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

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Al Faw Palace, Victory Base Camp

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Abstract

1.4b, 1.4d

Interview

What old acquaintances have you run into in Iraq?

1:00 I've run into people, but no super close friends. I've run into (b)(6), who ran the Corps IO operation. We were cadets together. A bunch of people from Korea: (b)(6) (b)(6) who has taken a battalion. Two other field grades I worked with are Division G2s now. BG (Mary A.) Legere, the incoming CJ2, was my brigade commander. A number of people I taught with in Social Sciences department . . . (b)(6) and she's here now. Those encounters brought back memories of different units and times when I had different responsibilities.

What happens in Small Group?

3:30. General Petraeus gathers the Small Group in a room behind the MNFI CG's BUA Room each morning after the BUA. Small Group consists of the staff primaries and key subordinate commanders (MNCI, MNSTCI, TF 1.4a) and it is also a SVTS with the IZ. Petraeus runs it from here. He goes over actions with people around the room and then turns it over to the IZ, whether it is Lt Gen Cooper or whoever is running it on the far side, or CJ3. They go around the room and it gets back to Petraeus to discuss his list of

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items, which he will discuss or task out. It is just a daily synchronization of issues. There are times in the BUA where I feel that some of the major events of the last 24 hours are not covered in the BUA, and they're covered in small group instead. Not all the time, but occasionally. General Nasr Abadi, the Vice Chief of Staff, also attends Small Group. After the Small Group is Small, Small Group. Small, small group is mostly ops and intel focused. The people that leave are CJ1/4/8, CJ6, R&S, TF 1.4a and the SGM. It is US specific and ops and intel focused.

What are the nuances of the command relationships under which MNFI operates?

7:30. I'm not sure when a theater commander has had so much direct access to the national leadership. Now, MNFI is under Central Command, our higher, but it is a little strange that Central Command is under a three-star commander and General Petraeus has been nominated to take over Central Command. I think it is known that P4 also has one hour a week with POTUS and an hour every other week with the SECDEF. With all the treasure and weight that the US is putting into this conflict, the MNFI commander, I guess, formally is in an organization chart that looks like Korea, but because of the nature of what is going on it has a lot more national attention.

I don't know if this is a unified command. I don't know if that term exists any more.

To what extent does MNFI operate in the absence of policy?

1.4b, 1.4d

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1.4b, 1.4d

14:00. And I think that was a good case where it was not exactly clear who in the interagency was . . . I mean theoretically the National Security Council was supposed to make the interagency work, but it wasn't really clear that anyone had a strong grip on that situation.

It is not clear that anyone in the interagency was thinking through the issues and drafting an overarching US policy or approach to the problem.

1.4b *seems to be an even greater challenge of clarifying policy.*

17:20. I think there is a fundamental issue . . . for the USG of how to weight the nuclear issue against [redacted] 1.4b, 1.4d in Iraq. Those two might not all recommend the same policy instruments or measures and it is not clear to me that the US is or even should weight the lethal involvement in Iraq over the nuclear issue. So there is an example where there is potentially a US policy issue. In some ways, I think what they have in common . . . and I think Secretary Gates had it right when he said recently that what we really need to do is to figure out where they are or to develop points of leverage, because I don't think that either of these two security problems are likely to be resolvable with some sort of simplistic use of force. I think they're both going to be complicated and multi-faceted kinds of approaches that create a sort of regional [redacted] 1.4b, 1.4d

1.4b to see its interest in doing things like not fostering instability in Iraq. I don't think they want the Shias to lose control over the GoI, but I'm not sure that they really want a Shia government that is fully capable of exercising complete sovereignty over its territory, because that would then diminish their leverage. It is difficult for me to sort out the extent to which [redacted] 1.4b, 1.4d that the US is a significant threat over sort of a longer term goal that, regardless whether the US were here or not, they would want to be able to continue to manipulate the Iraqi government.

We had a discussion in which I tried to suggest the way the media colors stories tends to exacerbate tensions or lead policy makers down unfortunate roads they might not follow were it not for media sensationalism. (b)(3), (b)(6) did not see it quite as I did. She insisted policymakers must make reasoned policy regardless of what is in the headlines, and woe to those who jump through hoops because of the media.

