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INTERVIEW

OF

LIEUTENANT GENERAL RAYMOND ODIERNO

COMMANDING GENERAL

MULTI-NATIONAL CORPS - IRAQ

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SEPTEMBER 7, 2007

This transcript was prepared from tapes  
provided by the U.S. Army Center of Military  
History.

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P R O C E E D I N G S

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This is

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the Multi-National Corps-Iraq historian. Today is Friday, the 7th of September 2007 at approximately 1506, and we are at the Al Faw Palace at Camp Victory outside of Baghdad, Iraq, and I am interviewing the Commanding General of Multi-National Corps-Iraq, Lieutenant General Odierno.

Sir, could you be so kind as to introduce yourself in your own voice?

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: I am Lieutenant General Ray Odierno, Commander of Multi-National Corps-Iraq. I took over command here on 14 December of '06.

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

: Thank you, sir.

Sir, one of the things since we talked last in June has been the continued efforts on the reconciliation front, and you have made a point in some conversations about the top down versus bottom up aspects of the initiative.

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What do you see as our opportunities and vulnerabilities along those lines?

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: Now what I would say is, first, on the reconciliation piece, it is something that sort of started out -- It started out at a very low level, and it started out by some Sunni groups coming across to us to want to now participate with us against al Qaeda.

I think there's a number of reasons why this happened. I think it is because, with the surge and the improvement of security and the success we are having, they realize that this might be a chance for them to do that.

Secondly, I think they realize that they really did begin to think about the fact that they wanted to reject al Qaeda and everything al Qaeda stands for. I think those are probably the two most important points which have driven them to reconciliation.

The government of Iraq, the leadership, is a bit hesitant and wants to go

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slowly on any type of reconciliation, especially regarding Sunnis. What I've found since I am over here, it is not that they don't want to reconcile. I truly believe that. But what it is, is they have this immense fear of Baathism returning to Iraq.

When you think about it, if you really sit back and think about it, it is a natural thought process after being under Baathist control for so long.

So, you know, I use the term I think sometimes you see a Baathist around every corner, and they worry that anybody who is Sunni, part of the insurgency war, in fact Baathist, and their only objective is to come back and take power of Iraq away from a Shia majority.

So with that, they are a bit tentative in moving forward with reconciliation. So what's happened with this bottoms up approach, we've become the conduit between the people who want to reconcile the Sunnis and the government of

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Iraq.

So through this reconciliation effort, what we are trying to do is confidence building measures, and we do that by a number of ways.

First, you begin to talk with them, and then they begin to give concessions such as I will pledge myself to work for the government of Iraq; I want to become part of the permanent security forces.

So what we have done is try to encourage that. What's happened now -- Because of this bottom up movement, what's happened now is the Iraqi government has now established a reconciliation cell which works with us and has become a fairly transparent cell that now is dealing with these issues. So that's a positive step.

Their timetable for completing this is much different than our timetable. We want to move forward with it very quickly. They still want to go forward with it a very methodical,

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deliberate process. So that's what we have to work through now, because we are not sure how much time we have; because the potential of the Sunnis reconciling directly impacts, I think, our timeline and the success.

I think, if we can get the government of Iraq to begin reconciling here in a very legitimate way, that would go a long way in people gaining confidence that this government might actually work, because again it's always been the unity government that's important.

If I could just step back a little bit, what I would say is what drove this, obviously, was what happened in Anbar. And again, it's the same thing. What happened in Anbar? Well, what happened in Anbar is, first, we reach out to the tribes, but more importantly we provided security at the population centers. And once we were able to provide security to the population centers, you saw a much bigger interest in the Sunni population supporting and

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helping us in fighting al Qaeda, because once again they rejected al Qaeda.

What has been interesting to me, though, which has happened much faster, is in March when we finished the clearance of Ramadi, that's when this thing really started to move. Leaving the dark cloud of al Qaeda, and that was over at Ramadi, has really changed the dynamics in all of Anbar.

I think, because it's the capital, because AQI was calling it the capital for their capital, and the fact that we were able to really go in there with a lot of combat power, defeat al Qaeda, the citizens saw that, and the citizens then really wanted to continue to fight al Qaeda, and it strengthened the tribes, and it increased the tribal capability cross the province. So I see that as a fairly significant moment.

What's happened since then is other people saw what happened in Anbar, and they think that can happen with them. So that's what has

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driven now this other -- this reconciliation movement growing in Baghdad, south of Baghdad, north of Baghdad, Allah Province.

The next step of all this now is doing Shia reconciliation, which we are just starting with, and that's a whole different dynamic, because, obviously, the government of Iraq feels more comfortable with the Shia leadership than the Shia leadership does with the coalition forces right now.

