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

(USA)

Al Faw Palace, Victory Base Camp, Baghdad

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

MNFI Historian

Abstract

(b)(6)

learned I could succeed on an alternative career path. In Iraq, I've learned extreme complexity. This is the best I've ever seen the Army because we are so mission focused. In my first 30 days, I gained the impression that success just might be possible. Who is in the CIG and how it functions; writing the SecDef letter; the CG's efficiency and pace; IDF; how PM Maliki surprised us at Basra and what has happened there; Mohan; PCNS and the 15-point declaration; Iran's complicated role and Sadr; the CG's testimony. We have a morale obligation, and the course of action has the possibility of success and is worth continuing.

Interview

I arrived in Baghdad in early February and my predecessor, (b)(3), (b)(6) left in early March. (b)(6)

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What individuals or experiences do you look back on as having been particularly important to your career?

As a lieutenant I worked for (b)(3), (b)(6) who showed me that it matters to retain talent in the Army, and he showed me what a difference an ambitious, talented individual could make in effecting change even in a huge institution like the Army. Up to that point, the Army had seemed to be sort of a one-size-fits-all organization, and that, I think, inclined me toward seeing that there was potential for the individual, despite the nature of the organization, to make a difference in the Army. Today, he is the Director of the National Security Agency. He was an early, huge, formative influence.

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From those experiences, the most important lesson [I've drawn] is to not underestimate your potential to make a difference, and also the importance of out of the standard, mainstream, Army-developmental opportunities, which I think at the same time kind of re-affirm your commitment in the long run to being an Army officer and making a difference, but allow you to bring to bear a new set of skills and perspectives that are more difficult to get if you stay as low as possible as long as possible [in tactical units], which I think is sort of a competing developmental model for Army officers, to stay at the platoon, at the company, at the battalion, and at the brigade or division. Those sorts of experiences are sort of irreplaceable, but nevertheless complimenting those with experiences in which you are totally thrown out of your intellectual comfort zone, compete in that vigorous environment, and then come back. I think both of those put together have been sort of a path that I have greatly valued.

How did you come to this position at MNFI, and what did you find when you arrived?

8:05. It's almost difficult to characterize what I've learned because in some ways I feel that I have so much yet to learn about the complexities of Iraq and what we're trying to accomplish. I think I've come to appreciate that it is very difficult to understand all the complexities of what it is going to take to achieve U.S. objectives as currently set in Iraq without an immersion opportunity. I think I could have studied much about Iraq without coming here, and gained from that study, but to actually be immersed in trying to watch initiatives being executed or our collaboration with the government of Iraq or our transitioning effort with the GoI on a day-to-day basis has given me an appreciation and a perspective that I could never quite have attained from across the water.

So, what have I learned? The scale and complexity of the U.S. effort never ceases to amaze me, the day-to-day roller coaster sort-of-feeling.

Can you recall the first surprise you experience on your arrival, or how strange or unfamiliar things felt when you first arrived?

9:30. I would actually even go back to . . . an impression about the Army in general. The last time I was in a unit was 2005, which was really not that long ago. I was in Korea, and I think the Army, maybe more in Iraq than elsewhere, but as a whole, is simply a better organization. It is more focused on things that matter, achievement of the mission, and the things that are necessary to achieve the mission rather than some of the focus on form and appearance that can come to characterize a peacetime Army.

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I don't think this exists elsewhere, but [there is] less focus on pure hierarchy. Of course we have discipline in the chain of command, but there is focus on what information is necessary to really make the best decisions. I've been really encouraged to watch, and it's funny I've really watched it in the last week without General Petraeus being there, but watching his key group of leaders interact in small group every morning, both in his presence and in his absence. It is clear that they're not just sort of wanting to provide information that they are not just providing information that he wants to hear but the information that he needs to hear. It seems to me to be a very robust collaboration effort in which each is trying to contribute to the information that needs to be on the table. And while he has been absent, it has been interesting to see the discussions continue. Everybody has something that has happened in the last 24 hours to bring to bear, whether it challenges or reinforces the initiatives that are under consideration, it is still brought forward, and that has been encouraging to watch. I do think that our Army is . . . I don't think . . . I think it is more capable than the Army organizations that I have been a part of in the past. My impressions of what we can do and the ways that we can do it has been extraordinary.

