UNITED STATES ARMY
CENTER OF MILITARY HISTORY

INTERVIEW OF

MAJ. GENERAL BENJAMIN R. MIXON
COMMANDING GENERAL MND-N

18 JUNE 2007
HEADQUARTERS MULTINATIONAL DIVISION - NORTH
NEAR TIKRIT

(This transcript was produced from tapes provided by the Center of Military History.)
PROCEEDINGS

(b)(6): This is (b)(6)

Historian at the U.S. Army Center of Military History. I am about to interview Maj. General Benjamin R. Mixon on 18 June 2007. General Mixon is Commanding General of Multinational Division - North and the 25th Division. It is at Camp Speicher near Tikrit, Iraq.

Sir, your Division initially operated under V Corps, MNC-I, Lieutenant General Chiarelli (Phonetic), and MNF-I's General Casey's command guidance, roughly described as the bridging or transition strategy.

In December of '06, III Corps and Lt. General Odierno's change of authority or transfer of authority, and in February General Petraeus came over and took over Multinational Force Iraq.

Can you please describe from your perspective as the Multinational Division -
North Commanding General the general differences or any general differences in operational philosophies, differences in approach to COIN and any guidance differential that you saw?

MAJ. GENERAL MIXON: Well, obviously, the change when General Petraeus came in was principally focused on securing the population in Baghdad. But MND-North is different than the fight in Baghdad, not only from the perspective of the size of the battle space but the diversity of the various provinces that I am responsible for.

Diyala, Saladin, Ninevah, Kirkuk and the three northern KRG provinces are all very different. They are ethnically mixed. A large majority of my provinces are dominated by the Sunni population, although there are a significant number of Kurds in the northern areas. But even amongst that, they could be Arab Sunni or Shia, or they could be Kurd Sunni or Shia or they could be
Turkmen Sunni or Shia, not to mention some of the other smaller groups.

So as we saw that guidance come in, the principal difference that it drove for MND-North was it underwrote a tactic that we had already started, which was to establish combat outposts in selected areas that we felt were decisive for us to control.

I do not have the force or the capability to secure the population in MND-North without enhancing the Iraqi security forces, that being the army and the police.

So in that context, the strategy for me remained the same. I still place a lot of energy and a lot of emphasis on continuing to improve the Iraqi Army and the Iraqi police. It is the only way that we can ultimately achieve our goals here in Iraq, which is to have the Iraqi security forces to be capable of securing their population, different than Baghdad because of the numbers of brigades and the importance of the
capital.

So not a dramatic change in the strategy from our perspective, but some incremental changes that underwrote what we had already started in the December-January time frame, which was to establish combat outposts.

So as we look at that, we are continuing on with that strategy today, but I would say that we are not moving as quickly as we had discussed under General Casey's command and under General Corelli's command of turning responsibility over to the Iraqis in MND-North.

(b)(6): Or transitioning to Iraqi control?

MAJ. GENERAL MIXON: That's correct. As you know, three of the four Iraqi divisions that are in my battle space.

The two divisions in Ninevah Province, namely 2nd and 3rd Division, Iraqi Army, and the 4th Division which covers Kirkuk and
Saladin Province are under Iraqi Ground Force Command, IGFC.

The 5th Iraqi Division, which is in Diyala, we have had to delay that division because of some Manning and training issues and the security in Diyala.

Having said that, I really had envisioned the potential for transitioning Ninevah Province the latter part of this year, meaning '07, over to Iraqi command and control, what we call provincial Iraqi control, and ultimately changing our footprint in there to more of a training and assistance mode.

(b)(6): Just in Ninevah?

MAJ. GENERAL MIXON: Just in Ninevah, as a start. We are still looking at that. I still think there is potential for that in early '08, but we will have to assess the security situation for that.

All right, sir.

Would you say there is any change
of emphasis on the transition? You mentioned that Casey and Chiarelli wanted to move it along, and General Odierno and General Petraeus will do it condition based. Is that correct?

MAJ. GENERAL MIXON: It is condition based, but I think it is important for the historic record and as historians take a look at this. It is obvious now to me as a ground force commander that the initial strategy was flawed.

We began the strategy with an effort to immediately and as quickly as possible build the Iraqi Army and the police force without adequate coalition forces' presence to establish initial security. That is obvious, and that is the reason that we have had to take a step back, if you will, well over three years into this campaign to establish security in Baghdad specifically and in other elements.

