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(b)(3), (b)(6)

(USA)

2nd BCT, 25th ID. HHC/1-27 IN Commander
21 March 2008

A Sheik's house outside Taji Market, northwest of Baghdad

By (b)(3), (b)(6)

MNFI Historian

I was traveling with (b)(6) during her visit to 2BCT, 25 Division. The Brigade Commander brought us to a sheik's house where they were already having a big gathering. I wound up sitting next to the company commander responsible for the area and struck up this recorded conversation.

(b)(3), (b)(6) took over the area from (b)(3), (b)(6) from 2-8 Cav, 1st Cavalry Division, on 15 January 2008.

Abstract

(b)(6) has been in command in Taji for two months. His focus is economic initiatives and working with Sunni and Shia tribes, and he has been surprised by sheik's simultaneous desire for private, free-market profits and socialized, command-economy costs. He feels he's made progress in helping the sheik get organized and introducing new ideas.

Why are we here today?

We are in Taji Market, at the home of Sheik Jassim Zayden. He is having a lunch and has invited guests from all over the area to celebrate the opening of this addition to his home, this grand reception area.

Who are some of the people gathered here?

Across the room, now talking to (b)(6) is the Quaim Maqim, whose name is (b)(6). (b)(6) Quaim Maqim is the title of the head of Taji Qa'da, like the county chairman.

Another individual here is Sheik Abhed, who is an Iraqi and has come back from Dubai. Abhed is an Sol contractor.

One of the challenges we've dealt with here was the fact that the area had 23 separate agricultural councils. I worked through three summits pulling these 23 groups together to make one voice. The toughest thing we face is moving their mindset from socialistic to free market thinking. The Iraqis consistently tell me they want a free market, and they associate the free market with prosperity, and I agree, but then they follow up with where is our free seed? They want the free market, as long as we supply their needs.

In one bright spot, there is an investor interested in putting \$30,000 into a feed lot initiative. It has taken numerous discussions to get the farmers to coordinate their efforts. This culminated a couple of weeks ago, for the northwest area, when I got them to set up

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a seven member council, with a chairman. They all went to Baghdad to see the Deputy General of Agriculture to discuss many of their concerns.

I'm also trying to get a chamber of commerce going, but I had a meeting, and as I asked everyone where they were from, it turned out they were all members of the same tribe. I explained to them a chamber of commerce needed broad representation of all the stores and all the elements of the community. I've also turned to Iraqi-Americans to help me get the word out.

What have you learned in your time here?

I've learned that the Sunni sheiks are eager to move forward, but they're nervous about going to Baghdad, which they need to do to coordinate issues with the GoI, because the checkpoints going down there are Shia controlled, so there is a freedom of movement issue

As we were talking, another group of men walked in and looped around the room greeting everyone.

This is good. These guys who have just walked in are from the Tamimi tribe, and most everyone else here is Dulaimi. Dulaimi is Sunni, and the Tamimi are Shia.

Is this the first time they've gotten together?

It is not the first time. They have done it now a few times, but this is good because it reinforces the recent, positive developments.

What has surprised you?

That they want both capitalism and free markets and they want us to subsidize everything. Our bi-cultural, bi-lingual advisors have really helped us in working through these issues.

These guys don't use maps like we do. When I asked them about the irrigation system, they produced a beautiful hand drawn schematic that showed how it all worked.

We are trying to encourage economic diversification, with cattle, dairy, global economic interests, and investments, jobs, security, as well dealing with veterans concerns. We have to figure out how to transition military age males to many other jobs other than security.

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