

~~CONFIDENTIAL/FOUO~~

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

(USAF)

19 February 2008

Embassy Annex, International Zone, Baghdad

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

MNFI Historian

Abstract

(b)(3), (b)(6) is a fighter navigator. STRATEFF has re-organized every few months since (b)(3), (b)(6) joined it in June '07. His initial focus was engagements, but the specific lanes with FSEC were never clear. He was engaging the Ministries of Health, Agriculture, and Education. The ministries suffered from Sadrist incompetence and mismanagement. The date palm spraying initiative is nonsense. MNFI does too much of what USMI should be doing, and MNFI should fold, or rather should be combined with MNCI. Frequent new campaign plans illustrate a lack of coherent design. The Army guys surrounding the hierarchy are not thinking through the situation; they're just saying "huah," and moving out without a coherent purpose. Transcript priority: low. These notes are nearly verbatim, but check the recording before quoting any material.

Background

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

6:25. The kinetic operations, there was a lull in the bomb drops in November and December, and then it started increasing more and more through March, when (b)(3), (b)(6) left. We did not get a real good feel for the insurgency. I think the DOD didn't believe guys would be fighting that much. We had numbers about battalions, but in a briefing to (b)(6) with the senior guys, there was a numbers game about Iraqi battalions forming up. We just didn't feel they were capable, but we were telling people the numbers were coming up, so we should be able to draw down.

9:00. At that time, we were better off than we are now. We had better security. At Camp Victory, we had guys moving around in two vehicles. Now, its more blocked off. Then, it was moving everywhere, to the embassy, and it was no big deal. The Green Zone, people were not getting bombarded at all. Right before I left, it got worse, because the

~~CONFIDENTIAL/FOUO~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL/FOUO~~

mortar attacks picked up. The night before I left, IDF hit a trailer, and the day I left, IDF hit the command post, and at that time we were discussing embassy/corps separation. One of our missions was deploying the Predator, with the TACPs using the lap top and the Rover III System. I went to Al Asad, to Fallujah to train teams. Other places seemed fairly safe.

Did you have enough assets for the mission?

13:00. Absolutely not. The reason is, with CAS, you needed people over the target area to do what they could. Since we were flying out of Al Udeid, the aircraft had a very limited loiter time. You never have enough. We did not have enough ISR assets, so we were using CAS assets as reconnaissance platforms. We needed a better capability.

His other deployments consisted of ONW and OSW. He was the Director of 13th Air Force in Hawaii, then an assignments officer.

STRATEFF

Found out about this assignment in Feb '07. I was originally supposed to go to STRATCOM, and he did not understand why they were putting a fighter guy into a public affairs position. It did not make sense, but whatever. Then they said I would be a plans guy at STRATCOMM. Then right before I arrived, I found out I would replace the STRATEFF Chief of Staff, [redacted (b)(3), (b)(6)]. He and I had a couple of sit downs, but not much of a handover. Of course, the position was evolving with things at Force Strategic Engagement Cell, now under Maj Gen Hughes, people got sucked into the FSEC.

17:40. I think the idea originated with LTG Graham, DCG, to engage the insurgents. It started prior, and [redacted (b)(3), (b)(6)] was working strategy against Sadr, and had written stuff on that, working closely with the Agency's Office of Regional Affairs (ORA), intel guys, dealing at that level.

When you arrived, what did you understand your mission to be?

19:45. That's where the confusion came in. I was told I was the Chief of Engagement. We were under the Office of National Reconciliation, and we were to support. . . well, I was to act as the LNO to FSEC, and chief of engagement to engage the CoR, insurgents, tribal leaders, to coordinate anything that was required. We had different engagement levels. What FSEC wanted to do was handle national leaders, the PMM level. He was their focus on other national leaders. We did not specify, but were to focus, but not specified, on ministers. Within a couple of weeks, the first mission was to mitigate Sadrism influence. We developed the idea, provided visibility. We briefed the CG and principals, and MNC staff. That was in coordination with State, ORA, everybody was involved, including Meghan O'Sullivan, the Special Envoy to Iraq.

What input did you get from people on what they thought should be the war forward with Sadr?

