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Embassy Annex, International Zone, Baghdad

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

Abstract

(b)(6) a linguistic prodigy, had an eclectic career on Capital Hill as a staffer before coming to Baghdad in April 2005 with the International Republican Institute. He helped set up the Council of Representatives' research directorate for IRI, was its country director in 2006, and in January 2007 joined the State Department at the embassy. He now handles all CODELs and keeps the ambassador apprised of legislative issues in Washington. He is now an old hand in Iraq. Policy is better coordinated than it once was. As an aside, Congress requires a lot of reports from the executive branch because reports give them a way to stay, or feel, relevant. In '05 and '06, despite many Iraqi contacts, none knew what the solution was the Americans might have implemented to fix things. It was a heady time because 2005 was so full of political developments, elections, and constitution writing. It seemed the future was promising, but it was all coming on the CPA's timeline. Iraqis are wrestling with a horrible past and fundamental constitutional issues. The socialist economy ruined individual initiative. Tribes are vital elements we can not ignore if there is to be hope of succeeding. The February '06 bombing uncorked the violence, and 2006 was awful. On top of it all, our tactics--the FOB mentality--were wrong, and trying to just hand it off to the Iraqis was wrong. AQI gave us the opportunity by overreaching, by tyrannizing Sunnis. Visiting Congressmen don't tend to recognize the importance of the tribes. Unity governments, such as the GoI, are very fragile, and it is very difficult to make it work. The mysterious dichotomy underlying everything is the Arabs' zero-sum mentality coinciding with tribal compromise and consensus, which alone will enable you to survive in the desert. Fear is the most common denominator. Things are much better here, but it is going to take time. Transcription priority: low. It is an excellent interview, but these notes are nearly verbatim from the recording.

Background

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How would you characterize the history of your role in, or piece of, Iraq over the last three years?

7:57. I was lucky as Governance Director because I was able to develop institutions in the Council of Representatives, the CoR. I was able to establish their version of the Congressional Research Service, as well as the Legislative Council, which in our Congress, LegCouncil drafts legislation. In Congress, if you're a staffer and your boss wants you to draft a bill that does something, unless you're a smart and capable lawyer, you go to Legcouncil and tell them what you want the bill to do and they draft it up. I put together their legal counsel, their budget office, and then moved on. When I became the IRI Country Director, I began overseeing governance, political parties, and civil societies. Then, after 19 months doing that, or 20, in November '06, the IRI decided Baghdad was too dangerous, and decided to go to Erbil. I disagreed, because I did not think they could come close to doing the same kind of work up there that needed to be done down here. So I was leaving country, and then Zalmay Khalilzad, then the US Ambassador, asked me to stay here as his legislative advisor. I said, "Are you crazy? I'm getting out of here." But they kept after me, and I finally accepted and came back in '07.

10:10. I'm responsible now for two problems. First, advising the ambassador on everything Congress is doing relative to Iraq, which affects us more than a regular embassy. I'm also in charge of the CODELs. In 2007, we did 57, with 208 congressmen and 186 staffers. In January, February, and March of 2007, we had 3, 3, and 3 CODELs. This year we've had 10, 9, and 11 in March. I've had one leave home in the last 13 months. There is just not a good time for me to vanish and go. I went home with the Ambassador when he testified in September, and I'll probably go back again when he testifies in April. I travel with the CODELs here and I'm their control officer from the time they hit the ground until they leave.

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The challenge I have with everyone in discussing Iraq is they see their small piece of it, but it is hard to get a big picture for what's going on.

