

Book Review

All In: The Education of General David Petraeus¹

Reviewed by Major Donel J. Davis*

I. Summary

General David Petraeus was a talented and successful general who oversaw the reform of the counter insurgency (COIN) doctrine and executed COIN operations in two major campaigns.² In *All In: The Education of General David Petraeus*, the author, Paula Broadwell, gives an informative and detailed account of General Petraeus's time as the commander of the International Security Assistance Force (COMISAF) in Afghanistan. She also highlights the difficulty of tactical operations when executing COIN operations on the modern battle field. While the book is not the biography it purports to be, these two aspects of the book make it worthwhile for readers seeking to learn about the complexities of COIN operations.

Broadwell touts this book as a biography of General Petraeus. She states it is a melding of her Doctor of Philosophy dissertation, which attempted to trace fundamental themes in General Petraeus's education, experience, and the role of key mentors, with a first-hand account of General Petraeus's time as COMISAF.³ She also proffers the book will chronicle a year of war through the eyes of three battalion commanders in the 101st Airborne Division.⁴ Finally, she states she will deliver a cautionary tale about how military bureaucracy can overcome passion and expertise based on the experiences of a special forces officer Major (MAJ) Fernando Lujan.⁵

Regarding General Petraeus, the details about his education, experience, and the role of key mentors are too few and too generic for readers to gain any real insights into him.⁶ The book provides some details about his military service and background, but it does not offer candid details a reader expects from a biographer who had significant access to General Petraeus.⁷ Furthermore, despite the book containing references and graphs to aid readers, the author assumes readers understand COIN doctrine and fails to provide

materials to help readers evaluate General Petraeus's COIN strategy.

Besides failing to deliver on details about General Petraeus, the book is sometimes difficult to follow. There are abrupt transitions to past events that add little value to the topic of the section⁸ and details that contribute little to the book.⁹ Finally, the experiences of MAJ Fernando Lujan are scattered across 260 pages of the book, which degrade any value his story may have added.

Despite some of the book's shortcomings, Broadwell's book does provide an in-depth account of how General Petraeus developed and implemented an arguably successful COIN strategy on a modern day battlefield. It also examines the rationale behind several tough decisions battalion commanders made when faced with only bad choices during their operations in Afghanistan. These insights are invaluable to anyone seeking to understand the difficulties commanders face when fighting against an insurgency. They are also unique due to the access Broadwell had to the commanders when drafting the book.

II. Introduction

Broadwell met General Petraeus in 2006 at Harvard.¹⁰ They were both graduates of the United States Military Academy, so they had some common ground.¹¹ During their initial conversation, she described her studies to General Petraeus, and he offered to help her network with people who could aid her in her research.¹²

In 2008, Broadwell started work on a Ph.D., which included a case study of General Petraeus's leadership.¹³ When she learned that General Petraeus was appointed as the COMISAF in 2010, she decided to combine her Ph.D. research with a first-hand account of General Petraeus's command in Afghanistan.¹⁴ General Petraeus agreed to help

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¹ PAULA BROADWELL WITH VERNON LOEB, *ALL IN: THE EDUCATION OF GENERAL DAVID PETRAUS* (2012).

² Peter Bergen, *How Petraeus Changed the U.S. Military*, CNN (Nov. 11, 2012), <http://www.cnn.com/2012/11/10/opinion/bergen-petraeus-legacy/>.

³ BROADWELL, *supra* note 1, at 19.

⁴ *Id.* at 20.

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Id.* at 110.

⁹ *Id.* at 52-53 (describing the military service of Lieutenant General William A. Knowlton).

¹⁰ *Id.* at 18.

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² *Id.*

¹³ *Id.* at 19.

¹⁴ *Id.*

by giving her access to written materials (emails, memoranda, and letters) and allowing her to interview him and other individuals in Afghanistan.¹⁵ Broadwell also traveled with General Petraeus throughout most of his time as the COMISAF.

Broadwell was given information from over 150 individuals and conducted approximately 700 interviews over a period of three years.¹⁶ The majority of the interviews took place during her fifteen months in Afghanistan.¹⁷ She cites 111 sources.¹⁸ Of those, 41 are interviews or emails from military leaders.¹⁹ The vast majority of the remaining sources are newspaper articles regarding events in Afghanistan at that time.²⁰ The primary sources she drew from, add perspective to the tone of the book, which is effusive of Gen Petraeus and lacks any real criticism of him or his subordinates.²¹

Another detail that gives readers perspective is the knowledge of the relationship that developed between Broadwell and General Petraeus. The book was published in January 2012²² after General Petraeus retired and was appointed director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). General Petraeus resigned as the director of the CIA in November 2012, citing his extramarital affair with Broadwell as the reason for his resignation.²³ Neither Broadwell nor General Petraeus ever disclosed the details of the affair, but many believe it began in November 2011.²⁴

The details and ramifications of the affair are discussed *ad nauseam* in reviews, articles, and through media outlets. It will not be addressed beyond a few brief remarks in this review. It is mentioned only to note that the affair diminishes Broadwell's credibility and may explain why Broadwell never offers an unkind word about General Petraeus throughout the book. Furthermore, readers should not rely on

any overall conclusions or justification in the book due to potential bias.