As you know, I have been given
additional forces in Diyala Province to establish security in that very important province there. So that needs to be analyzed. That needs to be studied for future reference.

(b6) I am going to jump around a little bit. Do you think you have sufficient force to accomplish the goal or the key task of establishing security for the Iraqi population in MND-North?

MAJ. GENERAL MIXON: I'll have to break that out by province. I believe I have a sufficient force in Ninevah, Kirkuk and Saladin Province to continue the primary focus of working with the Iraqi security forces and improving the Iraqi security forces and police, enough coalition forces to maintain what I call tactical parity.

That is if we can continue along those lines to improve the governance, which is a very important mission that we partner with our provisional reconstruction teams, if we
can continue to do CERP (Phonetic) projects, improving the area, while we continue to work with the Iraqi security forces and make them better.

I do not have enough force to simply secure the population. I have to use all means available, which includes at the present time trying to get the tribes to work with us more closer than they have in the past.

Now let's go to Diyala Province. In Diyala Province at the present time, I have enough force to improve the security situation in Baqubah. We have begun those operations, and Op tempo will pick up there over the next 30 days, but I do not have enough force at the present time to complete that security mission, which includes the Diyala River Valley and other key areas within Diyala, and I will address that with General Odierno once we finish the Baqubah operation.
Is there any thought to -- in Diyala and Baqubah in particular -- to try to replicate the JSSes, the Joint Security Stations and the COPs that were established in Baghdad?

MAJ. GENERAL MIXON: We have done that. We started doing that months ago. We did not have the numbers of forces to establish the numbers, but we have three combat outposts currently established in eastern Baqubah.

We intend to do the same thing in western Baqubah, and the Iraqi security forces, the 5th Division and the police -- that is the principal element that I am working with now to ensure that they can accomplish that with small numbers of coalition forces co-located with them, so that they can secure Baqubah.

If I can accomplish that task, then I will have enough coalition forces to address the Diyala River Valley and the other...
parts. If I have to tie down a large number of coalition forces for the security of the provincial capital, that being Baqubah, then I am not going to have enough force to get out into the countryside, if you will, and the other key areas of Khalis (Phonetic), Khan Bani Sa'ad (Phonetic) to address the enemy that we know is located in that area.

So we will be able to tell probably about two to three weeks from now whether or not the Iraqi Army and the Iraqi police will be capable of manning combat outposts, JSSes as you call them, to free up coalition forces to do those more mobile strike operations.

All right. I am going to take you back a little bit to the beginning of your rotation here in Iraq, and I believe that was in September.

I would like you to try to characterize, if you could remember back in September -- I know it's almost 10 months now
-- when you initially took over. How would you characterize the situation through that fall from September through Odierno's change of authority, transfer of authority?

MAJ. GENERAL MIXON: I would characterize it as a security situation in most of the provinces was pretty good. Our primary threat was the IED fight, and we came in here with a specific tactic and strategy as to how we were going to address the IEDs that we faced in Multinational Division-North.

In fact, going back to Diyala Province, Diyala Province was being held up as a province that was moving forward. The 5th Iraqi Division had been given Iraqi Army in the lead. The police were said to be on a good route forward, and although we had enemy contact in the area, a fear that Diyala was on the mark, some significant decisions were made in the Iraqi government that placed a Shia division commander over the Iraqi Army,
placed a Shia police chief in place.

Diyala being mostly Sunni but a Sunni-Shia mix, this caused some initial problems with the population; and as we discovered later, it appears that those two Shia individuals were placed in there to pursue a Shia sectarian agenda in Diyala.

That inflamed the Sunnis. It enabled the insurgency to gain a stronger route in Diyala Province and caused us significant issues in dealing with the Iraqi security forces.

We eventually had the police chief removed. We eventually now have had the Division Commander removed, but the damage has been done. That, coupled with the improved situation in Al Anbar and the step-up of operations in Baqubah has caused the Al Qaeda insurgency to migrate into Diyala Province.

So at the present time we have a significant threat in the province now that
we are going to have to address.

(b) As a matter of fact, that leads into my next question. You may have already answered it.

Fardh al Qanoon (Phonetic), the operations to secure Baghdad or the Baghdad population, beginning in mid-February, coupled with the situation, improving situation, in Anbar, looks like it drove the insurgents, AQI, Al Qaeda in Iraq, into Diyala Province.

Was there any attempt to try to interdict those movements lines through the Diyala River Valley?