I'm fortunate because I've been here awhile and seen a lot, and been to a lot of places. When I was with IRI, I lived out in the Red Zone, in Karadah. I was back and forth every day. As country director, I had 63 Iraqi staffers, and I talked with them daily, I was out in the city daily, and I was working with members of the National Assembly, and I get out . . . we do a CODEL about every three days, so I get out all over the country with them. Because I report directly to the Ambassador, I'm pretty well hooked into all of our policies here. When I'm with a CODEL, I'm not just babysitting here. They're peppering me with questions on a variety of topics, so I've got a pretty good overview of our entire policy base. Then, I still have Iraqi friends in the city, and I ping them with questions about what's it like, what is going on in their neighborhoods. I'm lucky that I've sort of done both sides of the coin here, rather than coming for a few months, staying isolated in my cubicle in the Green Zone or the embassy, never getting out, and then leaving. Continuity is one of the big problems here. I've been here through 10 Air Force rotations, three, almost four Army rotations, three Marine Corps rotations, and four State Department rotations. It is hard to expect people to stay here longer than a year, but there is this constant re-education process, and it is a little annoying. It is like when you're a high school senior and you get this constant flow of incoming freshmen, and they ask all these stupid questions, or they think they know how to reinvent the wheel, when four waves of people before them thought they knew how to reinvent the wheel in the same way.

What about the challenge of comprehending policy to be one thing, but sensing it did not fit the situation on the ground?

15:35. That has gotten better. In the time I've been here, it was "This is the policy, it shall not waiver." And it was like trying to slam the square peg into the round hole. I think the USMI and the MNFI have gotten much better at making the policy fit the circumstances. For example, they better at embracing the tribes rather than rejecting them as a vestige of some unacceptable past. The tribes is how stuff works here, the tribes drove everything. I see unit commanders getting to know the local Iraqis, kissing the local Iraqis, and that is a big deal here. When you get to a certain level of friendship, men will kiss one another on the cheek three times. A typical O-5 might just want to shake hands, but they know that this is important, and if that Iraqi is ready to kiss my cheek, then I can use that to further my goals and protect my unit. And they know to go and drink the tea and eat with the right hand and develop the relationship and pass that relationship off to whoever they TOA to.

I want to backtrack for some questions on earlier periods, beginning with your time with Congress and interagency challenges. When he returned to the Department of Defense, Secretary Rumsfeld expressed great consternation at the number of congressionally mandated reports the Pentagon has to provide. Why have the reports grown like they have?

18:20. Reporting requirements grew because Congress felt it was being stiffed on what was going on. They are co-equal branches of government, but congressmen feel they are

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a little more equal than the other two. And so, if Congress thinks its being cut out of the loop or left out of key decision-making processes, even if it doesn't a constitutionally-provided right to be in those processes, reporting requirements are the best way they have to remain part of the process. With me, I ran the East Asia Subcommittee. That is north Burma to California, but China was the big gorilla in the cage, and Congress doesn't constitutionally have a role in foreign policy, besides treaty making in the Senate. But if Congress is worried about technology transfers or jobs, the way for you to influence foreign policies that you don't have a constitutional say in is to create reporting requirements, to pass legislation that prohibits some trades or transfers. It used to be the Most Favored Nation requirement. In order for various governments to get that desired status, the administration had to click off a series of things, about compliance with human rights standards and trade standards, and that yearly process gave Congress a way to try to influence foreign policy. There would be hearings and 25 million reports due, and so, it has become its own monster. That is more clear to me now on the executive side because I see a lot of agencies spend a lot of their time responding to reporting requirements. It is the same here. Staff numbers, I don't know they have grown that much. The committees have fairly large staffs, but that is part of the nature of the beast. As a member of Congress, you're expected to know all things about everything, because you are having to vote on things from Alfalfa feed to something with Z. Personal staffs have not grown that much, because Congressmen are giving a chunk of money and they have to hire staff out of that, and the chunk doesn't change much. Congressional staff numbers have not grown that much. In the house, Representatives' staffs tend to have about six people. Senators' staff tend to have about fifteen to twenty people. The committee staffs tend to be bigger because that is where most of the work is done, but the staffing is proportionate to the work.

I think the growth, not so much of staff, but of what a congressman does, reflects how much more congress does, and it is about trying to stay involved. I do think that with the administration conducting military operations without declarations of war, that does invite Congress to require reports on all kinds of stuff all the time to maintain some oversight before a war happens. I think the blame lays on both sides. Administrations have cut Congress out, and Congress has an aggrandized view of what its position is.

Where were you on the morning of 9/11?

