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### **Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/74r8814k>

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### **Publication Date**

2007-09-16

# Iraq and the Betrayal of Trust

by George Lakoff

Last modified Sunday, September 16, 2007 12:00 AM

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MoveOn's "General Betray Us?" ad has raised vital questions that need open discussion.

MoveOn hit a nerve. In the face of truth, the right-wing has been forced to change the subject — away from the administration's betrayal of trust and the escalating tragedy of the occupation to of all things, an ad! To take the focus off maiming and death and the breaking of our military, they talk about etiquette. The truth has reduced them to whining: MoveOn was impolite. Rather than face the truth, they use character assassination against an organization whose three million members stand for the highest patriotic principles of this country, the first of which is a commitment to truth.

New York Times columnist Frank Rich, right about so many things, got it wrong when he criticized the ad in his Sunday column.

He overlooks the fact that the "distraction" he worries about has led the supporters of the Iraq occupation to endlessly evoke the Betrayal of Trust frame, identifying themselves with the Betrayer of Trust in that frame. The betrayers themselves took MoveOn's bait.

Thanks to their making it a national issue, we can now proceed to discuss their Betrayal of Trust on the national stage they have conveniently provided. The importance of

this frame is discussed in "Betrayal of Trust: Beyond Lying"  
— Chapter 6 of *Don't Think of an Elephant!*

Betrayal is a moral issue, and with respect to war, mass destruction, maiming, and death, it is a moral issue of the highest order. Betraying trust is a matter of deception that knowingly leads to significant harm. There is little doubt that the Iraq War and its aftermath have done considerable harm — to our troops, to the Iraqi people, and to our nation as whole. It is equally clear that there has been a considerable amount of deception in the instigation of the war and throughout the occupation. In short, there has been, and continues to be, a considerable betrayal of trust. It goes well beyond the general and the fudging of his figures.

The issue is this: Who has been betraying the trust of the American people — including our troops — in bringing about the American invasion of Iraq and in continuing the occupation? What were the acts of betrayal and with what consequences? And is a betrayal of trust still going on, and if so where, how, and by whom?

The old examples are well-known: The fabrication of intelligence about Weapons of Mass Destruction, the made-up link between 9/11 and the Iraq invasion, telling troops that by fighting in Iraq they are protecting America, failing to provide adequate body armor or humvee protective armor, and so on. But it was not just the Bush administration that betrayed the trust of the American people. There has been and continues to be collusion. If you knowingly aid and abet betrayal, you too are a betrayer. That includes those in Congress who have supported the administration's deceptions, and the right-wing think tanks, media outlets, and pundits. It includes Frank Luntz, the Republican language consultant who recommended referring to the Iraq occupation as the War on Terror. And then there is Betrayal by Negligence: Journalists who simply used the administration's deceptive framing when the facts undermining those frames were readily available. Finally, there are the major Republican Presidential

candidates, who are perpetuating the administration's deceptions and its betrayal of trust.

### **Betrayal for Oil?**

Why the deceptions? Why the false intelligence on WMD's? Why the false link between 9/11 and Saddam Hussein? Why Cheney's acceptance of the "quagmire" he warned against in 1994? And why his acceptance of the massive casualties he said would occur when in 1994 he was so proud of having had few casualties in the Gulf War?

Those at the hearings kept referring to America's "vital interests." "Vital interests" is a code word, and what we seem to have here is Betrayal by Code Words. One of the main vital interests is oil. As Alan Greenspan said in his new book, "I am saddened that it is politically inconvenient to acknowledge what everyone knows: the Iraq war is largely about oil."

