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Historical Notes and Observations

USCENTCOM FWD, Camp As Saliyah, Qatar, 12 Dec 2003

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

Subject: Joint Planning Group Meeting

Primary Attendee: GEN Abizaid

Conducted by: (b)(3), (b)(6)

12 Dec 2003 (S/Rel-MCFI) (b)(3), (b)(6) CCJ3-P, conducted a Joint Planning Group session attended by GEN Abizaid. (b)(3), (b)(6) explained that planning efforts were moving towards providing more of a direct nature of guidance than the previous model. GEN Abizaid interjected during the meeting and redirected, refocused, and reenergized the planning staff. He specifically tasked the staff to identify the critical path to success and specifically, to identify the key issues that were required to get there. GEN Abizaid characterized the six-month period between now and June as the most decisive period in the history of the Command. He added that failure in Iraq would be a huge loss for the region, a huge loss for the Coalition, a huge loss for our own country, and an incredibly huge loss for Iraqis.

The following is a transcription of GEN Abizaid's closing comments:

Let's do some philosophical discussion here. First of all, everyone will come out of here saying and feeling like I just ripped everyone a new one. Look guys, the question we have to ask ourselves every time we meet together as a staff, is what are we doing to help accomplish the mission the nation has given us.

We have three problems. Problem number one is GWOT in its broadest texture and it exists every where. If I were to tell you what I think about the global war on terrorism's intellectual framework that's been provided the United States of America or the international community or anybody else, I would say that it does not exist. We actually do have a good framework within our headquarters. If you guys would care to dust it off and take a look at it. The CPG did a pretty good intellectual framework. That needs to be better exploited, but where are decisive points in our theater in the GWOT.

On the one hand, I would look at the at the big map and I would say that we must succeed in the short term in Iraq and Afghanistan. But in the long term, we really must succeed in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan; and maybe some where else. We really have not looked at our theater in the way that we need too to be able to articulate in a coherent fashion what we need to do and what help we need from the rest of the U.S. government.

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After six months in command, I have come to the conclusion that the rest of the governments only going to be synchronized by USCENTCOM and its not that we are smarter than them or that they are not paying attention. Its just that we are really one of the few organizations in the government of the United States of America that can actually help focus it; because we are at the heart of the problem and because we have a regional perspective that is not clouded by bureaucratic and national boundaries. The State Department is clouded by national boundaries as is the (1.4c) to a certain extent. It only comes together here in a truly regional way. We can help the rest of the Government move in a direction that will allow them to give us better guidance. We are operating with very little guidance, which is typical at this level. GWOT is problem number one, but priority number three. Iraq is priority number one for the short term and Afghanistan is priority number two. And we have done some work, but we have never really properly gotten our hands around it. The GWOT is problem number one and it requires some form of intellectual framework that allows us to better look at the theater wide implications of what is going on.

The immediate problem that we can not allow to go down the tubes is Iraq. We really are at a decisive point and that is why I am having this conversation with you today. Being at a decisive point requires some decisive action and I am not so sure I know what it is. It is not everything we put in our guidance. Your task is to figure out what the decisive points are that will allow us to turn over authority in June to a bunch of people that can take it through the next couple of years. We really need some good hard staff work to look at this thing. It is not unlike the staff work that got us into Iraq militarily. Let's get the JPG together, get the right guys in there, lean on whatever support you need from the CPG, and lean on the smart people.

We have too many critics in USCENTCOM and I am one of them. I am tired of having the latest "what's wrong" brought to me. I understand what's wrong I actually do. There are probably a million things that are wrong. But if we can fix five or six of them, we can get through this. I need to know what those five or six are that we better fix. What I am not satisfied with is that we are not getting at this thing with the precision and logic that can come from a military staff really looking at the big problem.

Why is that? One reason is that I have become the deputy commander of CJTF4. I spend an awful amount of time trying to figure out the environment and I get drawn down into the operational and tactical levels and you guys go down that road with me. We are not looking at Iraq strategically and neither is CJTF4 or the CPA. We are putting band-aids on things and reacting tactically and operationally in ways that may or may not move us down the road in the right direction.