26:00. On 9/11, I was at my house just off the capital, at 8th Street and A. I was packing, having sold the house. A friend called and told me to turn on the TV. I remember how surreal it felt, and how nice people were to each other for a couple of weeks after. People were courteous on the highway, and nice. And then it was back to business as usual. My senate job had ended on 31 August. It had been with Senator Thomas, from Wyoming. He was a very black and white guy. He wanted to see the problem, write legislation to fix it, and make it go away. He had been on the Foreign Relations committee, but Foreign Relations was not much fun for him because there are no black and white solutions to foreign problems. He moved to the Finance Committee in August, right before the August recess. I broke up a 12-year relationship in July, and had to sell the house.

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32:30. By October . . . Thomas had run into the Library of Congress, who was looking for someone to run their legal research, and I knew the librarian, but I wound up with the US China Security Review Commission for awhile. When we gave up the MFN review, Congress felt, and this is a super example of the reporting thing. When we gave up the MFN, there was no way for Congress to oversee the relationship any more. There was no mechanism when we gave up the MFN mechanism in 2000. So, Congress created this commission. The House and the Senate could not agree on its scope or composition, so they created two, one for the Senate and one for the House, and I was on the Senate one. So I moved into that. It got a little bureaucratic.

For the period from '03 through April of '05, from the invasion through things going south, what do you remember of your impressions of those events as you watched them from afar?

34:50. I remember being on the stairmaster at the gym and watching "Shock and Awe" and thinking, wow, that's cool. Now, the speech on the aircraft carrier, there was pressure for an ending, but I remember thinking, you really don't want to say "Victory is Achieved." To sit on the deck of an aircraft carrier and say "We Won." Well, the hedging started immediately. And then, we want to keep troops around awhile. And I have been around fledging democracies enough, and foreign policy was kind of my pre-existence, you don't just come riding in somewhere, take down a totalitarian system, and then say, boom, democracy, here you go. What you do is you suck out the power center, and leave a vacuum, and then all those little internecine fault lines don't have anything to hold them together any more. That is what you got with Yugoslavia. You take out the communist state, and what you've got left is a fucking mess for twenty years. Serbs on the streets and marching in Kosovo, and people forget we've still got troops there. The Soviet Union fell and central Asia is still in turmoil.

37:32. I was not paying a lot of attention to it because it is sort of outside my area, but I just remember thinking . . .

My sense of the situation was that it is only the loser that decides when the conflict is over.

37:48. And this place is not going to be over for a long time. Just like Yugoslavia isn't going to be over for a long time. I remember thinking that, but I wasn't paying attention from day to day. But when I rolled in . . . I rolled in in April, they had the Interim National Council, but they hadn't drafted the Constitution. You could still . . . it was just at the end of the period that it was still sort of permissive. I met people who just the month before I got here had caught a cab to go across the river to the Palestine hotel. When I rolled around town, it was me and five guys with guns, and two old beat up BMWs, and our compound was out in Karadah, with our offices. Then, February 2006 hit, which was when Al Qaeda bombed the Askariyyah Shrine, and it just went to shit. I mean that was the fracture.

In that early period, April '05 to February '06, were there any Iraqis who tried to explain to you that 'Look, if only the Americans would do this, then things would be okay.'

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40:45. No, because I don't think they knew at the time. I don't think anybody knew, Iraqis included, what . . . you needed A, B, and C to put in here to make this thing work, because they never had any experience with democracy here. It was Saddam, and before Saddam it was the military government, and before the military government it was the British and the monarchy, and before them it was the Ottomans, and before them it was the . . . boom, boom, boom, all the way back.

41:30. The instructive stuff was the couple of people I knew who were conversant in the British history here, and who said, 'you know, the British ignored this, and the British ignored that, and you can't do that and be successful.' And everybody said 'yeah, yeah, yeah.'

It was a, from when I got here until February '06, it was very heady here, because they were writing a constitution, and they were all getting involved in their government, and . . . I've been here long enough that, the easiest way to relate to what happens here, is this sort of amorphous, have your antenna up, and you get a feel . . . if you think about it, you can come up with points, but it is the feeling of what it is like in the city, or it's the feeling of how things are going. And they were excited because they were writing the constitution and they were gearing up for elections. And there were a lot of problems because the Sunnis were boycotting everything, which they realized later was a bad idea because I don't think there has ever been a group that boycotted elections that afterward thought they had done the right thing, because you just screw yourselves.