How has your concept of Iraq evolved?

28:40. I think I have a much more nuanced appreciation of the situation here and the manner in which Iraq's history as well as what we have done or not done have shaped the situation we are in as well as regional dynamics. It is too simplistic to say that we created sectarianism in Iraq. It is also too simplistic to say it would have happened even if we were not here. So just in terms of recognizing the different forces that are at play, I think I have gotten a greater ability to do that.

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How has your concept of American military operations evolved?

29:55. I'm very impressed with what we are able to do today. It is pretty amazing. Some of the things that have impressed me are . . . I think ISR and intelligence support to commanders and operations. The linkages, the ability to provide more on a real time and near real time basis to inform what is going on, is stronger than what I would have expected before I had arrived. What we're attempting to do over here is enormously complex, and certainly it is not being done perfectly, but it is pretty impressive to me what is being achieved.

How did the SF/SOFA talks begin, how have they gone, and where do they stand today?

32:40. I guess one of the things that is very striking is how in the world do we ever expect this to be successful? When you look at the fact that this is a region that has suffered from colonialism, the fact that we invaded, how many Iraqis have died since the beginning of the war, and oh by the way this is an election year and even countries that we have been allied with for decades we don't negotiate SOFAs in election years. I'm not sure exactly how we ever thought this was ever going to happen.

33:10. Now with the Declaration of Principles last year, I guess my understanding was that the intent was that the Strategic Framework would offer the Iraqis things that we thought they wanted, the economic, the political, cultural, technological, and the diplomatic, and that would take the pressure off and be the argument for why the whole package was in the best interests of Iraq as we negotiation the SOFA. And every SOFA expresses ways of protecting US forces from the sovereignty of the countries within which they operate. So, I mean there was sort of a thought that that could somehow be made to work. Nevertheless, I think we are really not offering the Iraqis something that they really wanted, which I think first and foremost is an iron-clad guarantee of their national defense, and in return I think we sort of wound up putting up a maximalist position of what we wanted on the table, and it sort of resulted in an explosion. And I think it broke into the public sphere with help from Iran. I think that this was a tremendous opportunity for Iran and for Sadr, whether together or separately, or a little of both, and they seized it to win a public relations coup on the ground of nationalism. And there is the oddity of the POTUS being unwilling to even consider letting this executive agreement go before Congress. In comparison, PM Maliki is being a politician, putting it before the CoR because he needs the cover. I think it is a good case where Maliki is acting as a politician. He wants cover. He wants to use the Political Committee for National Security, where all parties are involved, and he wants a vote in the CoR, where he will not personally be able to be accused of being a stooge of the US in making these accords.

35:40. I think we are at the point now where we know it is not going to work, and so what we're trying to achieve right now is a Strategic Framework with some sort of a bridging mechanism that will carry us over as SOFA negotiations continue. You've probably seen the same things that I've seen about how the Iraqi delegation that went around the world to examine various SOFA agreements found a couple of interesting things, some things that favor the negotiations, like: every SOFA has some jurisdiction

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compromises, but also, usually they occurred under the protective shield of a mutual defense treaty, and usually they took a couple of years to negotiate. So they Iraqis came back and said “they’re trying to shove this thing at us in a couple of months,” which doesn’t give us ample time to consider. So anyway, I think a SOFA by the end of 2008 is out. I think we’re looking at some sort of a Strategic Framework and something that looks like a bridging mechanism. I think it will be very painful to get from here to there, but that somehow it will happen. I think CPA [1.4a] is completely off the table, and I think an UNSCR isn’t going to happen again either, unless the Iraqis find some way to use that just to protect their assets abroad, and not to have the security provisions, but I don’t know . . . but I think that is the only reason they would consider an UNSCR, is to protect their assets abroad, from Saddam-era claims. I think that is where we are. It is sort of ugly, but I think that we have sort of decided that as long as we have something that makes it legal for us to operate, that we don’t care what it’s called, an MOU, or whatever, as a bridging mechanism to a SOFA, and I think that will probably happen.

How is it that from '03, when the mission was to transition and get out, and through '04 to '06, when MNF-I was trying to transition to Iraqi control so we could withdraw, how is it we have gone from a transitional mission toward accepting an enduring security commitment?