MAJ. GENERAL MIXON: Yes, we did some significant operations and began to establish combat outposts in there back in January. I moved two additional rifle companies down to the area, because I needed more infantry in that area, and we did operations in the Diyala River Valley. But an effort to try to interdict in the COIN
environment is very difficult.

Even though there are a series of checkpoints throughout the area, and even though we were continuing to do operations, it was obvious that the enemy was able to migrate into Diyala additional fighters.

I believe it was always a support zone for operations in Baghdad; and when you take a look at the specific terrain, you have to be careful not to focus on the province. When you look at Baghdad and then you come north of Baghdad, if you draw a very large circle on the map and you look at southern Saladin Province all the way up to Samarra and you draw that circle over into Diyala, including Muqdadiyah (Phonetic), and run it all the way around through Baqubah, you will see very plainly that the enemy wants to control that battle space.

It is farmland. It is very easy to hide in. It has a predominantly Sunni population, and it gives the enemy access to
Baghdad, to Al Anbar, to Kirkuk, and to Mosul.

So it is obvious what is going on with the enemy: (a) he has been there already, but he has reinforced that area to hold that, now that he has seen Al Anbar is not going his way, and neither is Baghdad because of the surge.

(b)(6) In conjunction with the increase or the uptick in insurgent activity in Diyala, I remember in March you requested reinforcements from Corps, and General Odierno sent you a battalion. I believe it was the 520th Infantry Battalion, Stryker. I think it was.

Was that sufficient? Did that meet your request for reinforcements? Do you think that was sufficient at the time?

MAJ. GENERAL MIXON: It was not, but it was not intended to meet the ultimate request. I laid out the requirement to General Odierno that I thought I would need
at least two additional Stryker battalions and an additional brigade.

   He had to time that with operations in Baghdad and the arrival of the last brigade into Baghdad. So rightly so, he gave me an initial force that could begin shaping operations in Baqubah -- that was the 5-20th Stryker, the regulars -- and with a plan to ultimately give me 4-2 (—) Stryker to control the belts that lead out of Baghdad on both sides of the Tigris and the Euphrates River.

   (08) That's an entire Stryker brigade.

   MAJ. GENERAL MIXON: It is actually minus two of its battalions. So it is actually lighter than a Stryker brigade.

   That again enabled us to do shaping operations, and then was able to release brigade headquarters of 3-2 Stryker, the parent organization of 5-20 Regulars, and also an additional Stryker battalion from
them to complete the operations in Baqubah.

So it is a sequencing of forces, and I think that this sequencing is going to benefit us in the control of the Baghdad belt, if you will, at Southern Saladin and Southern Diyala, and also will enable us to secure Baqubah.

It's the follow-on operations that we are going to have to work out for additional forces, and we are taking a look at that now.

Now I believe in May you also requested reinforcements in MND-North, but I only read that through the papers, and there was some publicity, not a lot, but there was some publicity surrounding that.

MAJ. GENERAL MIXON: Right.

Was that a -- What was the response from Corps?

MAJ. GENERAL MIXON: Well, the response was -- I presented them with a plan.
General Odierno was receptive to that. He is familiar with this area. He was up in this area when he was in Division command. But once again, it was a matter of -- and I fully understood this -- the priority had to go to Baghdad, that we had to look at the sequencing of forces.

So as we looked at that sequencing, we were able to bring the forces in on the schedule that I just described, and it should work out to at least meet our primary objective: Control the belt; secure Baqubah. Then we will have to take it from there.

All right. I must note that -- just for the record, that I think you are the only commander that has, at least in a public sense, requested additional military forces, that I could see, over the course of the war in Iraq.

Do you think the command has been -- your higher Headquarters, the Corps and
the Force and CENTCOM -- have been receptive to those reinforcements?

MAJ. GENERAL MIXON: Yeah, I have not received any negative feedback from my commanders, but I should point out, I would never have done that in a public way, had I not first briefed my commander and made that request to him, and I would not have really made it public unless I was asked the question for operational reasons. But I was asked the question.

I believe that as military commanders we should give an honest answer to the American public and, therefore, I gave the answer, ensuring I didn't give any timing or anything else. But, yes.

Yes, sir. I believe you now have five brigade combat teams, soon to be six, I think. Is that correct?

MAJ. GENERAL MIXON: That's right.

Do you think that this is -- and you've sort of answered this, but I
would like to just ask it for the record.