They were setting up the parliament, and there were a lot of bumps along the way. Therein lay several of our problems, one of which was we basically gave them six months to write a constitution. You know, we put in place the CPA regulations that basically set out their timeline, you do A, then B, then you write the constitution, then it has to be voted on. You know, it took us, what 12 years to write our Constitution. We gave them six months, and said, 'here.' So, they did a fairly decent job.

Now, they punted the tough stuff, but that was ok. If you've got 90% of what you want to put on paper, and 10% is holding you up, for God's sake, get the 90% now, punt the 10%, and you'll get around to it later when your better equipped. There is a little denial, like Kurkuk, but they did a pretty good job. There were members of the Interim Assembly that were very versed in constitutional law, and they pulled stuff off the internet. They brought in copies of the Italian constitution, and they crossed out stuff they thought wasn't relevant, and said 'here's my idea,' and they were using the German constitution, and the Indian constitution. They was the building of institutions, the assembly. I'm most proud of the fact that the Research Directorate that I created is still going strong to this day. I started with a space that housed 1.4a troops, had 13 cats, innumerable mice, lots of rats, and tons of garbage, and now is their functioning legislative research service. They have 25 people on staff, non-sectarian, Sunni, Shia, Kurd. The director was a Sunni, the deputy is Shia, and they have successfully fought off attempts to sectarianize them. I have pictures of their library with their first 20 books. Now they have the 2nd or 3rd biggest library in Baghdad, perhaps a few hundred volumes.

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One problem I see here is the lack of a pre-existing sovereignty. The American revolution was a claim of sovereignty away from a power it recognized had once been legitimate, and the colonies-cum-states offered one another a mutually recognized pre-existing sovereignty on the way to forming a confederation, or a federation. In Iraq, there is no recognized pre-existing sovereignty.

48:10. Like Russia, they are captive to their past. We fight against this stovepiped, centralized, command, socialist mentality. The provinces are just starting to wake up to the idea of federalism. One of the biggest problems they had in passing the provincial powers law was you had a PM . . . you had governors arguing that they should control federal troops within their provinces, and it is a total states rights argument, and you had a central government saying 'Are you insane?.' Some governors came back and said, ok, well, 'we should be able to control federal troops if we can't communicate with Baghdad.' The central government came back and said, well that's not a good idea, because its too easy to cut the phone lines with Baghdad and claim power over the troops. They will be captives to their Saddamist past. You have military logistics that sucks, because under Saddam, if you had a warehouse full of tank parts, then your job was to have a warehouse full of tank parts. Now if somebody somewhere had a tank that broke down and wanted one of your parts, you were loath to send them the part because then you would not have a full warehouse, which meant you would be failing in your mission to have a full warehouse. And making a mistake under the regime was lethal.

50:20. That problem pervades the economy here. You run something into the ground rather than taking care of it, and then you try to get a new one. So the gas turbines in the Doura electrical plants, or tanks, you can see they just run shit into the ground because that was the culture. They still have problems with individual initiative, because you didn't take individual initiative, you did what you were told to do, because if you did take individual initiative, if you popped your head up, and you were wrong, the consequences were deadly. So they're culturally not big on initiative.

Out in the country, there is the tribal overlay to everything. The Sunni repressed the Shia and did horrible things to them, and did horrible things to the Kurds. This was not a fault line, fractured society before. Sheikh Abdul Sathir, who was head of the Awakening and was killed out west recently, has a Shia grandmother, and there are tribes here where the Sheik is Sunni and the members are Shia. There was not that kind of sectarian division permeating the country. It was not as bad as the fault lines dividing Northern Ireland, where Catholic and Protestant intermarriage is pretty rare. I cringe when I'm out with someone [like a CODEL], and the first question out of someone's mouth talking to an Iraqi is 'So are you Sunni or Shia?' They don't self-identify right off like that, but you hear it all the time. You can see the Iraqi roll their eyes. Then I think the other big problem here is we are a culture of immediacy. When we don't get quick results, we want to walk away. In this Arab culture, for most Iraqis I know, they can recite their lineage back to the time of the prophet. You have a culture where time is slow, and it is a long perspective, and a long vision. It is like the Chinese, with a long view. For the Chinese, the view of sweeping in to Taiwan in 50 years time is right on. To us, that's an eternity. And so, I think that failure, that disjuncture in cultures has set us up for a lot of issues and problems, just as its driving the debate in the states now, with people wanting

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out, and people saying "ooh, soldiers are dying, civilians are dying, we want out now." Well, yes, it's a fucking war. That is what happens. There was a . . .

