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Whose Betrayal?

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Betrayal is everywhere in the news. We learned today from the Washington Post that 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." Not keeping our country safe, as the troops were told. Not democracy. Not Weapons of Mass Destruction. Not al Qaeda. Oil! All those lives and maimings about oil! Are you shocked, shocked? It is Betrayal of Trust of the highest order: "Politically inconvenient ... everyone knows..." Oil was not discussed at the Petraeus hearings. The silence in Washington has been polite.

MoveOn's "General Petraeus or General Betray Us?" ad has raised vital questions that need a thorough and open discussion. The ad worked brilliantly to reveal, via its framing, an essential but previously hidden truth: the Bush Administration and its active supporters have betrayed the trust of the troops and the American people.

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?

I have developed a deeper look at these issues. You can read that in my new article [Iraq and the Betrayal of Trust](#). But meanwhile, let's talk about one of the traps we should stay out of: The Politeness Trap.

Bush took advantage of certain conventions of etiquette and politeness when he sent Petraeus to testify before Congress. Those conventions hold that one does not criticize the symbolic stand-in for the military, even when the uniform-

wearing stand-in is on an overt political mission that is at the heart of the Administration's continuing betrayal of trust. Decorum can be put to political use, and Bush did just that.

Bush was using a familiar right-wing tactic: identifying himself with a military uniform and the stature of the military in general, when he had no military stature himself. Rudy Giuliani used the same tactic in his ad in Friday's *NY Times*: he put on military drag by associating himself with Petraeus' rank and role, hoping some of the stature of the military would rub off on him. The implicit message is an attack on MoveOn: in pointing out Petraeus' deception, MoveOn, so Giuliani implies, was being disrespectful of the military itself. This is a typical right-wing attack on progressives, and progressives shouldn't stand for it. They should not be allowed to hide behind the troops. The troops themselves have been betrayed. None of us wants to hear it, to know it, to acknowledge it. Least of all me. It disgusts me how the troops have been betrayed by people saying, "Support our troops." But it is true, and millions of us must start saying so. There are unacknowledged villains behind this carnage.

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.

The American people have been betrayed by the architects and apologists for the invasion and occupation of Iraq. By avoiding the politeness trap in a patriotic, direct, and factual way, MoveOn correctly framed the betrayal of trust for what it is. And right now, the apologists for the occupation seem to be forgetting a lesson we thought Frank Luntz had schooled them on. They are quite busy invoking the frame of betrayal of trust, a frame that clearly best fits them. That frame is essential to bringing an end to the tragedy in Iraq.