So it's almost a completely different dynamic, and the government of Iraq is almost the interlocutor between them, us and the Shia group, the Shia militias and groups that we are trying to reconcile.

That is just beginning now, but we have to move forward on both of those. So I think both of these, we'll get a bottom up approach from the Shia, continue the bottom up approach with the Sunnis. I think it will get you to the reconciliation from a government of

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Iraq perspective.

It's much more complicated than that.

It is going to take some legislation that has to occur, and we have to talk about resettlement and all those other things, but that will come further down the line.

(b)(3), (b)(6): Is there a point, sir, at which -- Is this a window of opportunity that is going to go away or is that --

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: The biggest fear I have with the Sunni piece that we are working now is, you know, they have signed up for 90 days. We'll probably get them to sign up for another 90 days, but if they don't think the government of Iraq is taking action, is slow rolling their inclusion into government security forces, it could then cause a backward movement back to an insurgency.

We have to get the government of Iraq to realize this is an opportunity. Sunnis are stepping forward. They are saying they want to

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be part of the security forces. You would much rather have them be members of the security forces than members of a resistance that you drive them to for the long term.

So, again, this is about getting the government of Iraq comfortable with this, realizing that -- You know, one of the comments that was made by Sheikh Safahr (Phonetic), one of the leading sheikhs out in Anbar, this week was -- when the President came by, was, you know, it wasn't just Shia that suffered under Saddam Hussein; Sunnis and Kurds suffered also, and very few benefitted from Saddam Hussein. The majority of the population suffered under Saddam Hussein.

I think we forget that. We think that all Sunnis had a great life under Saddam Hussein, all Shia were persecuted, when in reality there was almost as many Shia as part of the Baath party as there were Sunni.

So there were Shia who benefitted. There were Sunnis who benefitted. There were

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Shia who suffered as well as Sunnis, and we just have to work our way through that.

(b)(3), (b)(6): Sir, one of the variables just in different readings seems to be the interaction with the Iraqi Army, also the National Police, but for the purpose of this question just the Iraqi Army.

In some cases, it seems like that is an easy relationship. They are doing a good job.

There is an easy interaction between our forces, coalition forces, and with the local volunteer elements of different types, but in other areas it seems as if the Iraqi Army elements are almost against the volunteers, or at least not supportive of that effort.

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: What we have seen is again, actually, most of the leaders who understand the dynamics within Iraq understand the importance of reaching out to the Sunnis. In fact, at the lowest levels, at squad level, platoon level, company level, they are, in fact,

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working with these groups that are trying to reconcile. However, you do have a few leaders, for a variety of reasons -- it could be that they mistrust al Qaeda. They did something to their families, and they still consider these people to be part of al Qaeda, or again they fear this -- that, in fact, the only reason they are doing this is to regain control of the power, that they are somewhat hesitant to work with them.

I think there's only a very limited number that are like that. My experience is the military wants to work with them. They understand the reason why we want to do it. It will create more stability and security. It tends to be the politicians that tend to have more of a problem with it, but there are few.

You know, we've had one problem with one brigade commander in Abu Ghurayb area who clearly has not endeared himself to the Sunnis population that is trying now to come forward. In fact, what's interesting is he is, in fact,

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Sunni, which makes it even more interesting.

That is really the only -- really one of the few cases I've seen. So I think, for the most part, the Army has accepted this.

(b)(3), (b)(6): I had a great opportunity to be able to shadow your detail the other day when you were out to do some visits in the Diyala River Valley, which was just great to be able to kind of tag along on that type of thing.

I was really -- It wasn't my first time watching your interaction with leaders down line from you, but it was nice. They have been involved with some tough fighting up there. But you asked them a tough question, too, and it was the question of, hey, what's going to happen when we go away from here? Will these guys -- Will the Sunnis and Shias in this particular area, knowing that that is one of the areas that is so hotly contested in terms of who is going to influence the action -- What are your thoughts

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about some of the tougher areas? Granted that we've had these successes in some areas, what's the way ahead there?

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: Well, the bottom line is the way ahead is, once we clear these tough areas, we have to control them. We will control them in the beginning, but over time the Iraqis are going to have to develop the police and Army to go in there and secure those areas.

The security forces are going to have to be representative of the areas that they are clearing. You know, if it's a mixed area, you are going to have to have Sunni and Shia representation.

The more important thing is they have to be loyal to the government of Iraq and not loyal to a militia or loyal to some other organization. That's the hardest thing.