~~(S/ACGU)~~ 54:48 We had an AQI detainee who looked at his interrogator and said "We can wait you out. We have no problem waiting you out. You haven't stayed a war . . you haven't won a war since WWII. You haven't stayed a war since Vietnam. All we have to do is wait you out, and you and your electorate are a bunch of pussies, and if they can't watch Fashion TV and Entertainment Tonight and who's walking down the red carpet, then you can't take it anymore." [redacted] 1.4b, 1.4d

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The Samarra bombing of February 2006 was of the Al-Askariyyah Shrine to the 12th Imam, the hidden imam. It is the shrine, or next to the shrine, that the hidden imam is supposed to return to, so its like AQI was trying to blow up Stargate, basically, blow the ability of the hidden imam to return. That is why it resonated. That is [redacted] 1.4d
[redacted] 1.4d a huge deal.

58:30. In 2006, it was really ugly here. They were finding a couple of hundred bodies on the streets every morning in Baghdad. You've got two overlays here that the shrine bombing set off. That is about like somebody walking into Vatican City and blowing St. Peters. You had that . . it uncorked the repressed Shia anger. They had been able to abide a lot until then because they'd been able to move into government and they were kind of dealing with the past 30 years, but that shrine bombing set them off. They ran amok, and then the Sunnis were already defensive. It reminds me of the Baltics, Estonia and Latvia, a minority Russian population repressing majority Latvians and Estonians. When the situation was reversed, the Russians started complaining of oppression. But it was like, screw you, you a minority now, and this is payback for what you've been doing to Estonians and Latvians for decades.

Then you had the . . . projections of political power came through the militias, through Badr vs. JAM, and you had 1920 vs. Ansar al Islam, or eventually AQI. So you not only had the inter-sect violence, but you had the military wings of political parties fighting. Once that cork came off, every body was armed, and sects and parties were going after one another, the only thing any given person could do was go out and try to cleanse their neighborhood, to try to settle your life, and it kept getting worse. I would hear stories daily of friends . . women being shot for driving through the wrong neighborhood. I used to liken it to an archery target.

That was my barometer, measuring the circles of experience, when they knew somebody who knew somebody who had been kidnapped or killed, and it got progressively closer, until it was their immediate family members, and then it was them getting whacked. That was my social barometer.

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1:02:30. My military barometer was . . . you could see . . . like a constellation of planets, where they circle constantly, and occasionally line up, and when they line up, they create high tides, or you have volcanoes. What I think what happened is this social fabric ripped to shreds at the same time that our former policies had been in place sufficiently long that it was clear they weren't working and they were just exacerbating the issues. And there was a change somewhere in there . . . a change in the feel, from . . . we did conventional warfare, and then there was an interregnum, and then suddenly . . . it was like . . . holy shit we've got an insurgency on our hands. So we were not geared for COIN. We were geared for conventional, or nothing. So we sat on the aircraft carrier, and said, okay, we're done, and then the military went into a hold posture, but the world around us was quickly turning into an insurgency. You can't sit on a FOB . . . you can't have a couple of FOBs . . .

There was an old Bugs Bunny cartoon that showed like early cavemen, and this compressed rabble of cavemen would come hauling out of the cave, they would like attack this dinosaur, which would just sweep them all away with its tail, and then they run back in this heard again, and that is how we were fighting stuff. We were on the FOBs, something would happen, and they would all run out, run the gauntlet, blow a couple of things up, and then run back and stay on your FOB. And you can't run a counterinsurgency that way. So it was like the perfect storm, social fabric ripped apart, cork out, military tactics not responsive to situation on the ground, politicians haggling with one another, and us trying to beat everybody back into line.

1:05:27. That is the other problem, too, here. I think unity governments don't work.

Before you continue, can you explain when protecting the population became a priority?