I have observed that officers in the states, such as those in the War College, have typically experienced considerable angst over this mission, but within about 30 days of arriving in Iraq, their views on the mission tend to become much more positive.

12:20. I have to admit I asked to come here. I will lay my personal bias on the table, which is . . . I really do believe the United States has a moral obligation based on our invasion and the situation that followed that, to try to leave Iraq in some sort of condition of security and stability. So I have a personal bias, a personal motivation for believing that, from where we are today, that the United States does have a moral obligation. I saw Ambassador Crocker raise this explicitly in a press interview the other day. So I will admit that I have that.

13:30. That being said, I do think that, within the first 30 days, I did get this impression that it is just quite possible that the United States could leave Iraq having achieved the strategic objectives as [we] set out for ourselves. It might not be pretty, but the idea that it is doable, I think, is an impression that . . . you know, we just might make it, in other words, with regard to an Iraq that is secure, is stable, is capable of self-governance, and is capable of defending itself. That it is possible that we could achieve those objectives before we leave, and . . . of course I would have liked to have seen that that's true. I do think you get the impression thought that it is possible, when you're here. So I don't have the advantage of comparing it to some of the previous years and some of the great mistakes that have been made both by the United States and the Iraqis since 2003. But what I could say is that, based on what I've seen since I've been here, and an academic knowledge of some of those prior events, it does seem to me that there are an incredible number of developments that are headed in a positive direction, even if on a day-to-day basis Iraq often feels like a roller coaster.

But did you have that same sense before you arrived, or did you have greater anxiety over the mission before you arrived?

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14:31. Yeah, I think so. I mean, I wasn't sure of that before I got on the ground. I think it is very difficult to appreciate the progress as well as the limitations in the progress . . . it would be very difficult for me to appreciate that without the kind of understanding I've been able to acquire from the perspective of . . . or the vantage point of seeing the kinds of information I've been able to see in the last few months.

Would you describe the CIG's daily and weekly operational tempo?

15:30. To me, the CIG is about helping the CG manage his time by supporting his ability to make a difference at a variety of levels. Each position in the CIG contributes to his ability to do that in a different way.

[First], there is the correspondence writer or speechwriter, which used to be (b)(6) and now is (b)(6), who helps him to reach out and write articulate correspondence that varies from helping a sergeant to get into the CID program to writing a letter, or drafting a letter from the CG and the Ambassador to Prime Minister Maliki on something like the way ahead on the port of Umm Qasr. So that position helps the CG make a difference through quality written communication of what in essence his message is, but he doesn't have time to compose. We are constantly trying to understand where he stands, what his message is, and then trying to articulate that.

Then, if you go to the next position, the talking point, briefing support, which has been (b)(3), (b)(6) is an orchestrator for, again, the CG has maybe 10 minutes between engagements. What will be the talking points that will allow him to most effectively leverage that half-hour, or 15 minutes, or 45 minutes that he has with . . . people all the way from ambassadors to general officers to . . . it might even be . . . I focus on high level events, but there is a whole host of engagements. Some of it is what do we already know in the CIG of issues that the CG has already articulated that we just need to follow up on. At other times it involves reaching out to the staff who are the primary issue-area experts on something like . . . a good example is the CG hosted a dinner for the speaker of the Council of Representatives two weeks ago. A colonel in STRATEFF named (b)(3), (b)(6) who does political issues all the time, so from her we got talking points that went through the STRATEFF chain of command. (b)(3), (b)(6) the chief of the CIG, sits with the CG at 100% of his substantive engagements, or 99%, because there are some that are personal or are one-on-one, and from that he also saw . . . well, (b)(3), (b)(6) tells us] the "last time the CG talked to the PM," or "the last time the CG talked to the Speaker," so we take that staff input, we take (b)(3), (b)(6) perspective, and then anything that anyone else has to offer, and hopefully reproduce a talking point list that will enable the CG to most effectively leverage that 1 1/2 or two hours with Speaker Mashadani or whoever else shows up at that dinner. The CG is a critical, independent weapon for MNFI, so [the CIG works] doing whatever we can to help him be as effective as can be.