I think we are making progress in that area. I think the Army, for the most part, is loyal to the Army. We are still frustrated,

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though, with the police. In fact, they tend not to be so far. We are still working hard on that. So it's important we do that.

That's why, as we move forward here in our strategy, we will look at each area very differently. There are some areas we will be able to turn over to Iraqi security forces very quickly. For one thing, the security environment is better. Secondly, there is not as contentious mixed areas in there.

Where there's other areas where you have security issues that are a bit tougher, and you have mixed areas which make it more difficult, that will take longer. That will require more U.S. presence.

So we have to understand that. There is not one solution for Iraq. That's why I continue to talk to these young leaders and get their opinions on how well we can do it, so I can gauge in my own mind how long is it going to take for us to turn this over.

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You know, when you ask me today, September 7th, I would tell you that there are some areas where I think it is still years away from turning over to Iraqis. There are other areas where we can do it this month or next month with relative success.

So we have to understand that as we move forward. It is going to be different. So that's the one challenge we have, to make sure everybody understands that, and what are the consequences if we don't, and the consequences could be numerous.

They could be the establishment of al Qaeda safe havens. They could be sectarian violence. Could be no establishment of rule of law, all of those things.

(b)(3), (b)(6): When we talk last, sir, the surge had just completed in the sense of having all of the forces on the ground here; and since that time we have had Operation Phantom Thunder and Phantom Strike.

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I just wondered if you could reflect back on those and talk a little bit to that.

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: Well, first, the thing that people don't realize is, when we brought these new units in here, what's so different about what we are doing is this counter-insurgency fight, and it's a even more complicated. It's a counter-insurgency fight with some sectarian -- other sectarian issues involved in it. So it's deeper than that -- with

1.4b, 1.4d

1.4b, 1.4d

it's not nation; it's elements. So that makes it even more complicated.

The reason I bring that up is a unit just doesn't come in on Wednesday and on Thursday are able to really make a significant difference.

You have to first come in; you have to understand the area you are operating in.

This, in my mind, takes somewhere between 60 and 90 days as a minimum, and it's

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been very consistent, whether it be 41 Infantry who came in and took over Che (Phonetic) or 42 Strykers who went up in Tarmiah (Phonetic). At the 60-day mark you see a significant increase in their ability to make an effect on their area of responsibility.

So what's happened is our forces are now on the ground here. The surge is on the ground. They, for the most part, now are really understanding their areas. So they are now really making a difference.

What's happened is exactly what we thought. In the beginning our casualties were up, for a number of reasons. One is because we went into areas we had not been in before, and all of those we went into were the most difficult areas. They were the ones where there were safe havens. They were the areas where we knew they were the supply lines for the VBIED networks, for IED networks, for al Qaeda, for Jaish al-Mahdi and for special groups.

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Those are the areas we focused on. So it was some tough fighting. Once we got into those areas and were able to clear those out, we now have seen the casualties and violence go down.

So the extra combat power allowed us to do things that we would not have been able to do. More importantly, it's allowing us to hold these areas, so these safe havens, the supply depots, these other things cannot be reestablished.

So Phantom Hammer, when we started that in June, was again to go into the areas such as Baqubah, east of Chi (Phonetic), Arab Jabour, where we were having these problems. After about 45 days, we got control of these areas.

Phantom Strike was what I call more of an exploitation and pursuit. We can't take over much more ground than we have. What we can do is continue to disrupt al Qaeda and other -- and JAM special groups in such a way where we can

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continue to eat at their leadership and make it more difficult for them to plan and conduct operations.

That is our intent, is to continue to do that, all the while trying to get them then to reconcile with us. And that's where we are at right now.

I am extremely encouraged against al Qaeda. I think the work with both the conventional as well as the special operation forces against the al Qaeda network is having a significant effect. It's still capable of conducting large attacks, but it's is becoming more difficult for them.

The time between attacks is longer. Their ability to get to the targets they want is more limited. So we are making progress.

(b)(3), (b)(6): Knowing that we focused on this particular time period and concerns of estimating what the enemy might want to do leading into the September time frame, we

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are almost at the time for the Congressional testimony, and we really haven't seen the ability of AQI to mount significantly.

Does that tell you anything about --

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: Well, I think it's not so much the testimony as much as it is the run-up to Ramadan and Ramadan itself. To me, that will be the key.

The last three years, 2004, '05 and '06, the run-up of 30 to 45 days prior to Ramadan were the most violent in those time periods, and each year it got more and more violent. In 2007 that has not happened. The run-up to Ramadan, in fact, has gotten much less violent, not more violent.

The next test will be what happens during Ramadan. So if it is quiet during Ramadan or is quieter, and we continue to maintain this or even continue to head in the downward direction, I think that will be a key indicator on where we are at.