40:06. I’m not sure we’re on the verge of accepting a commitment to preserve the territorial integrity of Iraq, as we have as a long-standing ally of Germany or Korea. I guess my inclination would be, as somebody who thinks of strategy in Clausewitzian terms, with never coming to grips explicitly with what constituted acceptable and unacceptable end states, and I think that . . . you know . . . the . . . or coming to grips with what was an acceptable end state and coming up with the ways and means that it would take to get there, and I think that each of those other strategies were not tightly linked to what we would leave behind and whether that would be acceptable, and when push came to shove, and you sort of started to having to think about what it would really mean to leave in the midst of a civil war, then that became an unacceptable end state. So when it really came down to . . . was President Bush willing to leave Iraq under those conditions. I don’t think that was what he had intended, but somehow we had managed to go through years of warfare without carefully reconciling ends, ways, and means, and I know that is sort of a simplistic formula, but that is really how I do see it, that we just did not fight hard enough to think about where we wanted to be at the end of the day, and whether we were willing to do the things that would enable us to be there, and then adapting, because that is the other huge Clausewitzian message, that war is unpredictable, and you should expect to need to change your assessment throughout the course of a conflict, because . . . so as we sort of updated our understanding of Iraq throughout 2003, we didn’t necessarily update our ways and means to associate what it might take to get the end state we thought we still wanted, which was a self-governing Iraq in which Saddam was no longer in power, and then . . . that’s about all I’m willing to say for sure, and didn’t have weapons of mass destruction, and how much did we really care about democracy? I think POTUS cared about it all along, and I think he thought it was going to be pretty easy to achieve, otherwise he would have supported bringing in the expats and putting them in power, or somehow setting up a strongman to succeed to strongman, but somehow I don’t think the implications of that were ever worked out.

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1.4b, 1.4d

How has recent guidance on Afghanistan affected MNFI planning?

50:00 I'm not sure of the impact. The thought that the surge needed to be temporary and there would be a drawdown and the pace might be questionable . . . Thought of surge drawdown.

The drawdown will be conditions-based, with a clear understanding of the priorities. In April, the CG acknowledged the strain on the force and the commitment of soldiers.

1.4g

Has your job—close to the CG, but tied to CIG operations—done more to restrict or broaden your view of the situation?

It has been broadening because I've had to learn about everything the CG deals with.

One of the most important things we do is ensure the CG has good data, as with counting MRAPs. The data is hard. The CIG has to make it not overly complex. It is easy to be wrong by accident. It is hard to get it right.

What topics do you think need more attention?

1:05:30. I think the interagency process in the government . . . I think there is a lot of merit to the observation that we are still operating in a USG that was fundamentally created to meet the challenges of World War II and the Cold War, and that is not the international environment that we find ourselves in today. The question is . . . I'm not sure how I'd do it, but I do think there is an argument to be made that many of the fundamental security challenges we face are a product of weakness and not of strength, and the organizations of our government designed to deal with weakness abroad are anemic, compared to the organizations of our government that are designed to deter, counter strength, and it is a sort of a simplistic military vs non-military, but developmental aid, foreign assistance, and not even just that, but capacity building, and not even US taxpayer funds, but we're just going to try to create capacity through . . . I think those are significant issues and I might try to do something on that.

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1:07:10. I guess another thing I'm interested in is how . . . what would a foreign policy of more restraint really look like, where do we have to be engaged, where could we pull back? I do agree with Secretary Gates that we've got to win the wars that we're in, so I don't even know what kind of a time frame we'd start to have some freer choices, but I think the US has a fundamental interest in being a status quo power, and we haven't been acting that way for the last eight years or so, and it has not been in our long-term best interest. I think we have an interest in being a status quo power, because domestically we have so much potential, and we benefit from a sort of free, international, status quo system, that if we did everything possible to foster free, peaceful international development, even democratic development, but in a very sort of non-aggressive way, that we would have an interest in that.

1:10:40. I think what the USG did right after WWII was to set up a solid global economic, diplomatic, and security system that fostered peaceful development. Both Germany and Japan, Europe and east Asia, and success stories for the post-WWII international system grounded in US leadership and consensus through multi-lateral economic and security agreements. Those parts of the world that are disasters today were on the periphery of that and did not benefit from it.

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