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Al Faw Palace, Victory Base Camp, Baghdad

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

This is the second interview with Mr. Harvey. See the 10 Feb interview for background.

Abstract

The September '04 Strategic Review determined the effort in Iraq was under resourced and not synchronized. The Powerpoint briefings the command was using looked good, but they were fluff. LTG Sanchez lacked an overarching concept or strategy. I briefed principals up to the President in December of '04 that the situation was an insurgency and growing worse, but Rumsfeld disagreed. The players in the chain of command were stuck in the process, and the process validated effort, which looked like success, but it blinded them to reality. Myers and Pace and Abizaid deferred to Casey. Casey was trying to transition to get us out of Iraq, which is what Abizaid believed was vital anyway. The January '05 elections, and subsequent moves toward government formation, looked good from the US perspective, but they hardened the conflicts we'd hoped they would resolve, so things just kept getting worse. We should have engaged the insurgent leaders on their terms. The post-war purge should have been the top 150 people, only, and everyone else should have been shepherded down a path of reconciliation. In 2006, it kept getting worse and worse, and various generals gradually came around, culminating in Casey's message of December of 2006.

Interview

Casey and Negraponte took over in July '04. I was in Iraq from July to September 2004 conducting the Strategic Review for them. I left when that was complete in September. I took some leave, then signed into the Joint Staff to take the lead on Iraqi analysis for the Joint Staff.

What were the conclusions, or the recommendations, of the Strategic Review?

1:40. We understood that, besides security, the other lines of operation were woefully undermanaged, poorly manned and resourced, and they were not synchronized with the security line of operation or with each other. For example, if your having problems in an area with insurgency, and you need to address underlying factors, you need to bring in some development, some government expertise, some jobs programs, into those areas. But when we overlaid, and we looked at where dollars went and the programs were, there was a major disconnect between the other three LOOs and where the security problems were. Maj Gen Stratman led this review. It had (b)(6) as a civilian, on it with five or six others, a British rep also. We found in many programs, whether USAID or the major economic leads . . . we found a lot of PowerPoint briefings with a lot of ideas, but when you peeled it back, and when you cross referenced these with what others were

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doing, and what was going on on the ground, you found there was not a lot there in a lot of cases. It all sounded good on PowerPoint, so it raised a lot of red flags for us on where the Ambassador and the General needed to be. Keep in mind that the violence levels at that time seemed to be manageable. It had been going up, but the perspective was that it manageable, according to the perspective of . . . it was not a crisis, ok, but the conclusions of the review team was that we were underestimating the trajectories and the potential for growth of the insurgency, and the discontent in the Shia Sadrist trend, and that there was real potential for it to get significantly worse unless one really developed a well ground counter-insurgency campaign that knitted together the other lines of operation and support. Mr. Matlock, who is from another government agency, and Maj Gen Stratman, could probably reflect that. It was very good at describing the current state of the situation. That was the easy part.

6:30. Once that was done, the issue became what should Casey, and Negraponte, and the British Ambassador who was part of this, in a leadership role, who received it and helped guide the review, what should they do about it?

Before you continue, let me ask about something (b)(6) (UK) recounted to me. (b)(6) said that he traveled to CFLCC in March 2004 to brief them on British counterinsurgency strategy. He told McKiernan and the staff that, based on what he was seeing, the US was facing an insurgency in Iraq. According to Alderson, this news shocked McKiernan, who refused to believe it.

7:30. (b)(6) is wrong. From the fall of '03 on, all the CFLCC leadership were getting my briefings laying out that this was a developing insurgency, so they knew that I was calling it an insurgency as the senior American analyst in Baghdad. They were doing their best to help us up here. I briefed McKiernan in February and early March of 2004, and I had been giving them updates on the situation. CFLCC fully appreciated what I told them, and their only point was that "it is much worse than we thought." LTG McKiernan heard the brief. BG Mark Kimmett was down there representing part of the staff here at the time.