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The strategic logic that is behind the CPA's plan is not bad. It talks about economics, it talks about security, it talks about governance. How is that integrated into what we are trying to do and how can we be of benefit in making sure we get the right resources and the right action at the right place to achieve success. I don't think any of us have taken a real stab at understanding what that success may be. You guys are going to have to tighten up your parachute harnesses and say, ok, let's put something together that's a think piece for the boss and go through an iterative process which will be extraordinarily painful to all of us, but necessary. One that will identify the important things which are so important that we get our hands around quickly.

We have put band-aids on things and fixed things and developed things in an actually fairly reasonable way. You guys out to be proud of yourself. There is no other organization in the government that is doing what we do. The fact that we are even moving towards a June deadline is because of us, by the way in case you didn't know it. I don't say me, I say us. Because of what we did, because of our willingness to bring it forward to partner with the [1.4c] giving the message that showed we were starting to get in trouble. We were good enough to say we are getting in trouble and we need to fix this big thing, yet when I ask what are we doing to fix the big thing, nobody knows. Which was a subject of a conversation I had with LTG Sanchez.

Some of the big things we are actually fixing pretty well. Like intelligence. But it was four months ago when I sent my first P4 out that said that we need to move intelligence capacity away from the hunt for [1.4a] towards counterterrorism. And we still haven't fixed it. If that's the speed at which we are going to move between now and June, we are not going to make it. That is why I am seized with a need for action. Seized for a need for my staff to come out of the weeds and get up into the stratosphere and figure out what must we do to be successful between now and June. Also, what are the things that we really don't need to be worrying about.

Iraq is our number one challenge because if we fail in Iraq it is a huge loss for the region, it's a huge loss for the Coalition, it's a huge loss for our own country, and it's an incredibly huge loss for Iraqis. Why should it be a near run thing? I would say that I am kind of a 60/40 guy. I believe we can probably muddle through but there is a forty percent chance at failure. Why should that be? With all of our resources, with all of our ability, and etc., why can't we get our hands around this thing better? Iraq has got to be our most immediate problem that we must work on right now with some real hard staff work; to include the effort of the directors.

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We have to have meetings where people quit being so worried about whether they are right or wrong or whether or not I am going to like the information or not. It has nothing to do with me personally or you personally. I am so tired of this risk adverse activity in this headquarters. It exists and you need to put it behind you. I don't like it. It's not like I am going to look at something and give you an A-plus grade. It's going to be iterative as we move towards some sort of a solution. Quit trying to give me the 99.9% product. Give us something useful that will move us in down the path to benefit our country.

Back to Iraq, we have looked at Iraq the last few months and there are some big things that jump out at you. Number one: the CPA is under resourced. And I'm not giving you priorities; I'm sharing my thoughts to help you form yours. I am not saying that I am right or wrong. I'm just giving you some Commander's guidance and to throw it into the mix. If you come up with something totally different, I will watch it and look at it. The good thing about being trapped here 24 hours a day is that we actually have the opportunity to get this thing right fairly quickly; which is why you are all here. And if we need to bring more geniuses out here, let's do it.

The CPA is under resourced. Iraq security institutions are moving forward at a rapid speed. But we have only really defined what we are trying to achieve in terms of numbers; which is not the recipe for success. We have to say, what is it that we want out of this, what is our rationalization for the security forces. There is going to be an Iraqi Army of this size that does what? We have to understand what we are trying to do as opposed to playing a number game; because this number game is killing us. We have a whole team who want to come out from Washington to convince everyone why we need more ICDC. I think it is more important to get ICDC right. Let's get these 36 battalions organized, trained, and equipped and then put into an operating standard that we can all agree upon. Then understand the transfer. Iraqi security institution rationalization is point number two.

