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Phoenix Base Camp, International Zone, Baghdad

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

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Abstract

McManus has deployed on a number of peacekeeping missions. For Australia, when the national interest may be obscure on its coalition deployments, the Australian officer can know his job is always do his best, make Australia look good, and convinced others they always want the Aussies on their side. Coalition forces have considerable difficulties understanding Iraqi processes and ways, as they have difficulty understanding our ways. There is a level of sectarianism in the MoD. Gen Babakir (JHQ) is very impressive. Transcription priority: medium. This is a very good interview on the Australian perspective and on JHQ. The following notes are very close to the recording.

Background

McManus's background: 28 years of service; a transport officer; has done divisional level units, commanded a battalion in operational service in East Timor; deployed as UN Military Observer in Golan Heights, Syria, Lebanon, in 92 in Sarajevo, Bosnia, on 6th visit to Iraq. Previously came as J1/J4 or CoS Pers and Log at the Australian CentCom equivalent. Established the Aussie log network and incorporated it into the US network; handled basing issues across the region; deployed in current job on 1 September 2007 as CG JHQAT.

Can you explain Australian defense concerns and strategies for when the deployment situation is not crystal clear?

I understand the question. My first deployment to the Golan Heights was more about professional development and a great opportunity to ply your trade than anything else. National policy and guidance really didn't figure into my view at the time. It was just a fantastic opportunity. But it did open my eyes to the impact of different national views on a problem, and it showed how the stove piped views gained from training needs to be tempered by other perspectives. So if I transition that to the Iraq position, whilst there is an Australian discussion about the Australian role in the region, your actions as an individual or your actions as a group of Australian service members has an impact on the world's view of your country. Hence, it is important to make a good impression and to conduct yourself honorably to the good of your nation. I continue to temper that with the view that as an individual, you are here to do your best with the previous experiences, education, and training you've received, tempered by the guidance your government has given you.

5:30 *What would those parameters be?*

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Most simply, don't make Australia look silly; be professional in the conduct of your duties; don't be negligent or fraudulent; don't let the national side down; work closely with your coalition partner so that those countries, not just the US, the UK, Poland, etc., have a view that these are good people to have with you in the future. Also, you want a good reputation with the Iraqis, so they see you as making a positive contribution and want you to be here. You can't be seen to pushing a specific national line. That can be counterproductive, so it is a simple lead-by-example model from being a junior officer.

7:30 On the topic of Israel, there is a crisis brewing with Palestinians breaching the Egyptian border. Does your experience in the Golan Heights inform your understanding of the situation in Gaza?

I think my experiences there and in many places inform my views of the whole region. Gaza is a microcosm of much larger issues, and it is an example of how a single issue can be blown up by individuals who have a particular barrow to push. So the world is full of those types of opportunities, depending on the circumstances that arise. My time in south Lebanon helped me see the many different cultural approaches with Arabic communities. The actions that people take are done for tribal, family, or cultural reasons that the Anglo-Saxon world has moved beyond. Lead by example from a cultural perspective may take a couple of generations. It is an interesting challenge. Understanding the Gaza and the Israel problem is not something a textbook or a solution will solve.

11:30. Before this job, was a student at our national defense college, and I was given a much better opportunity. As a student, I worked in our Centcom equivalent. It was a daily activity understanding what was going on here, and traveling to Florida or NATO, and reviewing Australia's role here.

In Dec '06, GEN Casey assessed strategic failure, but how do you think it came to that point?

13:09. My simplistic estimate was that we underestimated the complexity of the task. That sounds like a very blunt and harsh statement. I would not like that to sound like other people had better ideas. It was almost like a 'voyage of discovery' kind of activity. A lot of what we do in our business is all about calculated risk. Also, we don't like to put our soldiers in harms way for one minute longer than necessary. So if there was a way to slow down or remove the problem, and get done earlier, then that was always a laudible undertaking. But the complexity of the problem here in this country, whilst the military probably largely solved many of the military problems, the military is only one arm of the nation's power, and it was the development of those other arms of the national power, the cultural, the economic, other aspects, that I'm not certain that we paid sufficient to all those pillars of government in a synchronized fashion to produce a national solution. We certainly produced a very good military solution. The surge was a branch activity to an initial line of operation not succeeding as we would have desired. We got to a point of determining we were not getting the results desired or intended, so had to implement a

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branch plan to get back on track. I think people will judge the surge a prudent military decision based on the situation at the time.

Iraqi Joint Headquarters

JHQ is an interesting place because it has had no real investment since the coalition has been here. It has had a slow metamorphosis, developing its own identity. It is a collection of senior military officers. There are probably only 15 to 20 capable Iraqi officers in the whole of the JHQ, out of 1000.