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Now what's changed is, in my mind, we are just not fighting the Sunni insurgency. We are now also fighting an emboldened special groups out of Jaish al-Mahdi which is

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1.4b, 1.4d

So

that has added a little bit to it.

So even with that added on, we are still seeing a decrease in attacks, which in my mind is significant.

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

: In fact, sir, I wanted to ask about that change also, since we talked last. Come the end of July, I know certainly the focus had been on AQI, but now that doesn't seem to be the case.

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: Well, actually, I would go back. Actually, in December/January is when we started to focus much more on Jaish al-Mahdi. The main effort was Corps AQI, but I think we went from like -- to put it in mathematical terms, in November we were probably 90 percent al Qaeda, 10 percent Jaish al-Mahdi or

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extremists, Shia extremists, was our focus.

You know, in December it probably went 80/20, and then kind of slowly down to, you know, 70/30, 60/40. I think now it's 50/50 or even maybe 40/60 the other way, and it's because of two things.

First, the reduction of the al Qaeda threat, 1.4b, 1.4d

and more aggressiveness of these Shia extremist groups that's caused us to move that way. So I think it's a combination of both those things.

The bottom line is, in my opinion -- my true opinion is that for the government of Iraq to succeed, they have to deal with the Shia militias. They cannot have 30-, 40-, 50,000 man militia out there that's working for somebody who is not associated with the government or who are not doing things according to what the government needs it to do.

We will never solve this problem by ourselves. Only the Iraqis can solve this

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problem. The thing that's happened over the last 30 days which is encouraging is the Iraqis, in fact, have started to do operations against Jaish al-Mahdi.

That was not always the case, and we were kind of doing them on our own. They are now doing some, but it's not where it needs to be. They have to do much better than they are now in order to deal with this problem.

Because they haven't dealt with it, they are now seeing challenges to their governmental structure in the south, such as in Nasiriyah, Karbala, Basra, Samawa, all of those places.

So I think they understand now they have to do something about this, and I think we are starting to see that.

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

What is your read on Moqtada al-Sadr's decision for a call for six-month (Inaudible)?

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: You know, there

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are lots of opinions. You know, as of today, if you ask me, I think he's just trying to -- What he is trying to do, you realize, is -- They were embarrassed a bit over the Karbala incident that occurred a couple of weeks ago where, during the 12th Iman celebration, a holy Shia -- in fact, a Shia on Shia violence in Karbala that was instituted for the most part by Jaish al-Mahdi, which led to some damage to the holy mosque down in Karbala.

So I think that got everybody's attention, and they realized that's not what they wanted. So they called a cease fire, but I think they called a cease fire not because they want to stop violent action, but it's because they want to regroup, reorganize, see if they can get control of their forces so they can continue to influence the future of Iraq; because ultimately that is what Moqtada al-Sadr wants. He wants to influence the future.

He'll say the number one influence is

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he wants to eject the occupiers, which is the United States. But the other piece he wants to influence, he wants to gain political control within the Shia areas of Iraq, and he is using both of those to get to that end.

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

Sir, one of the initiatives -- and we touched, I think, a little on this the last time but not in great depth -- was the whole counter-IED fight.

Since talking to you last, I had a chance to go and kind of learn more about all the components that make that up. Do you have a sense of where you're at in the counter-IED fight right now?

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: Well, again, along with the attacks, the counter-IED fight is heading in the right direction. It's grown every month, every year. We are now -- Well, it's not growing anymore. In fact, we are negative growth. In fact, we are starting to reduce.

This is the first time we've actually

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started to lower the overall number of IED attacks. I think that's based on a couple of things.

I think it is based on, again, our tenaciousness at going after not only the people putting out the IEDs, the EFPs, but those who are financing and supplying, which we have always felt was the key.

We are still not anywhere near where we need to be. There's still way too many of these things that go off every single day. It's still my number one priority. But what I've found is IEDs lead you to the groups. IEDs lead you to al Qaeda. IEDs lead you to militias.

So when we are going after the IED network, you in turn are, in fact, going after these organizations. What we've learned is, again, it's not just -- You have to have defensive measures, but you got to be proactive in going after these networks.

Unfortunately, whether you like it or

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not, you have to make sure they are paying a price for this. You cannot allow them to go untethered and being able to do anything they want in terms of IEDs. You got to really staff and put the pressure on them.

That is what we have attempted to do. Again, we have not had the results I've wanted. We have a negative trend now. It is going down. It was lowest it had been in 15 months last month, but that's not good enough. It's still way too high.