1:06:40. I think that only came at the end of 2006, because there was a general surprise here, on everyone's part, on how quickly . . . as Americans, we don't really have a cultural memory of it . . . Northern Ireland is a recurring theme here, because it is our closest experience to inter-sect conflict. When you talk to most Americans, they don't get wanting to kill somebody because they're a Methodist or a Roman Catholic. That is hard to rap our little brains around. Now, everybody knew the Shrine was a big deal, but everybody was like . . . everybody was surprised when it turned into this orgy, this conflagration.

I interviewed a colonel who was commanding a brigade in Tikrit during that time, and he explained that despite the rising violence, they thought they were having success because they were proceeding with their mission to transition, to turn things over to the Iraqi forces and let them handle Iraq's problems.¹

And that was right, it was like, 'here you go', and that was another early problem, because it wasn't like . . . it wasn't a measured transition, it was just like, ok, here you go, you got it, boom. And just like you can't do that with democracy, you can't do that on the military side. You can't just go . . . ok, we've disbanded your entire officer corps. Ok, you who

¹ See my second interview with (b)(3), (b)(6) from February 2008.

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used to be an E-4, you're running things now, because you weren't a Ba'athist. So there was this sort of catch-up lag of figuring out that . . . wow, shit's really going down out there. And when it started affected the ability of the fledgling government to operate, that was like another one of these planets circling each other, and that wasn't good.

When and how did USMI and MNFI start to alter their approaches?

1:09:00. It was around January '07. There were sniffs of it in the air around November and December of '06, which is when the whole planning discussion behind Fardh al Qanoon was going on, and the COIN manual suddenly became ascendant and people . . . the commanders in the field . . . cause a lot of times I think that . . . just like now, I think change in Iraq is being driven from below, stuff is happening in the provinces that we want to see nationally, but this country has always been run top-down, and Americans tend to run top down, but this is coming bottom up. I think commanders in the field, the lieutenant in a shithole in Anbar, where the first ones to see what needed to be done, and they fed the process going up. The COIN stuff coming down and the surge was like the reverse perfect storm. So everything was lining up for the better. One of the best thing we had going out west was AQI overplayed its hand in Anbar province. They were running amock. Anbar is the first time where and Arab population has run counter to Al Qaeda. Because there were . . . at first a way for the Sunnis to be heard, to check the 1.4b which is how they see Maliki. Then, Al Qaeda was soon killing Sunnis. If you were walking down the street and smoking a cigarette, they would cut your finger off. If you were the sheik and you did something they didn't like, they would kidnap the sheiks kids and cut their heads off and leave them exposed for two days, which is abhorrent to Muslims who believe burial has to come the same day. So as we figure out we've got to engage the tribes. And it is hard for us to grasp the tribal thing. We don't get how the tribal overlay works.

1:12:50. It is almost like . . . I have members of Congress who come and ask why we are paying attention to the tribes when they're not elected, they're not the mayor or the city council, and it is the same thing as 1920s Chicago. The gangs and the mafia weren't elected, but they sure as hell controlled the businesses, as well as the Cubans in Miami. So if you want to matter as a mayor, you pay attention to the Poles, and you pay attention to the Italians, and you pay attention to what the mafia don is doing. And the tribes out west all have a construction company, they have an import/export business, and they are the social safety net for their members. You can pay all the attention to the mayor of Ramadi you want, but if you don't pay equal attention to the tribal sheiks, you doom yourself to failure. And so we started paying attention to the freaking' tribal sheiks. It was a very fortuitous switch from the post-conventional pause, the surge, the counterinsurgency, it all lined up together at the same time. We had guys come to us and say, 'Hey, I know we were shooting at you yesterday, but would you really mind if we started shooting at these other guys, instead?' So you have stuff at the provincial and grass roots levels that you still don't have happening here, because here you've still got people jockeying for national political power, and that goes back to the unity government thing, that they suck.