Do you think that this is sufficient force to accomplish the goals you laid out in 0701 in your operations order in conjunction with the Corps operations order 0701?

MAJ. GENERAL MIXON: I'm going to make a pretty blunt statement here to state that we cannot win this thing militarily. General Petraeus has stated that, and even in the provinces where I believe, as I stated, I've got tactical parity, that we will not win this thing through military means alone; and we all know that.

Right.

MAJ. GENERAL MIXON: We have got to get the Iraqi security forces up to state to where they can secure the population and we can continue to do operations against the cells, the leaders and so forth.

We have to get the government, both at the provincial level and the central
government, functioning effectively. We have to get the support of the tribes. It's critical at this point, because at the end of the day, counter-insurgency operations is all about support from the people either for the coalition forces and their own Iraqi security forces or the population is going to support the insurgency. That's no secret. That's the way insurgencies work. That is how they live and breathe, by moving them onto the population.

So at this point, we are pursuing all of those lines of effort. We are reengaging the tribes. We began engaging the tribes very heavily when I first arrived here, but their culture, from what I have observed, is: Number one, they will sit the fence and see who is going to win, I think. They look for the power base, and naturally, there is still a great divide between the Sunni and the Shia in this country as to who is ultimately going to rule over the country.
We can't deny that. It's there. So we have to continue to work that effort, having the central government, which is Shia dominated at the present time, to have political reconciliation with the Sunnis and the Kurds, so that we can move this thing forward. We will not win this with just military means.

(b)(6) How would you assess — I'm going to ask you probably a tough question, but working under the direction of this Corps staff as compared to their predecessor, and are you getting timely support from the Corps staff?

I'm not talking about General Oderno, but I'm talking about the Corps staff, and actually, General Anderson, the Chief of Staff, asked me to ask the Division Commanders that question.

MAJ. GENERAL MIXON: Well, we've had an interesting experience, getting a chance to work for two Corps staffs. First
of all, as you know, we did our train-up exercise with the III Corps staff. That was a great experience for us and great learning experience.

So we came in here working for V Corps and then transitioned to III Corps, of course. The broad answer to the question is, yes, we are getting the support that we need.

The historical analysis and the operational analysis that needs to be made is: What is the Corps' role in a counter-insurgency fight and how can they best support the divisions?

General Odierno was making some adjustments to his staff organization as they look at effects, both in the information world and in the counter-IED fight and, more importantly, I think, as we look, what is the relationship when you have a Corps staff and you have a staff that has been formed known as MNF-I, which is watching and playing in the strategic level, the operational level,
but also wants to dabble in the tactical level.

From my perspective, that creates a little bit of friction, nothing that cannot be overcome, but we get good response from the Corps. I try to make sure that we are looking well in advance, at least 90 days in advance, for our operations that we are going to do, and to make sure that we pass those items to the corps as quickly as possible.

Do you think that you've been -- you said you were working with the provincial leaders, the tribal leaders, since you got here, and you are, obviously, working with the Iraqi Army and the Iraqi police or the Iraqi security forces in general.

Is there any sense that, as the United States conducts these operations, these combat operations to secure the population, in some areas anyway, that the
Iraqi security forces look at that and say, well, the Americans are going to do it, why don't we just sort of stand back and let them do it? Is there any sense of that?

MAJ. GENERAL MIXON: That can happen, if the tactical units allow it to happen, and the guidance that I gave my forces when we came in here really falls into two categories.

First, in reference to the population, always treat the population with dignity and respect. I spoke to my leaders about that. I made video tape messages that I required all the soldiers to view concerning that, and then I coupled that with an emphasis to them that our mission was to ensure that the Iraqi security forces ultimately could secure themselves.

So I gave guidance to my commanders that, as you are planning combat operations, ask yourself the question: How can I make Iraqi security forces better by
integrating them into these combat operations?

Your ultimate aim has got to be to get the Iraqi security forces to be in the lead and that we would be in a supporting mode.

Obviously, we have some capabilities they do not have, attack aircraft, for example. We can move them around with rotor wing aircraft when necessary, but they should be the ones that are leading into the house, if you will, into the village.

They should be the ones that are talking to the Muktar of the various villages, and we should be present with them to provide them support.

So that's the guidance that I gave my forces, because I do know, having worked with many armies around the world, that Americans want to go in; we want to solve the problem, and we want to be the ones that lead
the way, and there will be a natural tendency for the forces, the Iraqi forces or any other force, to let the Americans do that, and that's not going to get us where we need to go.