17:20 They live in the IZ under constant danger and threat. It is difficult to comprehend life in a war zone. Many have had family members killed, kidnapped. Many CF don't appreciate that. For a range of officers, they've lived under threat for a couple of years, and it certainly wears down of them. Only the really great men step up to that challenge. Throughout their daily lives, they face the constant threat of having their house burned or family attacked.

While we've been doing PICs around the country and developing good tactical effects for battalions and brigades, doing strategy for the MoD is a different thing. Their officer education system was stuck in a 1950s-1960s mindset. They don't have the knowledge, training base, or experience to do this all from scratch. We are always developing new competencies, and they must also. They're using 1960s staff manuals, to show how backwards they are.

20:30. The way we do business is a wholly different basis than their. They don't have the knowledge, training, experience, to take on the concepts we consider pretty standards. 20-years-ago, we were much slower than we are today. We challenge ourselves on an on-going basis. These guys have not been challenged in twenty years. The staff pulls out their staff manual, which is from the 1960s. The really good ones have stuff they've borrowed from India and Pakistan from 70's and 80s. Many of the concepts we were trying to discuss with senior officers, they were not getting it.

23:00 We were using the wrong military language is talking with our superiors here. It was our military language, not theirs. We were using our concept of the logistics system, which was foreign to them. The logistics system, from where they used to be, does not incorporate our concepts of fuel, maintain, repair, train, execute, back to assess. It has been too great an education leap. Their J6 everything communications, whereas in our system, the logistics guys pick up the acquisition, the maintenance, the parts, . . . but the Iraqis are still stuck in a system that our Armies used back in the 50s, where technical specialties owned everything having to do with that specialty. They have not gone to what we jokingly refer to here as the Western Matrix Management System. We cross walk everything between branches and sub-branches. Cross walking here doesn't exist because it violates the concept of the top guy owning everything.

We don't understand that it has been too great an education leap for them to embrace our way on that. It is a challenge to the way they understand business to be done. Their senior guys don't understand the matrix management system that we use, that makes our integration faster and more capable, while having greater risks, but producing greater

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results. We're trying to get them to understand concepts that none of them have never been trained on. This has come as a surprise to a lot of people. We know our system works for us, and a lot of junior officers especially don't understand why it doesn't work for the Iraqis and why they aren't interested in it. They need consistent guidance from the top to take them to where they need to go.

The JHQ is stove piped, and does not integrate systems well. Within the stovepipes, it works very well in places, but can't communicate between stovepipes. As a HQ, you find pockets of excellence where that stovepipe works very well, and doesn't rely on others. When you get to the higher HQ, that is where the friction points occur.

29:00 The second interesting fact about the JHQ is that it occupies the same building as the Ministry of Defense. We've instituted civilian control of MoD, but that is a shock to them. This creates a civil stovepipe in the MoD, which does not integrate well. We've created a second stove pipe. It is not something they've done in the past. The conclusion is that the right investment is not in the senior guys, but in mid-level and junior guys, those willing and able to learn.

As an example of a challenge, the US, UK, and AUS offered schooling opportunities for 225 Iraqi officers (staff colleges and war colleges). Of 225 selected, only 95 got overseas due to a number of issues. That is progress over previous years, but you can see how slow it is going in getting the bureaucracy to overcome obstacles. I have seen a couple of young LTCs who attended staff colleges abroad and clearly have great future possibilities. Some senior officers are mentoring them for future success, but these guys are smart enough to keep their heads down, because if they seem too smart or too ambitious, somebody is liable to knock them off. The main focus is still with family in Iraq, over country.

Enemy

37:00. The Enemy in Iraq is impatience; pushing things too fast and too hard in developing the Iraqi JHQ, is counterproductive, like pushing a child. We can't crash-course it. You have to lead by example, let themselves fail, pick themselves up, and keep going. They have to crawl, walk, run in this marathon. The JHQ in some places is walking; in others it is crawling. We have to determine their marathon pace, which is well over 4 hours, not 2 plus hours our forces can do. We have to judge things by the Iraqi good enough, not by our good enough.

The Home Front and our Politicians

42:00 The average person [in the U.S., in UK, in Australia] has no idea what people do here in Iraq. Sometimes I think the people who fly in and fly out, visit and fly out, leave with an impression, are sometimes the most dangerous of individuals. I've had the chance to brief, or talk to some people who've come on these ins-and-outs in this AO or others, and I have a simplistic term for them, I call them FOB-Hoppers. They come in, they feel a sense of joy or whatever, and they use whatever snippet of news that is relevant to push a particular line at home, and that is very Iraqi. It is a very stove piped

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way of doing business. It just runs down a particular line and produces a singular outcome.