While readers should avoid relying on the ultimate conclusions, the factual account of events can be relied on. The length of time Broadwell spent in Afghanistan and her unprecedented access to personnel gave her a first-hand look at events as they unfolded. This gives readers a unique perspective on the COIN operations during her time in Afghanistan.

III. General Petraeus and his Strategy in Afghanistan

Broadwell does an adequate job of briefly describing General Petraeus's experience in the military. She takes the reader from his acceptance at the United States Military Academy to retirement, highlighting his assignments as aide to general officers and his time in command. She also provides details of assignments that gave General Petraeus experience with North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces²⁵ and exposure to COIN operations²⁶ prior to his appointment as the COMISAF.

Regarding his command in Afghanistan, Broadwell lays a good foundation to understand the enormous challenges General Petraeus faced. They included the political issues surrounding his confirmation as the COMISAF on June 29, 2010,²⁷ the issues surrounding the timing of an eventual drawdown of troops,²⁸ and the public perception that the military could not successfully execute COIN operations in Afghanistan.²⁹ She effectively sets the stage for the rationale behind General Petraeus's overall strategy.

The political landscape and tight timeline required General Petraeus to use a strategy that could be implemented

¹⁵ *Id.* at 20.

¹⁶ *Id.* at 368.

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ *Id.* at 368-74.

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ During an interview with Broadwell, Jon Stewart stated the only controversy in the book is whether General Petraeus "is awesome, or incredibly awesome." *The Daily Show*, COMEDY CENTRAL (Jan. 25, 2012), www.cc.com/video-clips/c4i2bb/the-daily-show-with-jon-stewart-paula-broadwell.

²² The Associated Press, *Timeline: The David Petraeus Scandal*, USA TODAY (Apr. 23, 2015), <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2015/04/23/timeline-general-david-petraeus-paula-broadwell-jill-kelley/26245095/> [hereinafter AP].

²³ Greg Miller & Sari Horwitz, *David Petraeus Resigns as CIA Director*, WASH. POST (Nov. 9, 2012), https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/david-petraeus-resigns-as-cia-director/2012/11/09/636d204e-2aa8-11e2-bab2-eda299503684_story.html.

²⁴ See AP, *supra* note 22.

²⁵ BROADWELL, *supra* note 1, at 75, 80, 128. General Petraeus worked with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization forces as a speech writer for the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers, Europe, and as the United Nations Force operations chief in Haiti. *Id.*

²⁶ *Id.* at 77-78. In 1986, General Petraeus served a short assignment in Southern Command Headquarters, Panama, where he assisted with counterinsurgency (COIN) operations. *Id.*

²⁷ BROADWELL, *supra* note 1, at 22-23. General Stanley McChrystal was fired on June 23, 2010, for comments he made to a reporter that were viewed as insubordinate. *Id.*; see also Michael Hastings, *The Runaway General*, ROLLING STONES (June 22, 2010), <http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/the-runaway-general-20100622>. The report strained relations between General McChrystal and the White House. BROADWELL, *supra* note 1, at 22-23. General Petraeus was selected to replace him as the Commander of International Security Assistance Force. *Id.*

²⁸ *Id.* at 44. President Obama directed General Petraeus to set the conditions that would enable the drawdown of American forces by July 2011. *Id.*

²⁹ *Id.* at 34. At the time, Washington analysts argued that COIN was not applicable to Afghanistan because it lacked a central government and that COIN operations hindered Afghanistan's ability to develop an effective government. *Id.*

relatively quickly. It also had to have ways to measure whether the strategy made any progress in Afghanistan. He settled on what he called the Anaconda strategy, which he previously employed in Iraq, with modifications to make it applicable in Afghanistan.³⁰ The modified strategy employed kinetic operations, politics, intelligence, detainee operations, information operations, international engagements, and non-kinetics to overcome insurgents.³¹

The book lacks clarity on whether the modified Anaconda strategy deviated from COIN doctrine. Since General Petraeus oversaw the rewriting of the COIN doctrine in a previous assignment, one may assume the strategy did not deviate.³² However, the enormous pressure on General Petraeus to succeed creates some doubt. This potential issue could have been addressed in the book by providing references to COIN doctrine, which would enable readers to compare the strategy to the doctrine. Unfortunately, these references are absent.