10:00. Up here, LTG Sanchez heard all these briefings, and we knew we were dealing with a lot of violence. The inability to move forward, to really come up with any concept of operations, or guiding principals, or strategy, or vision for his subordinate commands was really a major failing, given that he was being told that these are not just isolated pockets of resistance, that there is a major effort here by former regime members to knit together an insurgency, under the auspices of the military bureau. I can give you the slides; they're just at Secret/No Foreign, and there's no reason for them to even be Secret any longer. They should just be (?), because it's really kind of a basic kind of briefing. They're just . . . but I have those. I have them here, on the JWICS drive, and I'll get those to you.

11:33. After leaving Iraq in September '04 and taking leave, I went to the Pentagon. That is when I started to put together a briefing that laid out how I saw the situation in Iraq. From the time I got back, and discussions with General Ron Burgess, who was the J2 at the time, I gave the briefing to him, to others. Some heard about it. General Abizaid and

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Casey made sure I stayed on the Iraq problem. Mr. Wolfowitz asked for my brief. It then went through gateways to the SecDef, and then to the President on 17 December 2004.

So the briefing is making its way up during the second battle of Fallujah.

12:55. Right. When you look back at the slides of that time, the key cities then . . . in a pen and paper routine, the planners and CG needed to know. The top 15 cities we were tracking, and his focus was on stability and transition, Fallujah was one of them. It could not help but be, and it was driving everything else around the country. Then you had the Shia uprising which began in April and continued through August also. By the time we were getting ready to go into Fallujah, the city of mosques, its population of 280,000 was down to 15,000 living in it. With the international media, this became the cause célèbre, and it highlighted American occupation and arrogance and injustice. And we were still having the reverberations of Abu Gharib, which continued trickling out over the spring and into summer.

15:00. Other than that, Abu Ghraib at the time was an operation that had to be done. I don't see it as a turning point, particularly.

Did the briefing you gave, as it ultimately made its way up to the President, did it lead to more requests for information or guidance?

I gave the briefing to the Defense Policy Board, and members of the board continued to get quarterly updates through '05. And members included people like Senator Chuck Robb, I believe, Newt Gingrich, some retired senators, Congressman Foley, General Jack Keane. And what they were getting in that briefing, and what the Joint Staff was not getting, was a holistic assessment of what was going on in Iraq, instead of the day-to-day slice of reports that did not put things in perspective, from the perspective of trends analysis, and it was looking at the intersection of all these dynamics, economics, politics, governance, enemy strategy. You have to understand the enemy, what their tactical, operational, and strategic goals are. What the effects are they need to achieve in order to achieve the goals, and what the capabilities are that enable them to conduct their operations (tactical to strategic). It was probably never organized like that, and I lay out organization and people, and describe it as a collaborative and cooperative effort throughout and around Iraq, no hierarchical chain, to be sure.

What did the Defense Policy Board do with the information?

18:00. Well, they encouraged Myers and Pace to dig in for a better understanding. Through them, they encouraged the SecDef to hear my briefing in the fall. He recommended the White House see it. The SecDef thought it was solid analysis from someone who had recently been there, and was well grounded, although he disagreed with a number of conclusions.

Like?

18:58. Like that the insurgency was gaining strength and would probably continue to gain strength and there was leadership and organization developing. The prevailing view still resonated that the resistance was not coordinated or organized. IED networks need surveillance, planners, bomb makers. If you walk the dog back . . . I showed them

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Not all historical questions have answers, but how do you account for that inability to recognize it for what it was?

20:30. To not understand what it was they were seeing. That is the question.

Especially without have to resort to, 'well, they were obtuse.'

Well, I thought I was convincing, and no one ever could refute what we were saying. There might be some question about the roll of certain key individuals. At the time, in early '04, these individuals were trying to organize a broader insurgency. Some of them might not have been able to actually close the deal, like [REDACTED] b 6 like they wanted to, but we really hurt them at times with some of our operations, so it was back and forth.

