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

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Embassy Annex, International Zone, Baghdad

by (b)(3), (b)(6)  
MNFI Historian

Interviewer's Comments: *I knew (b)(3), (b)(6) when he was teaching at USMA in the history department from '96 to '98. He detailed the work of the Prime Minister's National Operations Center, its Crisis Management Cell, and the problems surrounding the Mosul Dam. US is working much better with Iraqis over last six months, Iraqi forces are getting better, poor banking institutions are a serious problem. The best and worst he has seen over six months were the return of the Iraqi soccer team and the bombing in Khantiniyah.*

(b)(3), (b)(6) acknowledged the interview belongs to U.S. Central Command.

(U) (b)(3), (b)(6) is an engineer and has a Ph.D. in history. He came to this position from an ROTC position at the University of Dayton. For his next job, he hopes to take the ROTC Brigade position in San Antonio.

(U) We are nearly at a tipping point, nearly finished with the al Qaeda fight. The next struggle threatens to be greater, and that is the internecine squabbles among the Shia.

(U) What is the Prime Minister's National Operations Center (NOC). It's director is (b)(6) (b)(6) a career bureaucrat who is now working with his third PM. The NOC is the Iraqi Situation Room, it gets done what the PM needs getting done. It is a coalition conceived, MNSTCI-build operations center. It makes them look much more broadly and give the PM situational awareness. The NOC has 1.4a people altogether conducting 24/7 operations. They are learning each day. NATO mission training is an on-going effort on the issue of what military questions matter.

(U) The PMNOC recently stood up a Crisis Management Cell. Of the 1.4a personnel, half are liaisons to the GoI's various ministries, such as the Iraqi National Intelligence Service. It is an all-male organization, it is establishing ground truth. The Crisis Management Cell is planning against and dealing with crises. They handle anything a province needs help with, but only those things. For example, they responded to events in Qantiniyah and in Karbala. Other events, bombings, etc, are the price of doing business, and they see them as provincial affairs.

(U) The Mosul Dam is an issue of great concern. It has three functions:

1. Hydroelectric Power

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2. Irrigation to farmers upstream, which mean they want the water higher.
3. Water storage.

(U) Problem is the foundation is made a limestone. It was built under Saddam, and the Iraqis developed a continuous grouting process for it, but this was never a permanent solution. The Crisis Management Cell is involved with it. US has warned there is a high risk of catastrophic failure, with flooding doing tremendous damage in Mosul and even down to Baghdad. For now, the Iraqis have lowered the water level to 10 meters, which has shrunk the lake by half, from something like 80km square to 1.4a causing farmers to have irrigation problems. Iraqis are considering building a downstream dam to alleviate the problem.

(U) Washington worked with (b)(6) on the reception and return of the Iraqi national soccer team, as well as getting the PM out of the country quickly when he needed medical care.

(U) The NOC personnel are on a working life schedule. They take Fridays off and work six, eight-hour days in three shifts. It is one of the few places in GoI that has a broad mixture of ethnicities. It is as non-sectarian as it gets here. (b)(6) is the PM's chief of staff. He is moving away from sectarian bias. (b)(6) does weekly engagement with Maj Gen Barbero, and (b)(3), (b)(6) sees all their interactions. The nation is testing their sovereignty. There are CoR frustrations over absolutely critical issues.

~~(S//NF)~~ We are moving the 1.4a, 1.4g out of Tuwaitha. At the same time, Iraq is seeking the return of its CBRN defense capability.

(U) New concern is vetting personnel coming into the country, using biometrics with 1.4b

(U) The PM NOC is involved with everything we do strategically, operationally, and tactically. We brief them on battalion operations and sensitive issues. Nonetheless, in the press, the GOI sometimes denies knowledge of U.S. operations to play to the crowd.

(U) We are much closer to the population than I've previously seen. Soldiers at checkpoints and CJSOTF are working close to the Iraqis. Iraqis have not put aside their tribal first concepts.

(U) Iraqis are remarkably candid and opinionated, but with little basis in fact in their reasoning. Facts are not critical, and if you present facts, Iraqis will shrug the facts away as not particularly important.

(U) Arrived in Baghdad on 16-17 June. There were IDFs nightly, because we had not yet driven the violence away from our doorstep.

(U) At the end of August, (b)(6) (AUS) was pushing combined planning for major religious events, such as several million pilgrims visiting Kadhamiya. Worked

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closely with Iraqis on it, and there were almost no incidents, and this led to planning for the 12th imam celebration in Karbala. All our plans had been to disrupt any effort by AQI against the pilgrimage, and a Shia conflict erupted between Sadrist and others. The PM got involved, arresting Sadrists, so it was GoI and Badr against Sadrists. It led the population to question Sadr and his motives. Sadr started losing control and influence, so he announced his freeze. We were stunned when we got that word, and did not believe it at first. Some Sadrists wanted to keep fighting. We designated them as "Special Groups," and Sadr cut them loose, disavowing their violence. This helped us go after the special groups, as well as to devote more attention to AQI.

(U) The Awakening Movement has been amazing. You can now drive in relative safety to Jordan.

(U) Iraqi TV commercials have really targeted terrorists, along with a website called noterror.org. There are two dramatic commercials featuring a market scene, the senseless kidnapping and torture of a man who refuses to reveal himself as Sunni or Shia but only as 'Iraqi', and a sheik leading people peacefully against armed gangs. The message Iraqis are giving and getting is 'we must succeed.'

(U) There has been an Iraqi surge of Iraqi Army and police, and there is an unabated effort to grow the military. Iraqis are stepping up, and we can't afford a reversal.

(U) The mission requires a robust ISF of some 500,000. It helps the country's economics and its employment situation. We are conducting many initiatives to train and develop entrepreneurship. One cause of the problem with corruption arises from Iraqi law making contractor fraud a jailable offense. Since there is such a backlog in the judiciary, it makes it too hard to prosecute fraud. Another serious problem is the poor banking system and the lack of a postal service. There is no Iraqi mail, no way to move money around the country and the system safely.

(U) One of the most important NOC functions is inter-ministerial coordination. In the most recent return of refugees, many problems arose of where were they to live, and what would they do. NOC does not plan or order what should happen, but they coordinate. The GoI easily becomes a focus for dissatisfaction. People want wrongs and grievances redressed, they want to return to their homes, but there is a property rights issue of 'he said, she said.' Whole neighborhoods have serious property law problems connected to land seizures.

Two moments have been the best and worst in Iraq for (b)(3), (b)(6)

1) The joy of the Iraqi people when we brought the Iraqi soccer team back. The streets saw chaotic celebration. Most of the team came back, but some still felt it was too dangerous, including the coach. Those who came were loved. Normally, a convoy on the move is a target, and it is dangerous to get close to one. We have a green laser we shine at other drivers as warnings to stay away. There were too many Iraqis, and they were too happy to keep their distance. They were high fiving the players on the bus, and Iraqis were dancing on top of my HMMWV. (b)(3), (b)(6) just had to enjoy it.

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2) After the bombing in Khantiniyah, in Ninewa province. It is a Yezidi mud hut village. They were poor peasants, totally apolitical, scratching out a life by living close to the Earth. Twin bombings killed hundreds and destroyed the villages. (b)(3), (b)(6) flew up there with (b)(3), (b)(6) PM Maliki gave (b)(3), (b)(6) a duffel bag with \$600,000 to distribute to the people in reparations for the destruction. Seeing that destruction and senseless violence made (b)(3), (b)(6) the angriest he has been. It drove home that we need the resolve to stay the course.

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