Another example would be briefings I mentioned. The CG has an MNFI Commander's Conference on the 19th of April. You know what we'll try to do is give him a straw man a week out, give him something to think about and he can tell us what he wants. We'll try

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to put that in there for him. And again, help him to effectively use that time with his subordinate commanders.

19:20. Another person is our ORSA, or our quantitative analysis guy. It has never ceased to amaze me that even when all you are trying to do is to be accurate, precise, and clear, with regard to your representation of the facts, how difficult that can be to do with an organization of the size and complexity of MNFI. So what (b)(3), (b)(6) does for the boss is he tries to make sure that any presentation, particularly of quantitative statistics, is internally consistent and is based on the best-available data, is presented in as clear a fashion as possible to avoid possibilities for misunderstanding to the greatest extent possible. And so that kind of sanity check, and again the staff, in many cases, the true expertise is working these issues on a day-to-day basis, but then we hopefully bring to bear and appreciation for the CG's preferences on how to convey the accurate data, and also do a kind of a sanity check, and also do a check for how easily it can be communicated. I think when you are in a staff function, and you have an area of expertise, I think you start to assume things are natural or broadly understood, like a whole host of terrible acronyms that exist in MNCI and MNFI. Well, the thing is that those acronyms don't communicate very well. So just, even that, the [focus is on helping] the CG be clear and accurate in his communications.

20:55. The CIG Chief is the most critical player. He is with the CG at 95% of the substantive meetings. He personally does the CG's talking points for some of the most critical meetings, like the Ambassador updates, like the updates for the . . . the Security Core group, and he has a perspective that is closest to . . . he has the closest, within the CIG, to an appreciation for the streams of data that the CG gets that no one else in the whole command really quite gets. He is one of the closest people to that based on sitting in with the CG on all of his substantive engagements. So, the last, final check on products and things, the CIG chief brings to bear his perspective, which is sort of irreplaceable based on his most consistent contact with the CG and being in the receive in the same environments as the CG.

My role as the Deputy Chief, and (b)(6) used to call it the whip, is kind of quality control of all those variety of products. My own independent . . . independent functions are . . . every morning, I go to the battlefield update assessment, and then the small group, and then the small, small group, and try to capture the CG's tasking, guidance, and intent. And I provide that in draft form to the chief of staff, who then provides his perspective before it goes out to all the chiefs of staff and assistant chiefs of staff within MNFI. So that is a huge mechanism for keeping me in synch with what is going on. I also do that with the Wednesday SVTS, which rotates through the topics of Defeat Extremists, Reconciliation, or Fardh al Qanoon. Those are the meetings I regularly attend. The other thing, and my primary product, is I'm the initial drafter of the CG's weekly letter to the Secretary of Defense, and that is another huge forcing mechanism to . . . for me personally to try to synthesize from the CG's perspective, what happened in Iraq over the last week, what are the priorities that he would want to convey to the secretary of defense. It is mostly about security but it usually touches on all the other lines of operation as well as other issues. Of course, those are really not my words,

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because what I really try to do is capture what I've heard the CG say all week, and then say it again in ways that he would want the Secretary of Defense to receive it. And then of course that is again reviewed by the CIG chief, who has a perspective to bring to bear, and then the CG personally edits it to make sure that the tone and the care with which ideas are communicated do exactly reflect his intent. So, again, that is a weekly function that I perform.

What schedule do you follow for the Sec Def letter?

24:20. The Sec Def letter is supposed to be on his desk when he walks into the office on Monday morning. We've heard he reads the whole thing. The routine is, before I go to sleep on Saturday night, whether it is midnight or 0200 (Sunday), I've got the draft, and it goes to (b)(3), (b)(6) and he looks at it Sunday morning. We get another review for grammar and consistency by another member of the CIG. The goal is that before the CG walks into the Ministerial Committee on National Security at 1800--or 1700?--on Sunday evening, he walks into the meeting with the hardcopy version of that. He usually, if that meeting happens, and he's present, he edits the hardcopy version of that draft and hands it back. If he is not present at that meeting or something else happens, then he sometimes edits it electronically. He returns it to the CIG, and we hold onto it until first thing Monday morning, because we verify the casualty figures first thing Monday morning, depending on the CIG Chief's schedule, I send it directly to (b)(3), (b)(6) (b)(3), (b)(6) forwards it to a variety of contacts on Monday morning. Then it is on the Sec Def's desk when he comes in Monday morning.