(b)(6) All right. When does your division have the transfer of authority? You were extended, I believe, for three months.

MAJ. GENERAL MIXON: Right.

(b)(6) When is the --

MAJ. GENERAL MIXON: We currently are looking at a late October. I think the date we are focusing on is somewhere between the 15th and 27th of October. We will be transferring over to the 1st Armored Division at that time.

Prior to that, we will transition out all but three of our brigades, the brigade from the 82nd, the brigade from -- my combat aviation brigade from the 25th and my 3rd brigade 25th, along with other units such
as my engineers and my fires brigade will all
transition out between now and then.

So the 1st Armored Division will
inherit at least three brigades that have
already been on the ground several months,
and then two new maneuver brigades and a new
aviation brigade when they take over in
October.

(b)(6) Can you tell me, you
know, how far along do you think you will be
in securing the population, in particular in
Diyala? I'm asking you to look down the
road a little bit on this and look into the
crystal ball, if you will, and I know current
operations are just beginning to kick off.

You can't foresee the outcome.

But do you care to speculate on the condition
of the province as opposed to when you first
arrived?

MAJ. GENERAL MIXON: I am
convinced that we will have Baqubah secure.

I believe we will have most of the Diyala
River Valley secure, and that the security situation in Diyala -- My objective for the security situation in Diyala is to have it such that the government in Diyala can begin to function and provide services to the people.

That will then allow us to turn a situation there, which is at the present time it appears that a good majority of the population, that being the Sunni population, is either overtly supporting the insurgency or they are being coerced into supporting it.

So we have to turn that. We have to turn that piece there, and then that is when they will make progress. So I think that we will secure Baqubah.

We will have portions of the Diyala River Valley secure, and then I will be able to hand that off to the 1st Armored Division.

(b)(6) The Diyala Operation Center -- do you think that that is going to
be a step in the right direction, to replicate the Baghdad Operation Center, to have kind of a unity of command of all Iraqi security forces?

MAJ. GENERAL MIXON: It will be good for coordination, and what it will enable us to do, a little different than the Baghdad Operation Center, is to put a focus on those governmental services that I just mentioned; because we need the DGs, or the Deputy Governors, that are responsible for the electricity, responsible for food, responsible for all the other things that the government has to provide, to be embedded in that Diyala Operations Center.

I really would like to see it function not really as a Diyala Operations Center, but more like a JIATIF (Phonetic), a Joint Interagency Operations Center, where you have governmental as well as security forces interacting in the same place, coordinating and working services and
security operations.

So we are going to try to move it in that direction, with the governor as well as the Iraqi Director of the Operations Center being joined at the hip so that we get good governmental services and we get good security operations.

(b)(6) Is there an appointed Iraqi commander? Has that been resolved?

MAJ. GENERAL MIXON: That's been resolved. He has been down there about four or five days now. He is getting his feet on the ground, and I think that that ultimately will be a good thing.

We are just now getting the physical structure of the Operations Center going --

(b)(6) Right.

MAJ. GENERAL MIXON: -- with the arrival of contractors. So still going to be another, I'd say, two to three weeks before it is really fully up and running, but that's...
okay, because we have the necessary folks on the ground.

I have moved one of my tactical command posts there and placed Brigadier General Bedenerik (Phonetic), who is my Chief for Operations, Deputy Commander for Operations, and that will be his principal place that he will be focused on, along with the TAC that we have down there.

So we are moving in the right direction.

(b)(6) So your Assistant Division Commander is down there with the Diyala Operations Center?

MAJ. GENERAL MIXON: He is located at Warrior, which is really 10 minutes away from the Diyala Operations Center, and I have three or four very strong LNOs (Phonetic) down there at the Operations Center from the 25th.

(b)(6) Let me ask you another question. You've touched on this already,
but do you think that in the MND-North area
the variety of different commands that
interface in the provinces that you have
control over, that you have command over in
the U.S. forces, MNSTIKI(Phonetic), GRD,
State Department, Multinational Force
elements, and other agencies -- Do you think
they are all focused on the same end state,
and are they working with the unity of effort
necessary to succeed?  MAJ.  GENERAL
MIXON:  Yeah, without a doubt.  If you look
at a wiring diagram, you may think that it is
not.  And of course, all of that begins with
the commanders' attitude and the guidance we
came in here with.