Yes, oil! The word is hardly ever mentioned in discussions of Iraq. The main event is oil. The oil legislation that the Bush Administration is so hot to push through the Iraqi government is not just about the sharing of revenues among Sunnis, Shiites, and Kurds. It includes a crucial "production sharing agreement" (or "PSA") — a legalistic code word. What it means is that, while the Iraqi state would nominally be in control of its oil, actually American and British oil companies — ExxonMobil, Shell, BP, Hunt, Conoco — would get exclusive 30 year oil development contracts yielding them up to 75% of oil profits until their investment was paid for and 20% (double the usual royalty rate) thereafter. These contracts would be worth hundreds of billions of dollars. And they are written so that the terms cannot be changed by future Iraqi governments. In short, they take democratic control of Iraqi oil out of the hands of the Iraqi people and give irreversible control of facilities and the oil to American and British companies. For 30 years.

Why is Bush proposing that 130,000 troops be kept in Iraq for many more years? In significant measure, to protect those oil interests — American investments and the American personnel doing the developing.

To read up on American corporate and government involvement in Iraqi oil, go to this report by Global Policy Forum, a nonprofit that consults for the United Nations Security Council.

Does the use of the term "vital interests," but not "oil," constitute Betrayal by Code Word? The question must be asked, and oil must be discussed. Especially the question of whether the war was really begun for the sake of oil. A few weeks ago, MoveOn ran the following clip of a 1994 video interview with Dick Cheney, in which Cheney points out that, if we had gone into Baghdad during the Gulf War of 1991 we would face all the horrors that we have seen: a sectarian civil war, a country we could not govern or control, guerilla warfare, mass casualties, and chaos. In short, Cheney knew what we would face there, and presumably so did Bush. They also knew that there was no evidence of weapons of mass destruction and no connection between Iraq and al Qaeda. We know that Bush wanted to invade Iraq from the first week of his presidency. They were also both oilmen. Did they invade for the oil? The question must be asked. If so, there is a lot of blood in that oil. Would they or their supporters forsake the American oil contracts and take our troops out? The question must be asked.

And a final impertinent, but crucial question. At a time when the nation and the world is clamoring for a reduction in the use of fossil fuels and for eliminating dependency on oil, why should we be promoting the extraction of even more oil — in Halliburton's estimate, 50 million barrels a day more by 2010. Are ExxonMobil's profits a good reason?

Encouraging the production of even more oil is a betrayal of trust to the detriment of future generations. Oil ties Iraq and Global Warming into a single issue.

## The Politeness Trap

There are certain politeness conventions that members of Congress follow. For example, anyone in a US military uniform must be commended for his patriotism, ability, and dedication — even if it is a political appointee on a political mission, like Petraeus.

There is a reason for this, what linguists call 'metonymy,' a mode of thought in which a leader stands for the institution he or she leads. If this commonplace metonymy is used, a general in uniform reporting to Congress would be seen as standing for the military as an institution.

Here is an example of the metonymy at work. Bradley A. Blakeman, president of Freedom's Watch, a White House front group, said "To question the character and patriotism of brave men and women who combat terrorism everyday is too much, it's in poor taste and it will not go unchallenged." Via metonymy, to call Petraeus into question is to question the troops' patriotism.

Literally, MoveOn was doing the opposite — the ad as a whole (hardly discussed in the media) insisted on the truth, even by a general acting politically for the President.

MoveOn.org was upholding the "character and patriotism," as well as the well-being, of the troops by insisting that they no longer be deceived, that the betrayal end. Blakeman takes advantage of the commonplace Leader-for-Institution metonymy to tell a further lie, and continue the betrayal.

Because the Leader-stands-for-the-Institution metonymy is widespread, members of the Senate and the House therefore treated the general with utmost respect at the hearing — lest some members of the public think that they were not respecting the military, which they in fact do respect, and should. The troops, after all, are not betraying us, whatever their commanders and political leaders might be doing. But they and their parents and friends might be

offended if someone wearing the uniform were insulted at a Congressional hearing—even if the intended target was the political appointee wearing the uniform and following political orders.