So we still have a lot of work to do in that area, but we have made some progress, and we've done that because -- I'm confident we've done that by setting up our counter-IED cell here at Corps that is mirrored at Division level by all the divisions, and I think that has had an impact. At least, we have focused some intel and operational capabilities on this, and I think it has helped a lot.

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

Sir, without getting

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into this, but I've been read in on the  
(Inaudible) CCM. Without naming -- has it met  
your expectations?

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: They have  
exceeded my expectations, actually. I would say  
that initially I thought it might work, might  
not. It has definitely worked. It has given us  
good information, and then has allowed us to help  
go after some of these networks.

(b)(3), (b)(6) : Sir, looking at the  
Iraqi Army and their progress and things like the  
Baghdad operations center -- and I think one of  
the things that I heard you remark on that you  
thought was a very favorable sign was their  
ability to do a job of protecting the celebration  
of the 9th Imam, if I have that Imam straight,  
and really taking a lead on protecting the  
marchers.

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: You mean the 7th  
Imam?

(b)(3), (b)(6) : Seventh Imam, thank

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you -- protecting the route, making sure it went smoothly. In previous years, there had been various incidents, lots of casualties. Went smoothly. Your perspective on their ability to get involved in that.

The following question: That is, at what point do we really start integrating the Iraqi Army elements in some of the more detailed planning of the combined coalition fight?

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: I think, first off, that where they have come from since I was here in December, which is the Baghdad operation center was not yet set up -- it got set up -- it was briefed early in January, and where they have come has been significant.

They still don't have all the staff functions that we would expect in a headquarters.

In fact, I think, it's a cultural thing. Everything is commander -- They are so commander centered. They do not have the staffs that decentralize some of the decision making. It all

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comes in the commander.

With that said, what I have seen is a steady increase in the Baghdad operational commander's ability to command and control what is basically a corps-like operation.

I have seen the Karka (Phonetic) and Soffah (Phonetic) commanders being able to command and control their forces in their zone of operation and do it pretty effectively.

So those are huge positive trends that we had not seen before, which I think are very significant.

In terms of at the lower level of the Iraqi Army, I think what we've seen is, you know, they have stood, and they have fought. A large majority of the Army battalions have stood and fought, and their sacrifices worked.

They still have huge logistical problems. They still have -- They still in some parts of the Army, small parts, but (Inaudible) sectarian issues where, depending on who they are

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fighting, they're fine; but other times, they are not.

What's good is the government is trying to get at this. They have fired 17 out of 24 battalion commanders and National Police. They have fired all brigade commanders. They have fired some individuals in the Army, not as many, obviously, because that is not as big of a problem. So those are all positive things in terms of that.

They have made some -- For example, they just finished -- They made a decision they wanted to move forces down to Basra, because they were concerned about Basra. So they have now -- They've moved an MP brigade down there. Today they moved a MEC battalion down there. They switched out a brigade.

They have established an operational command in Basra. All of these things, in my mind, are positive. They've seen a problem. They are trying to deal with it.

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The problem that I believe is -- again, it's a Shia/Shia problem, which is best solved by the government of Iraq. So I mean, some of those things are positive.

They still struggle in my mind with discipline. Now we have not yet been able to get them to accept what a noncommissioned officer does. We have instances where it works, but for the most part, we still have not been able to get them to adapt to that. Until they do, they are going to continue to have, in my mind, discipline and standards issues.

(b)(3), (b)(6): When do you see them being brought in or is that part of -- Maybe the way to ask this, sir, is: In respect to what you've talked about before in terms of tactical or (Inaudible) otherwise is a moment at which we all sit in a (Inaudible) together?

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: Well, I mean, I think we do that now, actually. The Baghdad operational command, they conduct a planning and

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targeting meeting every week that is joint with them and coalition forces. It is co-joint with MND-Baghdad.

They have been doing that for a month now, very significant, where they have a -- They have an O and I update with the brigade commanders update General Aboud, both U.S. and Iraqi. They have a targeting meeting that's a joint targeting meeting between MND-Baghdad and by Baghdad Operations Center, and they agree on the most important targets and the priority of these targets.

We do have some problems with some of the targets. That's still a problem and a bone of contention, but they have a process in place.

They have a joint planning meeting once week where they review future plans, and they address those.

Again, the Iraqis are still dependent on us to do some of the planning, because they have a very thin planning cell, but that's what

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we have to continue to work.

We have seen brigades plan, target -- I mean, do a targeting meeting, plan and execute operations. We have had several brigades that have done that on their own, the whole process. So that's a very positive thing.