22:45. That's interesting, because there are two sides to that. We looked at . . . if you could engage him, do it, because moderates may engage, but for the criminals, like

~~CONFIDENTIAL/FOUO~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL/FOUO~~

special group, let's continue kinetic operations. If they play ball, engage, if not, go after them. We were told Sadr did not want direct engagement, so FSEC was trying to do networking, asking who they could engage to get information across. I was involved in that, but never saw a final product, and Sadr was in and out of Iran.

(b)(3), (b)(6) our intel guy, was tracking stuff for Maj Gen Bergner, and is involved with intelligence and handles Iranian stuff. On the freeze, most Iraqis consider the Sadrists thugs. The freeze identified the thugs and opened the chance for reform within the organization. They were targeting the special groups for internal purge.

Bergner told us to look at ministries (Agriculture, Education, and Health). He wanted us to help with the low hanging fruit, to develop confidence in these ministers.

The Sadrists had walked out of these ministries in spring of 2007. Many of them were criminals using their positions to loot the ministries, and they were all tied into criminal elements in the Facility Protection Services. By walking out of the ministry, they were withdrawing support from Maliki.

At the Health Ministry, the main bad actor was the IG, from Dawa. Now, the Deputy Minister is now on trial, and he is a Sadrist. The dirt happens because they get away with it. The IG was as corrupt as could be, but he knew what he was doing. We requested STRATCOMM do a survey to figure out what people thought about the ministries. They actually have not too bad an approval rating, and we're looking for survey trends. The people don't know the good deeds, because the IO is weak.

The ministries were starting to do more press, and we were trying to figure out the ONR. In August, we shifted our engagement. In August, we got shifted from the focus on engagement . . . but first, note we supported the MNFI chaplain with his Inter-Religious Conference from 3 to 5 June 2007. He was engaging the Sunni and Shia endowment. We are expecting a Sunni and Shia fatwa to condemn terrorism. One of the CoR members is a Christian, a small minority group, and he works on the investment commission and helps us engage the others, such as the Muslim Scholars Association, a new group that formed in June '07. This group is easily confused with the anti-coalition Association of Muslim Scholars, under Al Dury. So the moderate MSA has changed its name to the Iraqi Scholars Union.

We focused on the ministries, post-kinetic and post-surge operations, or reconstruction. So in August, we were regionally divided, and I took the north, the KRG regions and others, supporting PRT issues.

Re-Organization

41:20. Right before my R & R, beginning in mid-December, we started concept development for the organizational change, which became effective on 23 January 2008. We were still SE, but added EDAT. Rather than having a regional focus, we would now have a functional focus, more job development. Different teams not regional anymore but functional. We engaged anything having to do with the ministry of agriculture such

~~CONFIDENTIAL/FOUO~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL/FOUO~~

as water and resources, planning and development, finance, treasury, etc. Our main focus is to engage with and support the Minister of Agriculture, Dr. Ali. We engage other ministries to support that ministry. He has a degree in horticulture from UCAL Davis, and he was a professor in Baghdad.

What about the southern marshes?

I haven't been involved with that, but hear its going well.

45:30. On 26 Jul 2007, the PM launched a 49-point initiative on water, agriculture, and live stock. We learned yesterday that the 2008 budget, which passed yesterday, set aside \$500 million for agriculture, and those long-promised programs finally had money. Dr. Ali speaks English. He is a capable and efficient guy. His deputy, (b)(6) is one of the better ones, and the ministry is better than most. They do have technocrats, but the budget is weak. The residue from what the Sadrist did to them still affects them, in terms of security. The reason is that the Facility Protection Services, they don't have good control over the individuals there, so the FPS is vulnerable to infiltration and dangerous to the ministry. Dr. Ali is from the UIA, and took the position in November 2007, after the position was vacant for a long time. (b)(6), the Minister of ____, was acting Minister of Agriculture for awhile.

And now you are stepping into date palm spraying?

49:40. [Small laugh] Yeah, that's an issue. We are doing a weekly update for Date Palm Spraying. We are meeting with the Iraqis on that. Yes, it is important for the Ministry of Agriculture, and we are de-conflicting flight paths and efforts. In 2003, they did not do a spraying at all, so it was not an issue. They sprayed in 2006, so they're getting it going again. Why is it important? Because the CG thinks it's important. Last year, they harvested six times more than what they needed. I'll give you an example. In Basra, using CERP funds, they spent \$12 million to plant 141,000 date palms. And they don't have any idea what they will do with them.