The Bush administration, knowing all this, made sure Petraeus testified in uniform. They knew that no really impertinent questions could be asked, nor impolite accusations made. The event was staged — with Bush going to just about the only relatively safe place in Iraq a few days before. Bush's framing — that the commanders in the field know best — took advantage of the metonymy. Where Bush had actually let Petraeus know in no uncertain terms what Petraeus was to tell Congress, he used the respect for the military to gain respect for his policy. With his popularity down to about 33% and credibility lacking, Bush was betting on the popularity and assumed integrity of the military. Moreover, Bush made political use of 9/11. He had Petraeus testify on 9/11, when nobody could possibly say anything but nice things and use code words. In short, Bush had put opponents to his policy in a politeness trap. To point out the betrayal inherent in the policy and in the general's report, they would have had to be disrespectful to the general, which they could not.

But in a country that takes its freedoms seriously, freedom of speech must be maintained. Betrayal through deception is much worse than being impolite. Where tens of thousands of deaths and maimings are concerned, it is immoral *not* to point out betrayals when they are real. It is patriotic to root out betrayal on grand scale wherever it occurs.

I do not question the need for decorum in Congressional hearings. But that decorum itself can be put to political use, as was done in the Petraeus testimony. Because of the Politeness Trap, the questions were set within Petraeus' framing. You might question the numbers or the graphs, but not the framing of the testimony itself, namely, that the military outlook in Iraq is improving. To negate the frame is to reinforce the frame. Asking how much it is improving,

preserves the frame. Arguing that it is not improving negates the frame, and therefore preserves the frame. Even asking *whether* it is improving preserves the frame.

What the nation saw was Institutional Betrayal by the administration and the general — betrayal of trust by manipulating the politeness conventions of the Congressional hearing.

The politeness conventions of Congress extend even further. A polite Senator or Congressman cannot describe what he or she sees if the description is impolite. A good example is the recent observation by Glenn W. Smith that the President is effectively holding our troops hostage. The Constitution makes Congress the ultimate Decider when it comes to military action. Congress has the authority and the duty to tell the President what to do, and the President has the duty of carrying out what Congress authorizes. The Constitution automatically ends any military action if Congress does not positively authorize paying for it. Congress, by doing nothing, could allow its authorization of military action to end, and say it would only authorize funds for immediate troop withdrawal. The President would then have the Constitutional duty to end our military involvement and bring the troops home.

But the President has put the Democrats in Congress in a political trap. Bush has defied the Constitution before — with signing statements, and has even made a principle of it with his Principle of the Unitary Executive. The Democrats very much care about the lives of our 160,000 troops in Iraq. Many of them believe that Bush does not care about the lives of the troops — as shown by his failure to supply body armor, or adequate troop numbers, or adequate treatment for veterans, as well as his willingness to keep a large number of troops in Iraq for another decade. In effect, Bush is saying, "Give me the funding I want to continue the occupation, or I will leave the troops there without funding, let them get massacred, and blame you." It is political blackmail. In his dealings with the Democrats in



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Congress, the troops are his hostages. Can anyone in Congress say so? Not by the rules of Congressional politeness. It would be accusing him of betrayal of trust.

But we citizens can — and must — say what we see.

### **The Conservative Smokescreen**

John McCain says that the Democrats are calling for "surrender." Norm Coleman calls Democrats "defeatist." That's not very polite, nor is it true. What conservatives have been doing for years is accusing progressives questioning their policy of betraying our military endeavors by being "weak." Anyone who questions policies favoring military action is in for a betrayal attack — one without foundation at all. Remember "cut and run." It will come back. And it will not be polite. It was not exactly polite for Sen. John McCain, a presidential candidate, to say, "MoveOn.org ought to be thrown out of this country."

The conservatives' rewriting of history in Vietnam hinges on the myth of liberal betrayal, that by not being strong, liberals betrayed America in Vietnam. The same myth is being perpetrated. This is a strategy for hiding their own betrayal of trust. Bring it up and you will be marked as not supporting the troops, as being weak, as surrendering, as "defeatist." It is name-calling.

What we need is a serious discussion of facts, from the perspective of who is being harmed, and who, in a position of authority, has been creating serious harm to our troops and to our nation by being deceptive. That is the Betrayal of Trust issue.

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