(b)(3), (b)(6): Sir, the last eight to 10 months has been pretty much a very demanding time. III Corps rolled in with an idea in their head of what the plan was going to be, a drawdown; quickly turned around and turned that into a surge.

Just being here, it's fascinating to watch them working very hard, and we've now, in particular, have had during this last month and a half that extra attentiveness to making sure al Qaeda doesn't get something in on us, as well as the demands of lots of Congressional delegations, lots of visitors.

Do you see that causing a level of -- Are you seeing any manifestations as a leader

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about is that causing some stress? Are you seeing more friction than you might otherwise, and how are you seeing it, and what do you think?

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: I think -- I'll be honest with you. When I got here, I was much more stressed than I am now, and let me explain to you why; because when I got here, I did not buy into what we were doing. I did not think we were being successful, and I thought we had to change course.

When I was home preparing for this, I was concerned that I was coming over here with a failed strategy, and we had this discussion. I had this discussion with some of my leaders, and I was concerned about what -- In my mind, that was more stressful.

Once we had -- Once I was over here and had a chance to work with, first, General Casey working with what the problems were, starting to come up with a plan to fix it, and I started to feel more comfortable. So at least, I

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felt like we were addressing the issues that needed to be addressed in my mind.

If we wanted to be successful, we had to reduce sectarian violence. We had to bring security and stability to the population. And at least with the new plan, it gave us a chance of success.

So in my mind, that -- I believed in what I was doing. I believed in what we were doing. I have seen it go down through the chain, and I think the soldiers and Marines believe in what they are doing now. I'm not sure they were sure of that before. They saw us turning over very quickly to Iraqi Security Forces, and they knew they weren't quite ready yet, and they saw this increase of violence, and I think they were starting to wonder what are we doing.

So I mean, I think all of that has, in my mind, released a little bit of the stress, because we are confident in what we are trying to accomplish. I think that's good.

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What has been most stressful, in my mind, is this is an extremely political campaign that we are involved in, and I'm not saying that we are political, but there is much political pressure.

There is significant political pressure in Iraq because of the reconciliation issues and them trying to stand up a brand new government; and there's regional political issues with Iran and Syria. But there is significant political pressure in the United States, and you cannot ignore it. You can pretend like it doesn't affect you, but it absolutely is not true.

What I have found is, you know, we have tried to be forthright but honest and not take sides. You know, one of the major pressures is, as we have gone out in the press, you see people look at every word you say, and they use it to whatever end they might. That has been frustrating.

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I think we have tried to insulate ourselves from making any recommendation or decisions based on any political pressure, but we haven't gotten political pressure at all from the leadership, in my opinion.

You know, they have allowed us to make decisions and move forward as we see fit. However, again, the political pressure being exerted by Congress, the influence they are having, trying to have, on the U.S. population, and the pressure that puts on us has made it more significant, in my mind.

So I think in that way, pressure has started to increase again.

Now as I have sat here and watched the last few days and see everybody posturing and positioning, and it is not necessarily -- You know, sometimes I think they have lost sight of are we here to win or lose or are we here to get political gain for whoever party you happen to be for. But we have to stay completely separated

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from that, and we try very hard to do that.

What I'm interested in is being successful here in Iraq, making sure our soldiers and Marines feel successful in what they are doing, they understand why they are here, and that it is, in fact, making a difference, and it will make a difference in the future. That's what I am focused on.

(b)(3), (b)(6): Because this has become such a political measure, if you will, it is almost as if, it seems to me, that those that are against the war have put up a sign, and those that are for the war, that really the information -- to a degree, the data -- will really just be used to augment whatever your position already is.

Is that something that you wrestle with as well or is that something that (Inaudible) Congressional delegations?

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: Well, I mean, what's interesting is I am very clear. I'm very

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up front. I'm very forthright with Congressional delegations. I tell them what is good. I tell them what is not good.

Frankly, when they are over here, they are fine. They understand it. They get it. They respond. They ask good questions. We have good interchange. I think, when they leave, they feel that they have an understanding, but again it's a very short understanding, although I think it has made a difference over the summer, all these Congressional delegations.

I think there has been a sea change in what they think, at least what has occurred in terms of security in Iraq, even though there's still people back there trying to massage that a bit. But I do believe that, in fact, they have at least had a chance to see it.

I get frustrated by people -- and I said it this morning -- by people who are said to be so called experts who have not spent any time here. I mean, you cannot be an expert here

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unless you have been -- You know, if you were here two years ago as a division commander, you are no longer an expert here in Iraq, because it's changed.

The dynamics have changed. The government has changed. The way we do business has changed. And so then you have people who have never been here at all and just read about what is going on. So you are then dependent on what has been written, which might not be accurate.