Because they lost the export market?

51:15. They lost the export market. They haven't had a export market since the 1970s, when they were the number one export. Now they have very small exports. Now, because I understand they are producing six times more that what the Iraqis can consume, they are letting it rot. It is one of those things were you face a situation . . . I'll give an example. We are supposedly recycling water bottles, so people put empty bottles into the recycling bin, except the bottles put in the recycling bins wind up being thrown away in the trash because there is no recycling system. That's what I kind of see sometimes, with CERP funds keeping guys occupied, or spending because we have too much money not to spend, so the projects make people feel better, but don't accomplish much, and I see that a lot.

If you had a chance to discuss the date palms and other issues with GEN Petraeus, what would you say?

~~CONFIDENTIAL/FOUO~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL/FOUO~~

53:40. The biggest issue is this. No matter how much we say things are going well, we and the Department of State have different missions. Maybe MNFI has overstepped its bounds. We need to let the State guys do what they do. For example, with the morning BUA, if you get rid of what the State guys are responsible for, and get rid of what the Corps is responsible for, what are you really left with? Nothing. That is why I'm a proponent of putting MNFI and MNCI together under one commander.

54:50. I think General Petraeus knows a lot of these issues really belong to State. I think he is just not happy with how or what they produce. I think he needs to tell Ambassador Crocker, things aren't moving; the embassy needs to do more. But he can't do that, so he gives the work to STRATEFF. So we are basically telling those guys how to do their job, but they have a different mission, to build capacity. By trying to help, I think we might actually be causing more issues.

55:45. Like drought relief, there is a difference between a solution and a big idea. The Iraqis have a long-term perspective, and we're trying to jam through short-term answers, and maybe not helping. People are too focused on the Sadrists. Agricultural development takes a very long time. The reality is . . . the embassy is not on the same timeline as we are. These issues are a CG-Ambassador level discussion. But, why is that happening?

TF BSO, as an example. The Mi-2s need engine parts in order to do the date palm spraying. So TF BSO may step in to buy the parts, get them here, and get them installed so the Mi-2s can do the mission. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Agriculture is not spending its budget. We wonder why, but why should they do their job, when somebody [us] keeps doing their job for them. They could get the Mi-2 parts. Why don't they? Why should they when Americans are willing to step forward, spend the money, make the arrangements, and make it happen, allowing the Iraqis to go home early from the office and let the Americans worry about all the bureaucracy? Then, our year-round turnover undermines all our efforts. We need to let Embassy Econ do their job. We are not the experts, and we're not designed for this. We're doing things we're not trained to do. We will never know how much our efforts just screwed up the situation worse than it was. That is the irony. It is a long-term solution. Year around people change, and we don't have the background to know the answer, and building relationships [to know or find the answer] takes time. Let the Embassy Econ work these issues, let them do what they need to do. We are not the experts. We do not have the right background for the mission. Why can't we get the right people for the mission, because they would be more effective here. We don't look at it holistically. Everything is short term.

1:04:15. The fact that we had a JCP, a Joint Campaign Plan, in June, and another one right after the September report tells us that we don't know, and we can't anticipate fast enough. Sometimes, the standard thing is, if you can't hold a job, because things keep changing, then maybe you don't belong there at all.

I think most people understand that. Sometimes, I like to say that the king is naked, and nobody at the MNFI level is willing to discuss it at that level. The fact that the CG

~~CONFIDENTIAL/FOUO~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL/FOUO~~

surrounds himself with all the Army guys, and that all the Army guys surround themselves with Army guys, why is that? My impression is it's because the Army guys will say "Hooah" and press on [without asking why]. There is no discussion, it is just moving out. I am a big proponent of telling the truth. Nobody wants to hear it.
[1:06:23]

After the interview, I had lunch with (b)(3), (b)(6) and he reinforced the sense that Army personnel act like robots, doing the bidding of the higher ups without ascertaining the purpose. In the USAR, according to (b)(3), (b)(6) the ATO keeps everyone coordinated and purposeful. That is what is missing in this situation, he believes.

Approved for Release

~~CONFIDENTIAL/FOUO~~