



**Women's Foreign Policy Group
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Martha Raddatz
ABC News Chief White House Correspondent

The Long Road Home: A Story of War and Family

Martha Raddatz, ABC News Chief White House Correspondent, spoke at the home of WFPG Board Member Donna Constantinople June 20th, 2007. She discussed her 13 visits to Iraq, her interactions with soldiers and their families both at home and abroad, and her book, *The Long Road Home: A Story of War and Family*, that was published March 1, 2007.

Constantinople introduced Raddatz by reading a segment from an article written by her daughter, Greta Bradley. The article was written after Bob Woodruff was injured, while Bradley was working at the University of California-Berkeley. She wrote, "As the Iraq war drags on, it is increasingly easy for people to become disengaged from it, to forget about the people who are in the line of fire every day. That is why it is important for journalists to go there and get a taste of both what the U.S. and Iraqi forces, as well as the Iraqi people, are experiencing. The journalists have the ability to make the realities come alive."

Raddatz began her talk discussing an issue she said she is often asked about: how hard her job is for her family. She said, "For a long time I thought people would think it was horrible...if something happened to me as a women and as a mom that I would just get creamed afterwards. I'd be gone, but people would think it was horrible for a mother to do this...But I think one of the things I've tried to do in covering this war is involve my children in this in ways that I think they grow and teach them lessons that they too will become passionate about something in their lives."

Raddatz discussed the ways she has tried to involve her children, and spoke of visiting Bethesda Naval Hospital each Christmas with her family. She recounted her 15-year-old son meeting a soldier with a mangled leg. She said that at first, her son would not look at the leg. Raddatz began asking the soldier how he was injured, and what they were doing to help him. Although she said her children were hesitant at first, she tried to show them to just ask questions, and that it is an appropriate thing to do.

She went on to explain that the soldiers and their families shared a lot with her because she asked questions.

"It's so important to just ask," she said. "No one really does ask, because people don't understand what they've been through, and they don't really want to."

Raddatz's book is about the April 4, 2004 battle in Sadr City, the day now known as "Black Sunday" because it marks the official beginning of the insurgency. Moqtada al-Sadr led the Mahdi Army and local community members in an attack. It was the 2-5 Battalion's first day in control of the area, and

they were to be there on a peacekeeping mission. Eight men died in the attacks, and over 60 were injured. The attacks were a complete surprise, as sectarian violence was less common at that time in the War.

Raddatz was told about the battle in Sadr City while in Baghdad. “When I asked the soldiers, they just were sobbing,” she said. “No one had asked them...It is not a culture where you talk about it.”

Now, Raddatz explained how difficult the insurgency is for the soldiers. It is a situation that she has never seen before in war.

“Eight-five to 90 percent of deaths occur from roadside bombs. For the marines, this is the hardest part. There is nothing they can do – it’s a horrible, unseen enemy...Their training doesn’t matter. They are constantly, I hate to use the word scared, but they are constantly scared. They turn into adrenaline junkies, and that’s why so many of them are having problems with addictions back home,” she said.

The battle in Sadr City marked a turning point in the war. The troops were totally unprepared – they thought it was peaceful situation, Raddatz said.

Raddatz also spoke about the situation at home during the War. Her book reflects the battle on the ground and is interspersed with records of what the soldiers’ families were doing at home. She told the stories of the soldiers and their families, because she said she feels that they are the only ones who have had to make sacrifices for the war.

“I feel very strongly that we as a country haven’t sacrificed for this war,” Raddatz said.

During her last visit, she said, morale was good. However, ‘her guys’ from the book are back in Baghdad, and their deployment was just increased to 15 months instead of one year.

“That is two Christmases, two kids’ birthdays,” she said, referencing the personal relationship she has with the people she wrote about.

Raddatz has discussed coming home with the troops and their families as well. She emphasized how difficult it is on the families and the soldiers after the return, because the army is limited in how well it can prepare the men, and they don’t encourage talking about it.

“It’s hard to come back – personally and for the soldiers. It gets harder and harder for them to relate to their families. They feel like they’re a burden on their families. I tell them they’re burdening their families with distance if they don’t talk about it,” Raddatz said. “Having been thirteen times, it’s depressing. I see the same things. They put more troops in one area, and then the violence spreads elsewhere.”

Raddatz also addressed the current situation on the ground, and the plans for the future. She has covered the war since the beginning stages. She predicted what the effects of current political debates will be, and how war will finally end.

Speaking of the current wave of violence in Iraq, in a month during which there have been more deaths since 2003 Raddatz said, “With this recent surge, they just brought 25,000 more troops. They’re bringing 3,000 more, but it’s not making any difference.”

She described the ‘whack-a-mole’ phenomenon that has been seen repeatedly in the War. Troops are now in the Baghdad belt, she said, but they can’t protect other areas without taking troops away from that area.

“This is the second time they’ve surged. Before, General William Casey didn’t want more troops until the Iraqi government does something.”

Raddatz speculated that over the next few months, General David Petraeus will find some progress. She said that he will be begging for more time.

“We will have to allow things to simmer, and then we will leave enough troops to respond in case something happens, but we can’t sustain the numbers we have over there now,” she said.

She also shared her opinion on the current political debate over bringing troops home.

With the political debate, it’s so polarized. I think that whoever wins will find out that it’s really much more complicated than black and white. I think that Bush will try to make it more secure before withdrawing troops, she said.

“I wish the debate were more about what happens if we pull out. I don’t know what will happen, but most very smart people I know believe if we pull out precipitously, it will be a disaster. We need a debate in this country about that...If you think we rushed in, don’t rush out.”

Raddatz reiterated her opinion with that of the soldiers on the ground: their biggest fear is that no debate will happen.

There is a need for more pressure and a discussion on what the possible consequences will be if the Iraqi government does not make progress, she said.

Question & Answer

“Al-Qaeda was not in Iraq in any way – there was no connection to Hussein. It was just that they were in the same country.” It is a small problem in Iraq.

I don’t think we will ever see victory. We will see a ‘simmer’ and that will be success. There will be an acceptable level of violence.

We have got to get MRAFs. I don’t understand how, if the army needs something, that we as a country do not get it immediately – shut down a Ford Factory and make them – but that would take a presidential order. In MRAF’s, no one has died from roadside bombs. (ref to editorial in Washington Post 06/14)

I think this country would have asked a lot more questions if it were their sons and daughters going to war. I do think there should be some level of national service – not just military service –that’s not for everyone, but some way that people can make an investment in the country.

It’s just a disaster for families. The country is really unprepared for troops coming home.

Over there, some families hate us and some don’t. It’s really that we don’t understand the culture.

I hope we've learned – not to invade a country without the understanding (ref to Vietnam – mistakes never to be made again)

We learned the wrong lessons last time.

Talks with the Iraqi Government have done nothing. Do we push them?

This conflict gripped me because it changed things so dramatically. How can we do this? War is a story you can't tell. I really feel that we have to go – it's incredible to be there. I hate when pundits talk about it but haven't been there.

I do cover it like a woman. I bring my gender to my coverage. I talk to the soldiers in different ways, and I talk to their families.

Here there is no connection with the troops. People are not engaged beyond the political debates. "I think the troops are feeling more and more divided from us. The political debate bothers them."

I wish there were 20 times the media covering the war. There are only 75 full-time reporters over there, because it's too expensive.

When I'm there, I embed with the military. I can get around a lot easier by embedding with them.