I made it very clear to my
maneuver brigade commanders, first and
foremost, that they would be joined at the
hip with the provisional reconstruction
teams, that their efforts were one of our
lines of effort, that being governance.

Security and governance and
economic development were our primary lines of effort when we first got in here. So we wanted to make sure that we were all focused on the same thing.

The same holds true with the Iraqi security forces, that the training teams that were there with those security forces -- we would work directly with them.

I did go to General Corelli and General Odierno and ask for tactical control of those forces. I was given those to clean up what could have been a problem with chain of command and authority. Did not have a problem. We changed it to take on anyway, and now we are all on the same sheet of music.

When I do my commanders' calls, the MIT Chiefs for each division as well as my brigade commanders are on the 'Net giving me an update on what's going on inside of there.

I have an IGFC cell that I have
formed inside of my division headquarters, which focuses on nothing but Iraqi security forces and what we can do to assist them.

The fact of the matter is, though, at this point in the evolution of Iraqi security forces the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Interior for the Iraqi government has got to step up and take more responsibility for the logistic support as well as the command and control of their forces.

That's my biggest concern as we sit here today, that they will step forward and bring those Iraqi security forces under their wing, eliminate the bureaucracies that are inside of their organizations right now, and quite frankly, the corruption that we know exists in those organizations, and effectively lead the security forces from a ministerial perspective.

We have to work on that, and we are working very closely with MNF-I and the
U.S. Embassy in all of those areas.

Let me talk a little bit about the Iraqi security forces, in particular, the police, the Iraqi police.

How would you characterize the Iraqi police structure and effectiveness in your area of responsibility?

MAJ. GENERAL MIXON: Well, let me start by the linkage between the provincial directors of police and the MOI. The relationship between those two needs to be strengthened.

Although budgets are passed down to the provincial director of police, the MOI tries to centralize too many of the activities inside the provinces. Even the hiring of an individual policeman has to go down to Baghdad. To me, that's unacceptable.

Other things are centralized, and all have to be approved at Baghdad. This stifles initiative, and it also undermines the authority of the provincial director of
police. That's kind of in a large sense.

The individual Iraqi policeman, though, has been used to being what we call a station policeman, not a cop on the beat, and we are trying to change that. They will wait in their station for something to happen and then go out and investigate.

We are encouraging them and working with them to be present in their neighborhoods on patrol, walking the beat, talking to people, being visible. And that is very difficult culturally to get them to do.

We are making progress. We have a very strong provincial director of police in Mosul and Kirkuk. They are working on that perspective. The PDOP that is here in Saladin is working that issue.

They are pretty good at going out and working against the enemy, but inside their towns and villages, smaller police stations, if you will, we have not been able
to break them free of their police stations, getting them working in the neighborhoods. But we will continue to work that.

We have enhanced our police transition teams, the numbers of those that we have in MND-North, per our request to CPAT and MNSTKI (Phonetic), and I think we will see some progress in the police over this year.

How about -- How would you -- Do you have any National Police working in your area?

MAJ. GENERAL MIXON: We recently -- We had some National Police in Samarra. They were not very effective, but now we have -- The 6th National Police Brigade is moving into Samarra as a result of the bombing of the minarets last week.

Right.

MAJ. GENERAL MIXON: So the plan is for them to remain in Samarra during the reconstruction of the Golden Mosque.
I want to go back a little bit to the bombing of the Golden Mosque minarets incident on 13 June.

You just mentioned that the National Police went there to help secure that. What do you see -- Do you see any -- How would you characterize the Iraqi population reaction, in particular the Shia reaction to that bombing?

MAJ. GENERAL MEEK: There's been some backlash and, although it be small compared to the last year's bombing against some of the Sunni at Mosul. We have not seen the level of violence that we saw during the first bombing.

I attribute that to the fact that the central government, particularly the Prime Minister, moved immediately to Samarra. He brought his Minister of Defense, Minister of Interior with him. He met with the local officials, who were already there.

The Governor of Saladin did an
excellent job of moving down there to calm the situation. They used Iraqi television to get the word out as to what they were doing. They made some immediate detentions of the individuals that were responsible for protecting this holy site, and then the Prime Minister went on national TV and gave a speech about — a unification speech, if you will, about all Iraqis being unified.

I think that very quick action by the Iraqi government and for the Iraqis to see their government taking action has been helpful in reducing the amount of violence.

