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

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American Embassy Annex, International Zone, Baghdad

by (b)(3), (b)(6)
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Interviewer's Comments

The increasing operations tempo of the war on terror has left a thinly-stretched Air Force even more challenged to cover all its missions without enough people. Contractors have eased the pain, but they lack flexibility in assignments, which leads to higher costs than utilizing military personnel. Assessments focuses on getting the right data, and getting it right, figuring out what it means. Iraq faces the unique challenge of developmental economics, where information sharing is fundamentally broken. We need more help to assess politics, diplomacy, and economics, but we successfully showed, through data, that CLCs were a good buy for CF and GoI. Transcription priority: medium based on content.

(b)(3), (b)(6) came from being the Deputy Commandant at the Air Force Academy. Air Force deployments have traditionally been four months. Those have crept up to six months, and then to 12 months for special career fields and O-5s and above. Filling slots has become more difficult as the taskings have increased. People are eligible when they PSC. We have seen people get selected and get no backfill, or positions are gapped between PSCs. The commandant's office has 250 personnel (half officers and half NCOs) of which it typically had 7 deployed. Many people were in 1-deep positions, which meant there was no backup. If someone deployed, someone else had to begin doing double duty. USAFA got its share of AEF deployments.

USAFA has been hit very hard on medical personnel being deployed. They eased some of the pain by civilianizing many base functions, but that has increased costs by some 10-20% and gone on for a long time. We were already at minimal manning, and now places are thinned out, with more people doing two jobs. We've had to restrict medical services and hire contractors, reduce gate opening times. The Air Force drawdown in recent years cost them additional flexibility. While contractors may reduce the expense of doing a given thing (guarding a gate), they are not flexible. The contract is only for that thing, and if a different need arises, you have to write a new contract, which increases expenses. A tech sergeant has the flexibility to learn and do whatever is required; not so a contractor, without considerable more expense.

The operations tempo at USAFA adds more challenges because they do some 10 air shows a year for major events and graduation.

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One of the great things about Assessments is that there is no job description for what you do. It is the ultimate job description in determining, on your own, "what is important?" and "What can you do about it?" It is a detective game to find the things that everybody else missed. It gives leeway in the charter. We work side by side with JCP on issues and concerns. The challenges are that the military is geared toward monitoring security issues, but the military is not primary in a stabilization operation. We have to figure out if we're making progress, but the problem is determining how to measure that. We have means of measuring security (attacks, casualties, IEDs, etc), but we need other means for measuring other lines of operations, the politics, economic, and diplomatic lines. We have hundreds of people feeding data into the security line, but we need the others.

I asked about economics.

(b)(3), (b)(6) devoted half the Assessments team to economics, but he had to teach them. We measure a lot of things that people think are economics, but they are not gathering the essential information. I (b)(3), (b)(6) have got to get out to talk to them, to see what they're doing, and to guide them to what we need.

I asked about "developmental economics," which GEN Petraeus recently talked about.

(b)(3), (b)(6) didn't really study it, and now he wishes he had. In a functioning economy, the market works as a "good information sharing mechanism." In economics, the key is recognizing the informal structures that are the signs of an economy. When the economy is disconnected, the patterns [informal structures] are not obvious. You have to build all these things yourself. We are missing the synergistic effects of a functioning economy on which to build. The good news in Iraq is oil, and oil helps Iraq a lot. But it is a developing economy in the bottom billion of the world's population. Oil is its one advantage. It has an immature legal system and business practices, and these are a breeding ground for corruption. An economy is based on trust. Without that trust, the economy can not develop, and money poured into the milieu just feeds individuals. These are huge challenges.

The good news is that, despite the lack of rules, there are common interests, and these feed productivity cells. We see that in agricultural progress. Many of our efforts are about trying to connect the cells.

We have to identify the proper priority for things. Last fall, GEN P had to begin his testimony according to the 18 benchmarks. He took those on, addressed them, and set them aside. He set them aside because reality has changed and those benchmarks reflect what were the priorities, not what are the priorities. As circumstances change, we have to draw out the most important things. We had last summer's JCP, it balanced priorities, and we had to prioritize them. We have to figure out going forward if we do a drawdown below 15 brigades, what will the role of those forces be? What about the politics surrounding them and the issue of elections. How important is provincial powers? Will given legislation move the ball. We'll probably continue on the present path, but also have to take account of what others say.

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We used to do many different and disconnected reports. We've tried to organize it all and feed everything into a coherent system. The monthly data has gone forward in the Joint Staff Supporting Data. It keeps the 609 report alive, which used to be the 9010 report, and at one point had not been very key.

We link data collection to the testimony. We don't want a report coming out just after the testimony that seems to undermine it, so we work hard to reconcile all the data.

For September 07, 29 August was the cut off date for the briefing data, but a lot of things changed between 29 August and the testimony two weeks later. We kept updating the data, and sent the latest figures to Petraeus the day (or night?) before his testimony. This enabled him to say that the trends demonstrated in the slides had continued up to the (then) present day. This had the effect of reinforcing what the slides were showing.

The most significant challenge is just keeping up. We have to keep commanders on top of changing data, and many commanders have more links than we do, so we have to find the key that links it all together.

I asked how does Assessments synthesize information?

On the example of CLCs, which (b)(6) dealt with, some supported them and some opposed them, but there was not enough information to clarify what their effect was. We took different pieces of information and showed the impact the CLCs were having on violence. We found that CLCs led to fewer IEDs. We looked at Yusifiya to demonstrate the margin for cost benefit. We showed how many American lives were spared by having CLCs against the cost of CLCs, and it was dramatic. We put it all together, and showed the GOI would save money and Shia lives by keeping CLCs. Hence, the program pays for itself, but we had to put all the info together to show that.

I asked what I should ask Maj Gen Robeson.

Robeson has a unique relationship with NSA Dr. Rubaie, and you should ask Robeson for Iraqis' perspective on things.

Final thought: Assessments is evolving. MNFI is trying to use assessments to inform it, to get behind the numbers, because challenges are complex and we're focused on asking the right questions about the data.

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