



# ENDGAME

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International

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CONTACT

Tom Koch, *Director*  
WGBH International  
One Guest Street  
Boston, MA 02135 USA  
TEL 617-300-3893  
FAX 617-779-7900  
tom\_koch@wgbh.org  
wgbhinternational.org

On December 19, 2006, President George W. Bush stated for the first time that the US is not winning the war in Iraq. It was a dramatic admission from a president who had insisted since the war began that things were under control. Now, as the US begins what the administration hopes is the final effort to secure victory through a “surge” of troops, military and government officials talk to FRONTLINE about both the military and political events that have led to the current “surge” strategy in *Endgame*. Shot in high-definition, it is the fifth film in a series of Iraq War stories from FRONTLINE producer Michael Kirk, including *Rumsfeld’s War*, *The Torture Question*, *The Dark Side* and *The Lost Year in Iraq*.

When the US invaded Iraq, the plan was to be out within three months, so there was no long-term strategy for battling the growing insurgency that was destabilizing the country. In a surprising public admission, Gen. Jack Keane, the Army’s second-in-command at that time, tells FRONTLINE, “I think it’s driven in part by my own failures when I was there as a senior military leader contributing to Gen. [Tommy] Franks’ plan that we never even considered an insurgency as a reasonable option.”

In 2004, in the wake of the Abu Ghraib prison scandal, the American withdrawal from Fallujah and worsening violence, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld dispatched four-star Gen. George Casey to Iraq to take control of the situation, and they believed that maintaining a “light footprint”—minimizing the role of the American forces while building up the Iraq security forces—would still ensure security for the upcoming elections.

Yet, in spite of the seemingly successful elections, sectarian violence in Iraq was growing. In February of 2006, Sunni insurgents bombed the golden dome of the Askariya shrine in Samarra. Author Lawrence Kaplan tells FRONTLINE, “...What was one-sided insurgency becomes a two-sided civil war.”

As Rumsfeld and Casey continued to insist that things were going well, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice sent State Department Counselor Philip Zelikow to Iraq to assess the situation. Col. H.R. McMaster’s “clear, hold and build” effort conducted in Tal Afar was one of the rare successful operations Zelikow could find. After US troops cleared insurgents from the city by seeking them out door to door, an ongoing troop presence in each neighborhood helped the residents feel secure, and the rebuilding by US troops could begin.

In the summer of 2006, Casey mounted Operation Together Forward II, relying heavily on Iraqi troops to maintain security in areas of Baghdad that American troops had cleared. Keane tells FRONTLINE: “As soon as I saw that we didn’t have the resources, I knew that the operation would fail. ...Our chances to succeed in Iraq were slipping past us...”

Following what President Bush called a Republican “thumpin’” in the November 2006 US elections, the president replaced Donald Rumsfeld with Robert M. Gates. The White House would publicly launch a review of the Iraq strategy, which resulted in another attempt to serve Baghdad—this time relying more heavily on a reinforced American presence. For the military’s strategists, however, the nagging question is whether it is already too late.

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CREDITS

FRONTLINE Executive Producer: David Fanning  
Director, Producer, Writer: Michael Kirk

A FRONTLINE co-production with Kirk Documentary Group, Ltd. For WGBH/Boston

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