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Embassy Annex, International Zone, Baghdad

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

MNFI Historian

Abstract

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Interview

What is your background?

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(U) 4:50. I was here TDY in 2003. I spent three weeks in September 2003 doing coordination in the governance office, handling the security piece, under CPA, doing Arabic media outreach.

(U) 6:35. I was assigned to a governance office, which have now become PRTs, and there was an essential piece missing there, which was the security piece. We had been sent as diplomats to various places around the country. I had been sent down in Najaf, but I did not have a PSD. When we went outside, outside the governance center, we had no security. There was no protocol for that. Luckily, nothing happened. We were collocated with a Spanish civil affairs battalion and worked with them on an ad hoc basis. We made it work for how a PRT maintains presence. It was difficult to organize anything. I went up to Hilla to link up with KBR for some support. We needed bedding. KBR had mattresses, but they had no way to get this stuff to Najaf and no security for a convoy to get it to Najaf. It was a Catch 22 situation since we were unable to get convoy support.

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(U) I was in Baghdad with the CPA from October through December.

(U) 10:00 There was sort of a sense, when Saddam was captured, that this was a significant event, and that this might begin to lead to the falling apart of the remaining resistance, which we now know didn't occur. At the time, it seemed a significant security event.

What was Najaf like while you were there, security wise?

(U) 10:40. I was there at a time when Muqtada al-Sadr was beginning to take over the Kufa mosque, and beginning to assert, through militia activity, a very malign influence in Kufa. There was a lot of concern being expressed and a lot of discussion. . . of course, he was alleged to have been involved in the 10 April killing of al-Khoei. There was a staunch rumor of a standing indictment associated with that murder. The [1.4b] backed down from Muqtada al-Sadr and they backed down from thugs who were taking over the collection plates in the mosques. On the other hand, I had a very good sense of the [1.4b] who provided security to us.

(U) 14:30. When I went up to Baghdad, I worked with the Governing Council as they headed to Madrid for the Madrid donor conference. I put together press planning, set up interviews with many officials there on that team, came back, and they kept me in the press office, and I worked on Arab media outreach, typical foreign affairs outreach.

Don't know if it is a fair question, but was CPA competent to the task?

(U) 15:54. It was almost set up for failure in some ways, looking back.

More to the point, perhaps, what did you feel in November and December 2003 as regards confusion on the task?

(U) 16:10. Well, of course, even then, when I got here in September, there was a sense that we were going to succeed here. You just couldn't entertain doubts about what we were trying to achieve. At the same time, there were really grandiose expectations that I saw on a personal level when we were preparing for the donor conference, which required that the Iraqis interact with the international donor community. And it turned out that there were a number of people that were working within the CPA that wanted to float or submit a number of proposals for funding from the World Bank or the Japanese, or others, and a lot of that led to a lot of grandiose ideas coming out, such as were mentioned in the 2003 supplemental, ideas of grandiose prisons and the zip code system, really kind of proposals that were disconnected from the reality on the ground, and that came from people being stuck in the building and not really knowing Iraq particularly well, but projecting their own ideas on this blank canvas that we thought we were looking at, when Iraq actually has a whole historical and cultural background [that should] inform any plans we would have for it, as we've seen over the last five years. So in those days, late '03, there was a sense of anything was possible here, that we could make it all happen. In those days, I had no sense that the wheels were coming off. There were others, I gather, who were predicting [failure]. You were kind of bewildered by the presence and the size of the operation, and there was a sense of a lot of internal business being done, and not a lot of significant work being done externally, and a lot of the work was generated inside for the organization, but whether CPA was up to the task . . . there were also things that as a Foreign Service Officer were frustrating to deal with.

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(U) 18:45. For example, we had difficulty doing routine things. In order to get newspapers, we needed a vehicle for someone to drive down to the where all the newspapers were sold, so we needed to purchase a vehicle, but the DOD bureaucracy could not do it. The State Department knows how to function in a foreign environment, like buying vehicles for use, but DOD regulations would let us purchase vehicles here.

(U) 23:20. Bremer had been working on a caucus system, and he went to Washington for guidance in the fall of 2003. We'd been trying to set up a caucus system, which fell apart with his trip to the state.

How did you come to return?

(U) I volunteered to come back in 2008. It was clear I'd have to come back again sometime, but it was hard leaving my wife and three small kids. I discussed this position with my predecessor before I came, so I knew what it was about.

Do you know anything about the background for Reconciliation?

~~(S/ACGU)~~ 28:40. You hear about things, but there is not much documentary evidence available. Ambassador Khalilzad, in particular, had reached out, and people tell us that, and that he had sought contacts, but there is not much documentation of that. There were periods of outreach.

What was it like when you returned?

(U) I arrived on 15 May 2008. The atmosphere was pretty good. This was after Basra and Sadr City. The IDF had largely stopped, so it was a positive atmosphere, and had a certain buoyancy. There was momentum in the mission. Once you get into the existential issues, like Khanaqin, Kirkuk, PEL, Basra, SOFA discussions, things get more tense.

What Iraqis do you typically work with?

(U) The PM's advisors: (b)(6) PE & furthered his own standing. Much more diverse political. There is greater military capacity. Military operations. The ISF. Parliament is developing.

(U) We are still working on the SOFA, on reconciling the Former Regime military, on Sunni enthusiasm for provincial elections, and the announcement by Sadr on targeting CF, and the Sol integration. Very beginning. Difficult. IFCNR. Sol. IDPs. (b)(6) Director. 51:22.

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