So I guess what I'm saying is we have to be held accountable for what we do, but we should not be held accountable for what other people's opinions are that are misinformed.

It's getting to the point that -- It's almost to the point now where, if you say something positive about Iraq, you are challenged about whether you are honest or forthright.

So that's a challenge we have to deal with. What I have to do as the commander over

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here is take that pressure off of all the subordinate commanders. It's my job to keep that pressure at my level, so brigade commanders, division commanders, battalion commanders can do what they need to do, and that's prosecute this fight, and that's what I have tried to do.

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

Were you able to anticipate that? Is that something, when you assumed command --

LT. GENERAL OBIERNO: Yes. I mean, I knew that that was the environment we were coming into. I knew that this was -- It was very political. In fact, actually, I've seen it -- Again with the new strategy and as we have started to move forward, I have actually seen it lessen a bit.

I think, because there is a big decision coming up in Washington here, it's started to raise it a little bit again, but I think the fact that we did change and tried something different has lessened that a bit.

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[REDACTED]: Sir, you do seem to give a lot of leeway to your subordinate commanders in terms of their interaction with the media. Has that worked to your desire? Have you needed to make any adjustments in that or have you been pretty comfortable with it?

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: I've been pretty comfortable with it. The thing that I have always been frustrated with is somebody gives you talking points. So you got to stay within these talking points. First of all, everybody figures that out after a while. So they know that these are directed talking points.

So all I ask for the subordinate commanders to do is talk about their own area, talk about their expertise, talk about their battle space. If it's a battalion commander, talk about your battle space. If you are a brigade commander, talk about your battle space.

Don't talk about somebody else's battle space.

That's the only guidance I've given,

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to stay within what you know. Frankly, they do a much better job at it than any of us do. So I want them to have complete leeway within the limits of their span of control.

So I don't want to tell them what to say and what not to say, because they understand it better than I do. So why should I be giving them guidance? They understand their area better than I do. They understand what the important things are, what aren't. They understand what are the best things to say and what aren't.

So I think it's pretty important to give them that leeway, and I got to underwrite the risk associated with it, and that's the most important thing.

(b)(3), (b)(6): I like that phrase, sir, "underwrite the risk" of that.

From the macro down to the micro a little bit, sir, there's a couple of things that have come up that I just think are interesting. I wanted to know your commander's perspective on

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them.

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: Sure.

(b)(3), (b)(6): One of the issues -- and this really isn't a new issue, but it's had one or two slight wrinkles lately, which is, you know, we've all had women in our forces over here, and women, of course, from the get-go here in Iraq. We still have some lines in there about which units they can belong to and which they can't belong to. But of course, in this type of environment those seem to make a lot less difference.

I'm thinking, in particular, we have females in MP units, and I know there was a difference in policy, I think, with the Marines and how they use -- they do not allow females in -- if we were shop a female MP unit to them.

I guess I'm just curious. From your perspective, how have you seen that unfold? Do you have any perspective on --

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: Well, let me

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talk about the more general issue. Once again, our armed services, Army, Marine Corps, whoever is out here -- we have to readjust what we are talking about.

We built all these rules for a conventional fight. All our rules are based on conventional warfare. So what are we doing -- So we haven't adjusted it for counterinsurgency.

So do we need to? We at least need to look at it. Do we need to adjust it or not? Frankly, women have performed brilliantly out here.

I have run into so many MP -- MPs are -- You know, MPs are doing as hard work as Infantry is out here, whether we want to agree to that or not, and I've met more MP company commanders, female, that have been outstanding all around the battle space, in contact every single day.

So I mean, you know, a lot of people don't like it that I said that, but I mean,

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that's the truth.

You know, you can make the argument that a lot of these logistics patrols that are led by female company commanders and female sergeants are as vulnerable as anybody else out there, since they've spent probably more time on the road as anybody else, which puts them at risk to IEDs.

So I mean, I think the counterinsurgency fight, the asymmetric nature of this warfare that we are involved with now -- we have to relook at that and see what it means.

In terms of the Army and Marine Corps, actually, policies -- The one thing I've struggled with is nobody is showing any policies yet. It's all interpretation. And so we are not finished with this one yet, you know.

So everybody quotes everything, but I haven't seen any policy of anything. It's everybody's interpretation of the policy, which is the way it always is. But the bottom line is,

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you know, the Army forms units to do certain missions, and they've got to be allowed to do those missions; and if the interpretation of the Marine Corps is that they can't do it that way, then we are going to have to look at reassigning the units. But I mean, I don't think that's the case.