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1:15:00. They may work in a three-party, or a four party system, but we have 37 ministries, and in a unity government you divide up the ministries and the tier one positions in the government not by your representational vote, but by this complex power sharing formula, which is fine, except for . . . I've heard Maliki say, to people, "You don't know what its like to have people in your own block firing rockets into your own compound. There are people in my own block who want me to fail." It took forever to set this government up, because you weren't doing it by . . . you weren't doing it by saying, okay, you got the most votes, you're the prime minister, and you set up the government you want, pick the people who know what they're doing. Instead, you have to have this percentage of positions for this bloc, Dawa needs this, and SCIRI needs this. Once you get it set up, it can work okay, because it has its own checks and balances, but I like to think of it as a big circle of dominoes, and if somebody gets cranky, as they have, somebody like Muqtada al-Sadr ordered his seven guys out of the government, and then falling dominoes topples the whole think over. Then, the carefully balanced, compromised structure, all falls. Then you have to stop governing, and go back to horsetrading, to get all the dominoes back on board. It gives everybody a veto.

1:17:15. It is sort of good because everybody feels that they got a piece of the pie. Except the Sunnis, who are always bitching, but everybody feels represented, but then you've always got people constantly jockeying for the next round. I think the CoR has finally gotten it. They have gotten over a little of their internal power play squabbles, but even there, it was initially dividing everything by sect, like the research director. The head was a Sunni, the deputy a Shia, and the librarian a Kurd. That was under the interim national assembly. But when it was the regular national Assembly . . . part of the domino deal is that the speaker is a Sunni. Then the 1st deputy is a Shia, and the 2nd is a Kurd. He is de jure the head, but the de facto head is the Shia leader, who is the 1st Deputy head. So, you have Sunni and Shia gunning for positions. They have a hard time getting the idea of non-partisan advice. So the idea that a research director would give a well-researched non-partisan position, they did not understand or like, so they've fought that battle a couple of times in the last three years.

What are the prospects for developing both coherent government and a loyal opposition that hopes to win the next election?

1:20:30. We need to realize that troop strength, numbers, and all that, that that is just out of the equation, that, politically, this place is just going to take awhile. You know, you've got . . . the Dayton Accords were in '95, and more than 10 years later we're still there. We're still in Korea, but Yugoslavia is a better example. You can't gin up from nothing. Like . . . and culturally, Arabs are a zero-sum game people. Your . . . and that is why compromise is so hard. There is no, "okay, we both got something we wanted, and we both got screwed. So it's a compromise, and we'll go with that." Arabs are very much a win-lose . . . if you got something in a compromise, that means I lost it.

I've heard the point made about zero-sum thinking before, but what confuses me about that . . . is also understanding that this is very much a trading culture, and that on a logical or rational basis, that even with a zero-sum, win-lose mentality, you would also have a reputation for hospitality, and I would think some

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tendency toward hospitality and a willingness to give more to show respect and generosity and openness and giving more than is received for the sake of building credibility, reputation

1:22:46. This is why people become Arabists, and go to their graves upset and confused. It's . . . that is the dichotomy inherent in the 'life is zero-sum game . . . but survival is based on tribal consensus and tribal compromise.' I mean, the whole majlis idea . . . majlis is any grouping of men that come together . . . the CoR here is called the majlis a_____ . . . down in the Gulf States, the parliaments are called majlis. So on the one hand, everything is done by group-tribal consensus. Shame adheres to the group, not the individual. The whole honor killing thing . . . the whole eye for an eye thing, if an individual from a tribe goes out and does something bad, that whole social opprobrium adheres to the entire tribe. It doesn't just adhere to the individual. So, on the one hand, you've got this whole group thing of compromise because that is the only way you can survive in the desert, and then the hospitality, and then the respect for age, and the respect for . . . under their law, between the time the CoR convenes, and the time a speaker is chosen, the oldest member presides.

Although that is the same in the Senate.

1:24:40. Yeah, well, in the Senate, it is the oldest by length of service. So here, it is (b)(6), who is the oldest member, so you've got that going on. But then over here you've got this . . . any win for you is a loss for me, and I can't let that happen. And I have yet to be able to flesh that out in my head or to come across a tome somewhere that explains how those two things co-exist in the same time and space. Now, they hammer things out eventually. But there is this knee-jerk . . . and I think that part of it is . . . this zero-sum exists to some extent in the Arab psyche . . . but I think the whole Saddam era pretty much intensified it, because there was one winner, and . . . so I have yet to figure out how those two are reconcilable.