21:40. Here's the thing. I think there was a common view that took root, and that . . . it prevented them from asking the tough questions or confronting what they were actually seeing and sensing. They were just getting daily sound bytes, and they never really got a comprehensive laid down of what was going on. Even though they got a briefing from me here and there, there were enough naysayers out there . . . So you hear from Harvey and his staff in the J2 that there is an insurgency and its growing and the process we're involved in is not going to do anything but enrage the Sunni community rather than soften.

So Myers defaulted to Abizaid, and Abizaid lets Casey run things, and relies on his phone calls and figured, well, here's what's going on, and we're on a path to get out. The path was to get out, to transition. That was the mindset. There was never any intent to determine the reality on the ground and decide to defeat the insurgency. [There was] never any idea of defeating the enemy. That was never in the construct of any campaign plan. It was all about transition. And if that's your model, and you're not . . . you don't understand the enemy well enough, then . . . and you talk to each other, so Casey talks to Myers, and Casey is on his SVTCs with the President, weekly, right, and says, "Well, sir, this is what we're doing." And they were so enamored with the processes of what they were doing, which gives you a sense of success, because we're moving this battalion from here to here, we're building this many soldiers, we've got LTG Petraeus out here, who is building with MNSTCI, which is building up Iraqi security forces. So they had their model in their mind, and a glide path to get out. And they were enamored with the idea of process, on building the ISF, and on a political march. We're going to have the Iraqi Transitional Government, we're going to migrate, we're going to have a constitutional referendum, then we're going to have elections, and then we're going to seat of government.

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This does actually begin to make sense that because their focus was not on defeating an insurgency, but to evade it.

24:49. That is another way of putting it. I never thought of expressing it that way. They just did not want to acknowledge the reality of what they were doing, and that the enemy . . . one of things is, remember, that the enemy has a vote, and we had senior four starts who would not acknowledge that the enemy has a vote, and that he has a strategy, and the enemy, I told them time and time again, the enemy believes that if they hung on for five to seven years, that they will break the will of America, and that they will then subvert the remaining institutions that we leave behind.

And we were betting that the institutions that will leave behind would be able to defeat the insurgents.

25:30. Right, to survive.

And we believed it had to be their fight anyway.

Right.

Without regard to the fact that we had already come once already . . .

You could certainly start going down the path of thinking through those points of view, but again, the failure to get regular, comprehensive assessments about the situation on the ground, and about what the enemy was doing to us, and understanding the enemy, that was failure number one. Failure number two was group think, and relying on . . . everyone wanted to hear about progress, and everyone was enamored with their own process and the plan, and GEN Casey said everything is going okay, and Myers and Pace just said, we'll, he's the guy who knows, I just get an update, one slide every day. They don't get a comprehensive lay down. . . . Abizaid was focused on the bigger fight, and his whole perspective the entire time was, "Look, we are an irritant there, the sooner we get out, the better off Iraq will be." So his focus was on transition, the SecDef's was on transition, and Casey's was on transition, and process. And the president and his political advisors had been focused on process, getting through the 2004 election, and then on 2006. And you had Iraqi processes in this, when you look at benchmarks of transitional government, constitutional referendum, then elections in December of '05, then you seat a government. The January '05 elections gave the first government, which drafted the constitutional principals for the October '05 referendum.

What did things look like in January '05?

28:00. In mid-January '05, I came back again with LTG Odierno and Gen Luck. We did another assessment trying to answer three questions: what are we doing, how well are we doing it, is there something else we should be doing. We were looking at intelligence, which is I looked, but also at training Iraqi forces, the economic programs. The team went back and reported to the SecDef, I believe, at the end of February, and I stayed here through the spring.

What was your impression of the day of the elections?