Do you write it through the week or do you start on Saturday morning?

25:50. I have not yet been able to start writing it all week yet. I've thought about that numerous times, but it seems that there are always developing situations that . . . even if I started writing it earlier in the week, I would end up re-writing it anyway. So I usually write the whole thing on Saturday. There are times that specific chunks could be written earlier in the week, but even then . . . and a great example is when the Charge of the Knights kicked off down in Basra. That situation changed fundamentally on a daily basis through the weekend. So by the time that letter went out on Monday morning, it was substantially different than the draft that I did before I went to sleep on Saturday night. Different weeks differ, but that was a week when there were key developments on Saturday and Sunday that were incorporated up until it was transmitted. Most weeks, it doesn't change much over the weekend, but that was a week that it did.

Can you tell me about the front office, the XO, the aide, and that staff?

27:45. You'd be better off asking them, but from what I can tell, I think the XO, (b)(3), (b)(6) (b)(3), (b)(6) has this unique, long-standing relationship with General Petraeus, understands his preferences, manages his schedule and commitments, leverages that team of three captains to do his scheduling and travel support to make everything as smooth and functional as possible. I think the XO's real job is to be a hub, to be sure that everything stays on track rather than to be a personal executor for the most part, because he has so many details that he has to track that if he dove into individual execution he might lose the bubble.

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28:35. The aide? I don't know. I think the aide probably does more than most aides, in terms of an appreciation of the CG's intent on missions as well as the classic aide functions of helping to keep the CG on schedule, by bringing all the personal support items, the coins, the equipment, the . . . whatever he brings to keep the CG on track.

General Petraeus is very efficient. It is very impressive how efficient he is. He does not waste time in transitions. He can't afford to. He is extremely disciplined, and one thing I've learned since I've been in Iraq is that you really do have to think seriously about your sleep patterns, especially in the CIG, where we're trying to think. You know you can't persist. . . probably really less than six hours on average of sleep. You start to do that, and I think your mental powers are going to degrade over time. So just, everything that the CG does and shapes and touches, to enable him to do that to the maximum extent possible while enabling him to have a sustainable battle rhythm is I think what we're all about.

Now SCJS also does a critical variety of functions, and I don't even appreciate all them, such as all the functions that are purely administrative. For example, the CIG usually doesn't touch award presentation or reenlistments. Unless it is something like maybe the DCG's award, something really . . . but for the most part, the SCJS again provides a whole realm of critical support to the role of the CG as a commander in taking care of his people.

Can you describe the first time you heard IDF?

31:55. There was an IDF attack on Camp Victory in mid-February [soon after I arrived], and I was sitting at my desk and it shook the building. I think that was the first time that I was aware of an IDF attack? I think it left a sense of . . . I think being in theater brings that home in a new way . . . just in seeing the StratOps emails coming over with the CCIR reports of losses. I think the IDF attack reminds you that there are people that are trying to kill us. I don't know if it's healthy or not, but I tend to take a sort of fatalistic view of it, and I think that is relatively easier to do on Camp Victory, because it is so huge. I mean, I think you could be stupid and make yourself vulnerable when you don't need to be. But on the other hand, I just can't see it shaping very critically your battle rhythm, especially around here, where there are a lot of areas where you are relatively invulnerable, like right here inside the palace. So I do think it brings home a sense of the realism of the on-going combat, but other than that I can remember any major reaction.

How would you go about explaining what has happened in Basra in the last three weeks?

33:30. It is an enormously complex situation, and I'm not sure that we yet understand exactly what motivated Prime Minister Maliki to

For two weeks prior to that, or at least two weeks, there had been a . . . I think it was two or three weeks prior when the Mohan plan was first briefed and presented to . . . in a convention center, Blackhawk, kind of meeting, where General Mohan laid out this deliberate plan for how to assert ISF control and presence in Basra in a gradual and progressive fashion. At that time, I think the concern was that, because of other priorities