I've had the idea that the US invaded with the idea that Saddam was the problem, and that removing him meant the problem was fixed; in fact, perhaps, Saddam was simply a symptom, and the most effective exploiter of, the problems that were already there.

Yeah, and it goes back here . . . and that is another dichotomy that Sunni and Shia have lived together, and grown up together, and gone to the same schools, intermarried, and lived in the same neighborhoods, and had tribes intermixed, but you have this seething underbelly of resentment among Shia because they have always been the majority here, so long as there have been Shia, and they have always been oppressed by the Sunni minority, whether it was the Ottomans sitting in Istanbul, or whoever, they've always had a Sunni oppressor, so you've got that seeming . . . it is like matter and anti-matter, that shouldn't exist in the same place. You've got intermarriage, getting along, not a problem, and then you've got resentment because you've oppressed me for a thousand years.

1:27:45. The Ambassador is sort of fond of saying that, when members ask what drives things here, he says "Fear." The Sunnis fear the Shia doing to them what they did to the Shia; the Shia fear the Sunnis returning to dominance, and the Kurds fear everybody. And

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a lot of it is that. A lot of what drives the Sunni now is not . . . there has been a shift with the Sunni. They have gone from "we want to be back in power, we demand to be back in power, it is our right to be in power." There has been a palpable shift to "we just want to make sure that where we are the majority, that we run stuff, and that we're not hounded and driven off." The Shia have this visceral reaction to anything that looks to them like Sunnis coming back in. And the Kurds are sitting up north wanting to use this wherever it is convenient for them. They're wanting to be autonomous, except for wanting 17% of the revenues cause . . . And there isn't anything going on out here that isn't logical, in the context, and Americans don't get that.

For instance, Americans don't understand what the big deal is with the census, it is like 'who cares.' But the census drives a lot of things. It will decide who votes on Kirkuk, and it decides who gets how much of the national revenues. The Sunnis like the old Saddam census because it undercounted Kurds and Shia. The Kurds don't like any censuses before 1912 or something like that, because that is when they controlled areas like Mosul and Kirkuk and the Turcoman areas; Turcomen like one version, Shia like another, and some like the ration lists, but the Kurds don't do the rationing like everyone else. The Kurds have kept pushing the idea that they are 17% of the population, and they're going to fight anything that indicates they should get less than 17% of national revenues.

What is your last big comment for this period, February of '08?

It has gotten a lot better, because one of my other barometers is . . . is . . . because I fly around all the time with members. My Baghdad barometer . . . my Ramadi barometer is easy, I have walked with members of Congress with no IBA through local markets, with . . . with 12 guys with rifles, but you couldn't drive through those markets a year ago without getting RPGed. So that barometer is easy, walking down Ramadi main street. Baghdad is tougher. An all Sunni or all Shia area is easy because there are no fault lines. In Baghdad, flying over, I see kids playing in the street. You used to not see kids in the street because parents wouldn't let them go outside. I'm seeing traffic jams again, and not because there was a car bomb, but because so many people are out and living. People are going to the zoo again. The amusement parks are open again. I see women walking in the street. So, the military surge clearly worked. The problem is that the political surge has lagged behind. The rhetoric in DC was "Give us a military surge; that will give us space for the political surge." Unfortunately, in everybody's head, that set up a simultaneous . . . but it doesn't work that way. You need to do the military surge, put the breathing room in, and then let the idea sink into everybody's head that the breathing room isn't just this temporary anomaly, that the breathing room is going to extend, because if I'm this Sunni sitting in a Shia neighborhood out in Baghdad, and things kind of calm down, before I give you my gun and stop organizing my militia, I'm going to make sure that is set for awhile before I say, "Ok, let's talk political reconciliation."

So it is making sense to me that we had this military surge, we got a breathing space, and now just in the last month or so are we starting to see de-Ba'athification pass, pension law pass, budget pass. You're starting to see stuff work out.

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To borrow a line from the CG, I'm not saying its going to be good, I'm not saying its going to work, I'm not saying . . . but in this snippet of time, 25 February, it has gotten a lot, lot better, and inshallah, it will keep going.

1:34:08.

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