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The security focus was good. I thought, as far as getting through it, it worked fine, but these elections and these processes, because we failed to acknowledge the underlying issues, and because you still didn't have Sunnis involved, and they were . . . the Sunnis that we had in government, the Quislings, did not represent anyone legitimately, fed into the anger and resentment and fear, which fed the insurgency. Then you had the referendum in October. As you follow [these events], and see the rhetoric, and see the media, you see the enemy IO, and you see it in the interrogations, the Sunni community is getting increasingly inflamed. And the only thing that unhinged it, as I mentioned last time, was the Samarra bombing, which changed the whole dynamic. If it had not been for that eruption [and the fall out], we would probably not have had the surge and the success we've had today, because that changed everything.

Sticking with pre-Samarra mosque bombing dynamics, from the spring of '03 through February of '06 . .

31:15. Steadily increasing violence, especially from October '05 on.

My impression throughout that period was that US commanders were struggling to find any viable Sunni community to work with, because it was so disparate, and working with any group alienated other Sunnis opposed to that group.

31:45. The fundamental issue was people that had resonance and influence, we refused to talk to them, and it is still the heart of the problem. So we talked to low-level people, like b 6 an insurgent leader in Abu Ghraib who is now in the SoI, and he is really just a sub, sub group leader, but he has given us insights, and he's is from Jaish al Islami. But the people who matter, former businessmen, tribal leaders, clerics, still had influence in '03, '04, '05, and even in early '04, Iraqis who has not taken sides, many former leaders, became increasingly frustrated, especially with Abu Ghraib and Fallujah. And that was a tipping point for them. They gave us a year, and we hadn't done anything but anger them. And then you threw Abu Ghraib and Fallujah at them, and a lot who had been on the fence now tacitly supported the government with their money and sons.

Besides talking to them, what policies would we have had to pursue to pacify that element?

33:20. You would have had to redress some of those things that we did at the time, which was de-Ba'athification, needed amnesty, had to look at people's right of return to their jobs without fearing prosecution by the new government of Iraq. No society can go through the kind of upheaval that this went through and not have to have some form of reconciliation. This is old worn out territory. There were insurgent leaders that we could talk to. (b)(6) [long list]. And all these people are still influential in the insurgency today, though less than in the past because they've been out of the country for awhile. But you've had a growth of new leaders. It is similar to the Algerian case with leaders inside and outside the country.

But if you engage those . . .

34:55. The balance had to be you had to make sure the Shia . . . we set the stage, unfortunately, by establishing rules of the game that we were then in a corner and could

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not get out of. One could say, 'you could have done this, but then you'd need a government of five years as a transitional government.' You have technocrats and a Prime Minister who can not succeed himself, or president, and you focus on building efficiency. We had the power and influence at the time to force that issue. We made a lot of other unilateral decisions at the time; we could have forced that issue. And it might have worked. And I don't think we would have gotten a lot of pushback from Sistani and the Hawza at the time.

If we had pursued a very light de-Ba'athification, just the very top, and maintained the Army, would that have entailed some level of suppression of Shia uprising?

36:45. Well, a lot of the Army was Shia, but you underestimate the number of people who were Shia Ba'athists, and senior military officers. In retrospect, one had to pay more attention to the Presidential Security, the Special Republican Guard, and the M4 and M5 bureaus of the IIS, for example. You had to target your concerns, and maybe you do something with pensions, but maybe you do something with pensions.

Everybody was afraid. There were hit squads going out and killing former Ba'athists every night.

In my work on CFLCC in May of '03, the perception is that the command was not concerned with Iraqis whacking Iraqis.

37:40. No, I don't think they were, but there is only so much you can do, but if we had kept some Iraqi security forces, we'd have had a basis to begin with. Not everyone would have come back. We'd have had ministries filled, and most weren't bad. But now, starting over, we've lost the technocrats, businessmen, teachers, middle class means. We need them back to rebuild the country. If they were involved in the political process even back then, you'd have had checks on extremism in the Shia community, and you'd have avoided a Fallujah. You would have had a different set of problems, and we still didn't have enough force structure. This country still had a bankrupt infrastructure, as we found out. Our intelligence failed us on this. Nobody was telling me about the bankrupt infrastructure here, that electricity wasn't getting to the other parts of the country that the water didn't exist, and these were all questions that should have been asked pre-war.