(b)(6): I want to switch to the Iraqi Army now. We do have these military transition teams or training teams that are embedded with the Iraqis and that report to you, as you indicated.

How would you assess the Iraqi Army units that you have working for you or that you have working in your area of responsibility?
MAJ. GENERAL MIXON: Well, as I mentioned, the three of the four divisions are under Iraqi ground force command. The 2nd, 3rd and 4th Divisions are doing independent operations. They have battle space that they own and control in the area.

We are still doing combined operations with them. The Military Transition and Training Teams help us with those combined operations, but we are seeing some pretty good effects with these divisions.

We are at a point in this period to where the Iraqi divisions need to get better mobility. Right now they are using our Humvees. They need enhanced mobility so they can cover their areas, and I think ultimately the Iraqi Army will probably need to grow by another two to three divisions to be able to provide the type of security necessary to secure the outlying areas from the cities, and have the police, as we
continue to grow the police -- and we are expanding the police forces -- and then control the inside of the city and do work with the Iraqi Army.

So we are seeing some good results, but right now they have, for lack of a better word, in my estimation, have plateaued out and need some additional equipment. Their logistics is a weakness with them still.

What I would like to do, and as I mentioned earlier, in the latter part of this year in Nineveh Province I would like to do transition and do a training and assistance role for the U.S. forces that are up there and establish a program to where we would take Iraqi companies and rotate them through a seven to ten-day training program COIN focused, if you will, to work on collective skills; because that is what we haven't been able to get at, and that is what is holding them back.
Now they do operations, and they are getting training by way of real operation, but we need to do operational training for them that will enable them to become better and grow their leaders.

We have done a program like this in the 2nd of the 4th -- 2nd Brigade, 4th Iraqi Division, in Kirkuk. It has been very successful, and it has made that Brigade a very good tactical brigade. So that's what we need to transition to, to make them better, to take them to the next level, if you will.

Have you seen what you might characterize as steady progress since you have been here in the Iraqi Army?

MAJ. GENERAL MIXON: I would classify it as steady progress, yes.

I want to give you a chance --

MAJ. GENERAL MIXON: With the exception of 5th Division, I should say.
Fifth Division has been a challenge, but we are going to have to -- primarily because of the intense security situation there, but also because of the division leadership that I mentioned earlier.

What about the soldiers?

MAJ. GENERAL MIXON: Soldiers are -- You know, they are soldiers. They still -- They do not have a national identification, is part of the problem. I have not seen any particular sectarian issues except on a few isolated incidences that we have dealt with, but the soldiers that are in the Iraqi Army -- they want to stay and secure their area that they were recruited in and where they are from. That has caused us some challenges as we tried to move units down to Baghdad.

We have had literally battalions that have just about disintegrated, soldiers going AWOL and so forth, because of moving to Baghdad for the security situation.
So the nature of the Army will have to change over time to give them more of a national identity rather than a tribal or ethnic identity, and that's just going to take some time. 

(b)(6) How about the junior leadership in the Iraqi Army?

MAJ. GENERAL MIXON: It's very weak. We have not developed it -- and it's understandable. You can't develop a noncommissioned officer corps in a couple of years. That's an area that we focus on in every one of our divisions.

Our Command Sergeant Majors have run warrior leader training, if you will, to train junior noncommissioned officers. So it's going to take some time to build that up, but that's an area that is going to have to be worked, and that's the kind of thing that we are going to have to put some energy into as a coalition that we can do to get the Iraqi security forces, particularly the Army,
to the next level.

Sir, it may seem like I have highlighted some problem areas in your area of responsibility, talking a lot about Diyala, and I recognize that that is where your focused, especially right now on the 18th of June. But I wanted to give you an opportunity to talk about some real progress or successes that you have seen since you've been here, since September of 2006.

MAJ. GENERAL MIXON: Well, as I said, we have seen improvement in the 2nd, the 3rd and the 4th Iraqi Divisions. We have seen improvement in the police, particularly those that are up in Mosul, in Kirkuk, and those in Saladin. But this is a tough fight, and the enemy still has a great deal of strength, still has the capability to put out a significant number of IEDs, improved explosive devices.

I attribute that to the fact that, unfortunately, a large majority of the Sunni
population still supports the insurgency. Even at this point after the number of years that we have been here, the billions of dollars that have been spent in the so called winning the hearts and minds effort and all the other things that we have done, we have not been able to turn enough of the population to cause the insurgency to lose its strength, which is within the people.

