charge](#) for sex with any sex a year later on the E-Ring at the Pentagon. Say what you will about booty call as a "civil right," but gender choice is not a significant national security issue in the middle of a shooting war. The legality of relationships are social issues that should be addressed by an elected, yet too often cowardly, Congress; not the appointed military brass. And while the JCS was riding point for preferences, nobody seemed to notice, or care about, failure in all those Muslim Wars.

Indeed, a four-star public relations campaign reinvented the English language to avoid words like victory. The new word for retreat is "drawdown." And real goals like winning or victory have been corrupted with terms like "nation building," or worse still, military gibberish like "[transition](#)." Euphemism is the first refuge of analytical cowards. CIA, if not the entire Intelligence Community, takes a bow here too. Only a loser needs to create another word for failure.

In the interests of such political correctness, relevant terms like Islam, Islamist, Muslim, and even terrorist have been stricken from the public vocabulary with JCS help. Witness the recent Benghazi fiasco! The debate is not over mayhem or atrocity committed in God's name. National politicians and the military brass are arguing whether or not to use the word "terrorist" in their reports dealing with Muslim barbarities.

And consider the 'inside baseball' spat over doctrine to be used against the nameless enemy; the counter-terror versus counter-insurgency (COIN) debate within the military. Petraeus apologists believe that the former ISAF commander [reinvented](#) the US Army with new doctrine; and then rode the COIN horse to promotions and prominence.

In truth, COIN played little or no role in Iraq or Afghanistan for two reasons; the force ratios required by Army [doctrine](#), impractical theory, were never achieved. And both conflicts, like most Muslim wars, are civil, not insurgent. These internecine Islamic fights are between Sunni and Shia or between autocrats and theocrats. Neither NATO nor the US Army has the charter or doctrine to resolve these or any other religious or tribal civil wars. Evolution might be the only solution to any Muslim pathology.

COIN had nothing to do with tactical "success" in Iraq or Afghanistan either, but such distractions may contribute to strategic defeat. Theoretical [illusions](#), even those nursed in the halls of ivy, are blinders. Theory,

or more honestly, politicized military doctrine does not win wars.

Combat Petraeus-style doesn't just presume to alter military doctrine; it presumes to alter the nature of war. Unfortunately, war is not about hearts and minds or social services; it's about winning and losing. Kick enough azimuth and hearts always follow. Even terrorists understand this. And that understanding explains why Islamists are winning now - on a global scale.

War is a time-tested primal exercise, not a venue for intellectuals, polite politics, or poseurs. Combat is the definitive zero sum enterprise; the competent live, the inept die. With skill and luck, the righteous might prevail. But there are no guarantees.

There are no draws and you can't spin a loss. The enemy and toxic ideology needs to be beaten first; and then the diplomatic social workers and nation builders can be deployed.

As with COIN, Petraeus has been taking bows for the "surge" in two countries, but especially, the so-called "turnaround" in Iraq. Alas, tactical success there has only two parents; bribery and the US Marine Corps.

Sunni allies were [bribed](#) for the short haul as they are bought in so many Muslim tribal cultures. This perennial CIA tactic is myopic too. When the money runs out, all you have left is another well-equipped foe. Consider the blowback in Afghanistan. All those *mujahedeen* that used to be romanticized, when they were fighting the Soviets, are now killing Americans with better gear.

And the US Marine victory in Fallujah had nothing to do with COIN doctrine either. The Marines took that city with the same [tactics](#) that Marshal Georgy Zhukov used to take Berlin; house-to-house fighting. What the Marines didn't destroy in Fallujah, they killed.

David Petraeus and John Allen seem to have been a perfect fit in Tampa; sun, fun, and bimbos - military camp followers. How do senior flag officers use cyber drop boxes and send thousands of emails to married groupies and not think such behavior is compromising? Do they not know that NSA can read their mail? And those who defend all of this as "private" are correct - as long as character doesn't matter. Character is how you behave when no one is watching.

Yet, someone is always watching. The night before the Petraeus 'sierra' hit the public fan, he and Broadwell were a [couple](#) at the annual Office of Strategic Services (OSS) awards dinner. "Wild" Bill Donovan and "Vinegar" Joe Stillwell must be spinning in their graves.

Jim [Clapper](#) didn't fire the CIA chief for private behavior; Petraeus was fired for public, professional stupidity.

Nonetheless, both political parties are tripping over each other with accolades for Petraeus. They argue that drop box sex is a private, not a professional failing - which is simply another way of saying that personal integrity doesn't matter. If character doesn't matter, then America has the top brass that it deserves.

Or maybe we expect the Joint Chiefs to entertain, not lead; but then again, even the Village People might be embarrassed by today's four star peacocks.

The Joint Chiefs live in a bubble. They learned nothing from the Boorda incident. Recall that Admiral Jeremy Boorda, then Chief of Naval Operations, ate his gun over a bit of ribbon. Boorda [awarded](#) himself a few valor devices that he had not earned. He had never seen combat; but the admiral embellished his chest hair at the expense of JCS reputation anyway.

The fruit salad debate may seem trivial to those who have never seen combat; but for real warriors, such pretense is an insult. The logic of



awards and decorations is simple. It's easier to pass out buttons and bows than it is to give a promotion or a pay raise. Therefore, most awards are for attendance, not achievement. Senior officers like Petraeus get awards or decorations for changing their skivvies - or their address.

Indeed, if you audit the sentiments of troops or their dependents; the cynicism about flags like Petraeus is universal. One veteran seemed to think that American senior officers [resembled](#) Muammar Gadhafi. Another underlined the Petraeus political career track with questions:

"How does an officer with no personal experience of direct fire combat in Panama or Desert Storm become a division CDR (101st Airborne) in 2003 ... (and how does) a man who served repeatedly as a sycophantic aide-de-camp, military assistant and executive officer to four stars get so far?"

Nonetheless, the men who presume to lead continue to parade on the E-Ring in drag. Petraeus alone had nearly 50 badges, awards, and decorations on his Class A blouse; yet, no Combat Infantry Badge ([CIB](#)). After West Point, between cadet and general, Petraeus attended seven (sic) schools before getting his first star.

This is a chap who probably never saw a firefight, and then at a distance, until [very late](#) in his career. Yet, he and the Joint Chiefs still need fork lifts to get dressed in the morning. Such are the hazards of softening "soldiers" at Princeton instead of hardening them in combat.

With no signs of prudence or modesty at the Pentagon, maybe Congress should mandate a limit on gold braid and other uniform claptrap; no more than two rows of fruit salad and then only ribbons for heroism or combat tours. Appearances - and restraint - matter.

America has the best grunts, sergeants, and junior officers in the world. They deserve good models, they deserve better generals. They deserve modest flags promoted for valor and achievement - warriors with personal and professional integrity. No officer who fails to serve in combat as a junior or field grade officer should command any storied fighting division, no less an entire theater.

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