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in Iraq, even with that plan, might not have supported the extent of the ambition that General Mohan had for what to do in Basra. So out of that meeting was a committee formed by the Prime Minister and General Petraeus to look at resources available for the Mohan plan. That was briefed at the critical sort of weekend. That was briefed again the following Friday night, at which I think the CG got the first indicators that the Prime Minister might do something much more precipitous, with regard to Maliki. The next day, the Prime Minister asked for an unscheduled meeting with the CG and the Ambassador at 1100, and at that time expressed his intent to do something about Basra now. He mentioned the list of units he was going to mobilize, and that he was personally going to go down there Monday, with his AK-47. The understanding in that meeting was that he was going to do something that was, to some extent, a signal to militia groups and criminals that their activities in Basra were unacceptable, and that it might involve a significant number of detentions, but it was not going to be a long, sustained campaign to establish ISF presence in the city. I think on that basis, you know, we continue to learn . . . now whether Prime Minister Maliki actually knew what he intended to do on that Saturday, I don't think is clear. So what happened the next week when he got there is that the scale of the ambitions and the scope of the operations that he began to express did to some extent take the coalition by surprise. It was certainly not recommended by GEN Petraeus. I think the CG's view was that, to an extent, what was happening in Basra was something that was had been working to enable the Iraqi security forces to do, which is to take ownership of a security situation in a PICd environment, but that nevertheless it could have been better planned and the objectives could have been more closely tied to reality than what they were. The CG nevertheless was concerned to show our support to the Prime Minister in the over watch role that we believe we have in the PICd provinces with the enablers that we always expected them to need. So at the same time that we had reservations about the planning, the intelligence, and the pace of the operations, we did push to support them. Even in logistics, the ISF did take the lead, but we supported them with logistics, close air support, air weapons teams, and MiTT teams, so all that has been taking place gradually.

37:30. So what really happened, I think even from the first indications that the CG got that Maliki was going to do something more precipitous in Basra, he was a little concerned that the PM would stick too many short sticks in too many hornets' nest, potentially creating a situation that could spiral. Those concerns probably elevated over the next few days, but the CG was at the same time working everyway possible to prevent that from happening, by reinforcing non-kinetic efforts, humanitarian assistance and information operations, and reconstruction assistance and in the travel support initiatives to prevent the situation spiraling out of control. I think in some ways that where we stand today is not where the worst case scenario would have said. I think the operation is still very much on-going, and long-term solutions are not yet in place, but the ISF presence in Basra and the security presence at the ports have at least given Maliki a symbolic victory that has been backed by major parties and factions in Iraq.

39:00. Whether this can be turned into a long strategic success, I think we still have to see. Mohan is looking at kicking off things again tomorrow. This is still a developing situation. Will they be able to say "we're going after heavy and medium weapons,"

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which Sadr claims they don't possess anyway, and through everything, kinetic and non-kinetic, show JAM or the Sadrists, that it is not after them per se, but after criminal elements and weapons that it is illegal for them to possess anyway. Or will there be a clumsy door-to-door effort that actually pushes mainstream JAM and Special Groups together, and that is exactly what the reverse of what we've been trying to achieve for a long time. So Basra, I don't think we know the ending. I think that . . . my personal perception though is that I think we are at a better place than I think we thought we might be with regard to the actions, especially those taken by the Political Council for National Security last Saturday and their 15-point declaration of clear support for Prime Minister Maliki. I think our fear now is that Prime Minister Maliki might be overconfident and might potentially continue to stick some sticks in hornets' nests that do not need to be dealt with right now. That we should now really focus on cementing the gains that have been achieved, move forward at a measured pace, so . . .

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What is your assessment of what the CG's testimony this week accomplished or tried to accomplish?

45:11. What it tried to accomplish is that the CG and the Ambassador promised to report back. So this is their promise fulfilled on whether the surge has met its objectives and recommendations for the way ahead. So, in terms of doing that, this is . . . fulfilled a promise. I think the intent was to convey that real security gains had been achieved and that Iraqis had begun to take advantage of the opportunities that provided for progress in the economic and political spheres particularly. Diplomatically, there have been a few successes, like the hosting of the Arab Parliamentary Union in northern Iraq. But diplomatically, and part of that is not within their control, but there has been less progress in terms of Iraq's Arab neighbors for probably a host of regions. So the course of action that was initiated with the surge is a course of action that does promise the United States the possibility of achieving strategic success, of meeting the objectives as set out by the Bush administration in the Joint Campaign Plan. And that, in general, staying with it, is worth the effort.

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