And we execute our orders (stay or go), do the best we can, and then evaluate how we did given the time and resources provided and the guidance received.

43:45. The head of the JHQ is General Babakir Baderkhan Zebary. He commands great respect, his tribe is from Kurdistan. He has been senior since 2004, since coalition came in. He has the respect of nearly everyone. He is non-western in leadership style, but quite effective. Most western officers have an ego of some type, very confident. In Australian cricket-parlance they're front-foot drivers, you step out into the ball, you don't wait for it to come to you. Babakir respects everybody, treats the lowest soldier as he treats his deputy or himself. He is very deep thinking, and very relaxed about minor setbacks, including losses on the battlefield. He has a long-term game plan. His horizon is set on Iraq's future. He doesn't back people into corners or shame people. He is the one senior officer on the Iraqi JHQ that I would comfortably say he is a great man. Whether he is the right man for the time is an interesting question, whether the military needs a more forceful driver right now, perhaps. I would work for him, gladly, one of three from coalition countries I would work for, and for whom I think national sacrifices make sense to work for him.

Sectarianism

49:15 *Do you see much sectarianism in JHQ?*

There are always . . . when people are frustrated, they'll blame some trait they associate with Kurd, or Sunni, or Shia. Babakir insists on merit, regardless of sect or religion. He chooses to appoint capable officers. In the MoD, I do see some sectarianism over there. The MoD is very much pushing a line of . . . not open sectarian line, but almost a frightened push to make sure we don't have too many minorities in the MoD. Now, the Minister of Defense is a Sunni, but the reputation behind the doors is that he is the most "Shia" Sunni they've ever seen. They believe he is a Shia by his actions. That is all hearsay and so on. There are elements of it that, if you paid more attention, you might find he is favoring one side more than the other.

52:16. Some of that may just be him working within the higher government's sectarianism, where he as a Sunni is in the minority, and within a Shia majority organization, he has to make more accommodations to Shia, to play the game for awhile. What are the threats to his position and his life that require him to maintain a particular kind of balance.

McManus was in south Lebanon and Golan Heights. 1992-1993.

Some have worried that sectarianism is driving Iraq in the direction of Lebanon. Would you see that?

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I think every country has the potential to become Lebanon or Iraq. What stops that is a common purpose. The US and AUS have developed the common purpose in our political system over a couple of hundred years. For US, George Washington was a unifying individual. Henry Parks was a unifying individual for Australia. But Iraq does not have a unifying individual.

What is the long-term strategic purpose for CF here?

To be the kind of people that they would want to sign long-term agreements with, to lead by example. My purpose is to do myself out of a job, but how long will that take? I can produce some really good metrics that get me out of here in a week, but what purpose will that serve? The time will not be driven by us, but by the Iraqis, our hosts. The SOFA will be an important part of this package this year. It is a step in the maturing of the nation of Iraq. We have a SOFA in Afghanistan, but that is a difficult circumstance to be subject to their laws. Where you have a sustained presence, how long will they tolerate you? The enduring parts of a military deployment are because there is an identifiable external threat, or somebody is there is to build up your capabilities. The SOFA involving all the CF will pose a range of interesting dilemmas for Iraq. So many countries are re-engaging Iraq, opening consulates and embassies outside of Baghdad. For all the US investment of blood and treasure, it would be a bad outcome for US if Iraqis suddenly decided they didn't need our help and told us to leave after this huge investment.

1:04:30. Will be replaced soon by Brigadier Steven Dunn.

What has impressed McManus is:

- 1) the patience of junior officers as they try to make small miracles happen with CF, and not necessarily with the Iraqis. The jobs we thrust them into are ones we would never give them at home. I have lieutenants and captains advising generals. This shows the immaturity of our effort, which Dubik has focused on fixing.
- 2) willingness of Iraqi senior officers as individuals to listen and try to understand what we are trying to offer. They are more patient than I think we would be. They put up with our coalition turnover
- 3) impressed with how smoothly Aus and UK officers fit into the US structure. Each brings different perspectives. It is quite enjoyable in this environment. I've enjoyed the guys I'm working with, especially (b)(3), (b)(6) (USN), the chief of staff.

This has been a great opportunity to work within this environment. It is great OPD. It improves our competency and capacity for future. We're better prepared for the future. It demands taking a long term view of national interests and priorities.

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