We are on the cusp of that now in many areas as we work with the tribes, and the tribes reject the Al Qaeda mentality, which is very brutal, is very much into the Shirrah (Phonetic) law, the brutality of justice, if you will, and the other things that they do.

Having said that, that does not mean that they are going to support this central government and the Shia led government, and that is a concern of mine.

So ultimately, how do we come out on the end to achieve the strategic goals
that the United States has set for itself, which is a government that is able to govern and that the security situation in Iraq is somewhat stable? That is still out to see how we will ultimately achieve that objective.

(b)(6) Sir, that concludes the questions that I have. I always give the interviewee an opportunity to add anything that I may not have covered sufficiently or simply didn't cover at all.

So this is your opportunity for that, sir.

MAJ. GENERAL MIXON: Yes. Let me just make a few short comments about the modular brigades --

(b)(6) Right.

MAJ. GENERAL MIXON: -- the modular division structure, because I think that may be important in the future.

The modular brigade organization at its base is a good organization. It has a
great deal of flexibility. Our brigade combat teams have a great deal of combat power, and it is the right organization for the current times. However, they are one battalion short, and they need another battalion in each one of the organizations.

That was a deliberate decision that was made in order to have more brigade flags, but I think as we look at those organizations on the ground here, it is apparent that they need an additional maneuver battalion to be more effective.

Having said that, when you look at the counter-insurgency fight, we have had to reorganize our heavy brigade combat teams into really motorized infantry, if you will.

When you do that, obviously, you take away the core competency of those armor battalions that are doing that and those cavalry squadrons that are doing that to function, and they do a great job and have
done a great job adapting to the COIN environment.

    I should say artillery battalions also that have been adapted to motorized infantry. But you do not have enough infantry, once you dismount from the vehicles, to do the intensive amount of search that you need to do in villages, in rural areas that is necessary to really prosecute the COIN fight when you have a determined enemy that is hiding amongst the population and in the countryside.

    That has been part of our challenge. We've got the world's greatest soldiers, and they have done a superb job, no matter what their MOS, in adapting to this environment. But that organizational structure is not, I should say, the best organizational structure for this, but we have adapted that, and they have done extremely well in adapting to the COIN fight.

    That's sort of a lead-in, I guess,
to what I would say as kind of a closing comment, is that particular structure -- and I'm talking about the heavy brigade combat teams and the way we have reorganized ourselves for this particular COIN fight.

The rotation cycle that is set up as we bog -- what we call bogging, coming in and out of theater -- drives you almost into placing brigade combat teams in certain locations, which may not make the best tactical sense, and I will give you a clear example from the standpoint of MND-North.

We have had over the last two rotations a heavy brigade combat team located in Divile Province, a province where they clearly need more infantry, but because of the rotation cycle, it is difficult to change that process once it gets started.

Right. So you are locked into putting that in.

MAJ. GENERAL MIXON: And myself as a Division Commander has no control over
that. I am -- The bog cycle is set up at
Department of the Army. It is based on
availability. It is based on equipment. And
that is set up.

The theater has to be paying
attention to that and make those changes.
Fortunately, as far as Diyala is concerned, I
have brought that to the attention of General
Odierno, and they are working to change that,
to put a Stryker Battalion in there which has
had a lot of infantry, that will be the
better force to put in there.

Now I have mitigated that by
putting additional infantry rifle companies
down there, but it is very, very difficult
once you get set in place, and particularly
once the contacts are being made with the
local population to begin changing units out
once they have been there two or three
months, and that's kind of the way rotation
forces you into putting a force in a
particular area.
So structurally, I would say, you know, we need to reconsider an additional battalion in each of those teams, and also when we get involved in these kinds of operations, ensure that the rotation cycle does not drive the tactical employment of our brigade combat teams.

Any observations on the RISTA (Phonetic) battalion, sir?

MAJ. GENERAL MIXON: The RISTA battalions are a great organization for they are designed to do, reconnaissance operations, but once again, when you get into the COIN fight, they've got limited infantry.

Right.

MAJ. GENERAL MIXON: And they have to adapt to that environment. So they are well suited for what they are designed for, but they are light on the infantry, even though they do have an infantry company.

All right, sir. Well, that concludes the interview. Thank you very
much, General Mixon. Thank you.

MAJ. GENERAL MIXON: Thanks.

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