What is clear about the modified Anaconda strategy, as Broadwell points out, is that only one of the seven lines of effort involved predominately military actions.³³ The rest required extensive input and support from foreign and civilian entities. The key take away—and one of the salient points in the book—is that success in COIN operations requires commanders to develop and sustain a partnership with a variety of entities that have competing interests. The book is helpful to commanders in this regard because it provides multiple examples of the great lengths General Petraeus and his staff went to in accomplish this daunting task.

IV. Tactical Operations

Broadwell discussed the missions of three battalion commanders, Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) David G. Fivecoat, LTC David S. Flynn, and LTC J.B. Vowell, to highlight difficulties commanders face at the tactical level during modern day COIN operations.³⁴ Their efforts are described intermittently throughout the book, which occasionally makes them hard to follow. However, the passages pertaining to them are focused on the most daunting challenges they faced. Their stories illustrate that COIN operations are complex even

at the tactical level; that commanders must be flexible on how they train and employ their troops; and that COIN operations often require commanders to pick between two bad options. One incident the book describes is particularly illuminating on this last point.

One of the most controversial tactical decisions in 2010 was the decision to destroy the village of Tarok Kolache.³⁵ The battalion commander responsible for that area of operations had to secure the village because it was a bastion of insurgent activity.³⁶ Nearly every building in the village was abandoned by the original inhabitants and riddled with improvised explosive devices.³⁷

Faced with the prospect of losing many Soldiers to clear the village, the commander opted to destroy it with artillery and aerial bombs.³⁸ The book explains that this was not an easy decision for the commander to make. He had to weigh the cost of Soldier's lives in keeping the village intact against potentially catastrophic consequences destroying the village would have to the COIN mission.³⁹ His decision to destroy the village and the impact on the mission in Afghanistan is still the subject of debate and faces heavy criticism.⁴⁰

VI. The Afghan Counterinsurgency Advisory and Assistance Team

The book describes special forces officer MAJ Fernando Lujan's failed effort to expand the Counterinsurgency Advisory and Assistance Team (CAAT) to an Afghan Counterinsurgency Advisory and Assistance Team (A-CAAT).⁴¹ The mission of the CAAT members, as described by Broadwell, is to circulate around combat bases, develop ideas to enable Soldiers to shift from conventional warfare to protecting the population, then provide the ideas to regional commanders.⁴² Therefore, the A-CAAT would do the same thing except it would require members of the team to embed with Afghan forces and provide ideas to Afghan commanders.⁴³

³⁰ *Id.* at 139.

³¹ *Id.* at 365.

³² *Id.* at 67.

³³ *Id.* at 139.

³⁴ *Id.* at 13-14. All were assigned to the 101st Airborne Division. *Id.*

³⁵ *Id.* at 101-03.

³⁶ *Id.*

³⁷ *Id.*

³⁸ *Id.*

³⁹ *Id.*

⁴⁰ See, e.g., Joshua Foust, *How Short-Term Thinking is Causing Long-Term Failure in Afghanistan*, THE ATLANTIC (Jan. 24, 2011), <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2011/01/how-short-term-thinking-is-causing-long-term-failure-in-afghanistan/70048/>; Kevin Sieff, *Years Later, a Flattened Afghan Village Reflects on U.S. Bombardment*, WASH. POST (Aug. 25, 2013), https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/years-later-a-flattened-afghan-village-reflects-on-us-bombardment/2013/08/25/d8df9e62-05cf-11e3-bfc5-406b928603b2_story.html.

⁴¹ BROADWELL, *supra* note 1, at 14.

⁴² *Id.* at 36.

⁴³ *Id.*

Despite the success of the project, it ultimately was not implemented due to a lack of interest by superiors.⁴⁴ The cautionary tale appears to be that sometimes bosses in the military disagree with their subordinates and decline to implement their suggestions. This is not new in the military or other organizations, so the cautionary tale is superfluous.

As discussed earlier in this review, the details about MAJ Lujan's mission are unceremoniously peppered throughout the book. If the passages were consolidated in the book they may have provided a more compelling story. However, the minimal information discussing the A-CAAT and the way it is sprinkled throughout the book reduces the story to a distraction.

VII. Conclusion

Readers should look elsewhere if they desire an unbiased, meaningful biography of General Petraeus. On the other hand, readers can obtain a unique account of COIN operations at the strategic and tactical levels through the multiple examples and factual accounts in this book. Overall, this book is a worthwhile read for anyone seeking to learn about the execution of COIN operations on the modern battlefield.

⁴⁴ *Id.* at 295.