Again, that's what I'm saying. I got to get more -- You know, everybody talks about it, but I haven't seen anything yet. So there's a little more to go on that.

(b)(3), (b)(6): All right, sir. And I wasn't (Inaudible) just because I'm a Marine asking a question.

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: No, I know. It's a good point. Well, frankly -- Let me -- This really -- I feel (Inaudible) about being a Multinational Corps Iraq commander is that I'm not. You know, all the Air Force units here work for the Air Force, and all the Marines work for the Marines. They don't work for me.

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That's wrong. Who is responsible for what is happening in Iraq? Is it General Mattis (Phonetic) or is it General Odierno?

(b)(3), (b)(6): General Odierno.

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: It's General Odierno. But who do they work for? There's something wrong with that. It's about responsibility and accountability. You know, who do the Air Force work for in theater here? They work for General North. Who is accountable? He's not accountable for what happens in Iraq.

Now this is General Petraeus. He is as accountable as I am, and I worry about that. I mean, if this is joint, then you work for me. You know, now do they -- Now I've taken it where now do they work for me? Yes. I mean, does (Inaudible) ask -- pay attention to what I do and do it? Yes. But in reality, that's not how it's set up, if you get down into the bottom line.

(b)(3), (b)(6): Yes, sir.

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: And we have Army

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battalions and brigades working for Marines, and that doesn't seem to be an issue at all. It's only when you get General Officers involved, it becomes an issue, which is sad, in my opinion.

(b)(3), (b)(6): Sir, I know that was an issue -- Well, I'll look at the Air Force, because that was one that came up with regard to air space and how to -- Was there some resolution of --

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: They have decided to go back and review and change some of their procedures. They haven't done it yet. I guess they have changed one, in particular. But, see, you know, the Air Force thinks they own the air space. They don't own the air space. The CFAC (Phonetic) doesn't own the air space. They manage the Air Space, but they don't own it. General Petreus owns it or I own it, you know.

We are still not conducting jointly warfighting operations. Now with the Marine Corps, it's different. Actually, the Marines do.

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They do what we say. They operate within -- You know, I exaggerate a little bit there.

See, here is what bothers me, and it's our system. It's not the officers. Let me take MRAP fielding. You know, we have MRAP fielding for the Marines, and we have MRAP fielding for the Army. Why is that? Why don't we have MRAP fielding for Iraq?

You know why that is? It's because of the way our system -- We still have a peacetime system. The Marines fund the Marine stuff. The Army funds the Army stuff. I think that is one of the things that just still have to work out.

The same thing happened when we first started up all the Humvees, the first thing. Started happening with Dukes (Phonetic) and -- what do the Marines use?

(b)(3), (b)(6): Oh, the light armored vehicle?

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: No, no, no, the counter-IED system.

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

: Oh, the IED system.

1.4a, 1.4g

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO:

1.4a, 1.4g

1.4a, 1.4g

It's

really a problem.

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

: Yes, sir.

LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: And so those are the things we have to fix. Future leaders have to fix that stuff. What's good about is these young guys, battalion commanders and brigade commanders, they work with Marines, Airmen, Navy. We have Navy guys in TACs, Airmen in TACs. You know, they have Marine battalions working for Army brigade commanders. You got Army brigade commanders working for Marines, and that's not supposed to be, you know, and it works fine.

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

Sir, we are coming to the end of the time that you allowed for me. I just wanted to ask you if there is anything I haven't touched upon that you wanted to talk about before we wrapped up today?

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LT. GENERAL ODIERNO: A couple of things. One is that I think most people underestimate how much our battalion, brigade, division and even Corps commanders over time have been able to adjust, change, adapt to change, be flexible, be adaptable in what we are doing.

I think people don't understand the complexities that are on this battlefield and how they have been deal with. People try to make it too simple, and it's not, and I think it is unfortunate that sometimes people make it seem that way.

These battalion and brigade commanders conduct the most sophisticated operations that I have ever seen. One minute you are conducting lethal combat operations. The next minute you are conducting non-lethal engagement operations, and it could happen within the same hour. That is hard. That is very hard.

You have several different enemies you have to deal with. You have to deal with al

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Qaeda. You have to deal with Shia extremists. You have to deal with [REDACTED] 1.4b, 1.4d You have to deal with -- I mean, it's just on and on and on -- criminals. And yet they are able to adjust and handle this. And I think we need to give ourselves more credit for that.

We are going to talk again, I assume. Right?

[REDACTED] (b)(3), (b)(6) : Oh, yes, sir. As usual, I had more questions than we got to, but I very much appreciate your time. Thank you, sir.

That concludes this interview.

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