In December of '02, McKiernan at CFLCC asked his staff whether the Saddam Fedayeed had RPGs, and the lack of an immediate answer indicates to me they had no appreciation of how ubiquitous RPGs [and other armaments] were in Iraq.

40:20. They were everywhere for the clans and tribes that were loyal to the regime. He was not arming the Saddoun tribe in Maysan province. They might have had their own weapons through the black markets and stuff, but that is why . . . There are 100,000 people that were in presidential security, the key groups of the IIS, the fedayeen Saddam, and the SSO, that were drawn predominantly from eight tribes and eighteen clans that were the inner sanctum of the regime, that represent the area going up the Tigris through Tikrit and Mosul, and where we are still having problems. That is the Baizis and the

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Musla clan, etc., and it is the same guys that had the most to lose that are still fighting, and they're the ones that were armed like that. And, that is 100,000 people, and that does not count the regular Ba'ath, the regular Republican Guard, the regular Army, or the Air Force.

41:50. In April of '05, I went back to the Pentagon, to the old job. I continued to work and brief. DIA was increasingly taking a contrarian view with what was being presented by MNFI, and Casey regularly called back to DIA director and lodging complaints about our analysis saying things were getting worse. In late '05 and into '06, the C2, General Zaynor, was getting increasingly troublesome. I told Zaynor that "you just don't know how to think about an insurgency and what they're doing to you. This is on the wrong path, and the enemy is winning." And by Spring of '06, we were saying that the country is about to come unhinged, to fracture, and it may be inevitable at this point, given the course of events and our inability to have the strategic patience and commit the resources, and that the macro trends of Iraq, the political culture, the ethnic divide, the deep-seated suspicion and distrust between groups, leaders, and the lack of any political core in the country, and no experience in governance, and the constitution being inevitably weak, it did not look like we were going to be able to pull back. So we were trying to put out a paper that said Iraq was heading for state failure, even with our presence there. And Major General Zayner was saying, with the other intel heads back in DC on VTCs, that things were getting better. The Director DIA and others thought "what is this guy [Harvey] seeing?" This was in May of '06. And that was when we were about to put out a paper saying the country is falling apart. And it is not just the Sunni insurgency. It was the blowback from the militias, what was going on in Baghdad . . . the 3,000 civilian deaths a month, the first Together Forward campaign was a failure, because they were not applying the principals which we already had in the draft COIN manual.

45: 15. Fundamental: protect the population. You have to get off the FOBs. You have to partner with Iraqi counterparts. This should not have been news, but I know that Casey was telling Pace in June of '06 that things were okay; these were just bumps in the road. And Pace defers to that, because Casey is a four star, and he is there.

In early December '06, Casey sent a message that we were heading for strategic failure. What was the trajectory to his offering that assessment?

46:21. I know that Mullins in the summer of '06 was saying that, that we were saying that to Pace in August and September of '06. I know that Keane went into to tell Pace in July of '06 that "you need to appreciate the fact that we are "losing in Iraq right now, and General Casey does not have a handle on it." Everyone else could see what was going on, that was going out and looking at it.

And that is when it General Pace put together a Council of Colonels to take a look at options, assess the situation, and that had (b)(3), (b)(6) on it and (b)(6) I was an adjunct on it, providing the intel and the assessments, and I was doing weekly sitdowns with General Pace from July onward to help tutor him on Iraq, because he had not been getting a comprehensive assessment. Again, the leadership in the Pentagon was

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looking at their own little lanes in the road, Title X, or this, or that. He gets his one little slide a day, but who is putting it all together? Where is your operational net assessment?

I went out to the III Corps in August of '06, and I laid out a briefing on trends in Iraq and where we're headed. And that briefing had those guys shaking their heads, saying, "Oh my God."

The next step is the dynamic between LTG Odierno and General Casey as to why General Casey went that note.

That is where we'll pick it up next time.

48:52.

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