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Commander's Notes

Commander's Staff Meeting, 2 April at 0830, Tampa MCR

This is a rough transcript of the summary of meetings in Washington and guidance provided to the staff by GEN Abizaid on 2 April 2004.

Issues pertaining to relations between CENTCOM and the national leadership

- Serving as the connection between the national leadership and the fielded forces in the CENTCOM AOR.
 - It's the most important thing we do and it's also one of the most difficult.
 - All of the staff sections are doing a good job putting things together to support my efforts here—J2, for example, did a good laydown on Fallujah yesterday.
- We will be the focal point for bad news in Iraq between now and November.
 - We cannot avoid it and our job is apolitical—we are not here to get the President re-elected or Senator Kerry elected.
 - We must be careful that we don't inadvertently create a political dynamic.

The current situation in Fallujah

- The most important thing to consider here are the optics of the situation.
 - We are involved in three battles—we must win the perception battle, the intelligence battle, and the kinetic battle.
 - The kinetic battle is probably the least important of the three.
 - In our look at the perception battle, there are four target audiences.
 - The U.S. audience—they are going to be looking for revenge/retribution for the deaths in Fallujah.
 - The Arab (non-Iraqi) audience—they are looking for us to be like Israel and validate their opinions of us as occupiers and bad guys.
 - The Iraqi audience—they are looking for a measured approach. We will provide security while creating opportunities for those not involved in violence.
 - The international audience—the non-Arab world media outlets who will also be watching.
 - With no disrespect intended, the reality on Fallujah is that the incident is militarily insignificant. However, repeated play on the media has made the insurgents appear strong and the U.S. weak.
- We must show strength in addressing this, but we must also take a nuanced approach.
 - This operation, and operations in Fallujah in general, are all designed to allow the people in Fallujah to escape the Mafia-like intimidation network.
 - We must have the Iraqis with us—the ICDC and other Iraqi security forces should participate. This would be a good opportunity for the new Iraqi anti-terrorism forces.
 - Wanted to do this earlier, but got a lot of pushback because it was hard—now we must do the hard things.
- “This ain't Mogadishu. We're not walking away.”
- The President and the Secretary of Defense are calm. There is no sense of panic.

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CENTCOM, the CFH, and the immediate future

- Flying back to Qatar on Tuesday.
 - Going where I need to be—must be in the same time zone with the subordinate commanders.
 - All of the staff leads and personnel need to go to where they are NEEDED—there will be times where it is necessary for the mission to be in Washington as opposed to As Saliyah.
- We are headed for a rocky time over the next few months. There is going to have to be economic and political action to bring the Sunnis into the new Iraq—and it hasn't happened yet.
- We will be forward at the CFH for the foreseeable future.
 - We will continue to man the CFH until I am convinced that MNF-I is stood up and operating.
 - We're going to keep up this pace through at least September.
 - The people who are forward right now NEED to be RESTED.
 - If you don't have a rotation plan—you need to get one before I make one for you.
 - We have people all over the AOR, and we need to have a family support plan. Not like a battalion/squadron/ship, but so that families know where there people are and how they are.
- We will re-evaluate where we are in September.

General Enemy Situation—Overall War on Terror

- The enemy is pulling off a lot of operations right now, where they can conduct them, because they are under a lot of pressure.
 - Current terrorist attacks in Uzbekistan will probably not be decisive except in limiting their ability to operate in Uzbekistan.
 - Similar to the effect attacks in Saudi Arabia—a negative impact on their cause.
- They must maintain their image in the media—the perception that they are winning depends on press coverage as opposed to actual events.
 - I believe that they believe they forced the change in the Spanish government—but I do not believe that to be the case personally.
 - However, as they believe that, they will continue to attack Western interests and will probably target the United States in advance of our elections.
- Our enemy is evil, but not smart. They understand us even less than we understand them.

Iraq, the Transition, and the MNF-I Stand-Up

- “Iraq is the top priority through the transition period.” We must focus on Iraq as a top priority without ignoring the rest of the theater.
- Filling MNF-I is a top priority. Subordinate commanders must support this effort.
- We are entering both the most difficult and decisive phase in Iraq, and we cannot take the strength of an MNF-I led by LTG Sanchez and weaken it by under-resourcing it.

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- There is too much bureaucratic infighting regarding Iraq right now—we need to establish the Barno-Khalilzad model there, but instead we have arguments about what the right structures are.
- The current organization chart for MNF-I is a personal redline, as well as one for the Secretary of Defense. He will carry our fight to the interagency.
- I am getting desperate about getting weapons and vehicles to the Iraqi security forces—we have two months to figure this out, and it should have been done nine months ago.
 - I am not willing to wait much longer or put up with more bureaucratic stupidity on this issue.
 - The key to this fight is getting a robust Iraqi security infrastructure into the field. We are running out of time on the acceptance of our forces by the Iraqis, and we must have an effective security force in place.
- It would be nice to capture or kill Zarqawi.
- We MUST develop a Sunni strategy.
 - We have to walk away from de-Ba'athification.
 - We are going to need to simply identify those 1,000 that are criminally culpable and cannot be part of the future Iraq, as opposed to punishing 40,000.
 - How can we be so stupid as to put de-Ba'athification in the hands of someone like Ahmed Chalabi, who is probably the least trusted person in Iraq?
 - We have to get the Sunni economic programs going—the Corps of Engineers says they are coming, but this should have been done months ago.
- The enemy picture is good. Don't be worried about unanimity in the intelligence community—we all have the same general picture and a little disagreement isn't bad.
- The operation against Sadr's lieutenant (b)(6) will go forward simultaneously with operations in Fallujah.
 - It will put pressure on Sadr and his organization.
 - The simultaneity is good—it illustrates that we won't take any garbage from Shi'a troublemakers either.
- Information operations/strategic communications/public affairs/psyops are going to be critical over the next week.
 - We need to use the themes that LTG Sanchez and CJTF-7 are laying down—they are very powerful.
 - We need to use this to empower forward-looking Sunnis and encourage them to support us in getting rid of the Mafia-like intimidation network.
- J3 needs to move ahead at flank speed on the PSDs in Iraq. Just submit an RFF for what Ambassador Bremer and LTG Sanchez think they need.
- There will be an O-6 commandant in the Green Zone. Convinced the national leadership that a Colonel/Captain was more than adequate for those duties.
- The SECDEF mentioned the possibility of entirely handing one province over in Iraq to Iraqi control and departing.
 - There are advantages—it is one way to establish localized control and encourage governance with less control from Baghdad.
 - J3 and J5 need to be looking at a thinkpiece on the topic, with other players as determined by the Chief of Staff.

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Comments on the AOR

- We have got to continue working the political-military issues regarding Pakistan.
- We must also support Uzbekistan at present.
- There is a lot of concern in Washington about the Qatari government and Al Jazeera.
 - My personal feelings on Al Jazeera are well known, but I don't have any problems with the Qatari government and like our hosts.
 - The national leadership, however, feels that the Qatari government could be doing more to bring Al Jazeera under control and could threaten a pull-out of U.S. forces.
 - This is going to come to a head—we need to be looking for a substitute location for Qatar and the forward headquarters if necessary. There are a lot of options.

General Comments

- Our forces need to be calm, steadfast, and professional. When confronted by the enemy, they need to be fierce, precise, and devastating.
- Everyone needs to understand what's going on—communication within the staff is important.
- This is a great staff that does great work.
- “You're doing the most important staffwork of your life.”
- “You show weakness in the Middle East at your own peril.”

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