Headquarters rationalization is point number three. Clearly, we are spending way too much of our time working at way too low of a level within both Iraq and Afghanistan. The good news is that we recognize the problem and we will move towards a more robust headquarters for both of those places and I think we are actually on track to make that happen. I actually believe we are conducting a guerilla campaign to make it happen but I don't want it to be a guerilla campaign any more, I want it to be something that people must decide upon. We know that we have to get ourselves out of the tactical weeds and back into the strategic mode, but we don't have to do it immediately. So headquarters rationalization for the theater is important and by June, I would like to have our

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headquarters position so that we are taking a strategic look because there is a headquarters in robust enough in Iraq that can do the operational and tactical work necessary. And we can then provide the strategic guidance to it as opposed to what we are doing, which is tactical and operational. Let's face it. We built a stability headquarters for an organization that is fighting the counterinsurgency and that was not the right thing to do. Let's make sure that as we rationalize the headquarters for Iraq that we give it the things it needs to get the job done.

Security institutions, CPA under staffing, headquarters rationalization, intelligence structure reform has to happen. And of course all these things are linked. Infrastructure; what am I going to say next? Information. The "five I's" which were good five months ago are still good ways to think about the problems. Look at it and assess how we are doing. With Iraqization, we are doing well in terms of numbers but not doing well in terms of rationalization. Information we still are not doing well at. What are we going to do about it? Intelligence; we are much better at - but still not good enough, and probably never will be. Infrastructure; I probably would have said we were doing pretty well; but no we are not. And the fifth "I," Internationalization, where are we on that? Nowhere - nowhere past where we ever were. Is Internationalization on the path to success? If it is, then maybe we better rejuvenate it.

Despite all of our leaders saying that they will give us whatever we want, they do not have anything to give us in terms of troops; as we have learned with our force rotations; which get us to another key thing. Rotation of forces is on the critical path to success. I actually believe we have done a good job at articulating how the force rotation will work.

I've given you about five things that I think are on the critical path to success. What are the ten things - the fifteen? I want you guys to tell me. Internationalization is not just providing troops for the Coalition. It also has to do with neighboring countries commitment to guarding their borders. What is the diplomatic activity that we are undertaking in a coherent manner that says we are engaging with those countries on the border to help us? We talk about it, but it only happens sporadically, country by country. It is not happening in a way that it could happen, and it's not happening in a way that could be farmed out to another agency of the U.S. government.

Where do we need help when it comes to insurgency? Insurgency is probably the sixth "I." We know what has to be done in an insurgency. The work that CJTF-44 has done and what you guys know needs to be done, needs to be talked about in a coherent fashion. You have to isolate the insurgents from all sorts of different things. How are we doing in that regard? Is it a critical path to isolate the insurgents from their money?

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Yes it is. Are we doing it? In a way we are because we guard banks and we prevent robbers from stealing money. In a way we are doing it through currency reform. But I don't know if we have brought the resources of the United States Treasury to bear on where the borders of money are out there that belongs to the old regime? Does any one know? I actually think that someone in our government is working it; but I don't know who.

Isolation of the enemy from their ammunition; how are we doing. I don't know. Maybe we are having good effect, maybe not. What are the ways we can help isolate? Do we have a rational way to do it? Some one says there are 10,000 SA-7s out there. Do we need a more robust rewards program? Do we need to up the ante?

Isolate people from their source of support. Here is where this comes into the big Sunni problem. The Sunnis are still on the fence. They are either extremists on the religious side or extremists on the Baath party side. Who are the ten people who we should say, "Come to Qatar, or come to Bahrain, and tell us what your problems are. What is it that you want to join our team?"

You start thinking about all of the things that we know we need to fix. And you look at our track record for how quickly we have fixed things between May and now and it doesn't give you a lot of confidence. So what I want to know is what we need to fix and what do we need to do to be successful by June. You are going to have to go back to your fairly well defined ideas about end state and determine what has to come together between now and June. We have to do some emergency fixes now. We have to figure out what Sunni reconciliation means. Does it mean repeal some of the de-Baathification and hire more guys? It means a lot of those things but how are we going to do it? What's the focus? Who is in charge of doing it? Who is doing it? Passing memos around is really pretty good, but it doesn't make anything happen.

What we bring to bear that CPA can't, because they are not resourced for it, is that we can actually make things happen. What we need to get is the resources, the buy-in, and et cetera. All of this is do-able if we just shake our heads a few times and figure out what we need to get accomplished during this decisive period. And it is a decisive period. And I am pretty optimistic about it. I believe there are Sunnis looking at us now that are wondering what we are going to do to get them on our team.

I could go on and on about this, but I need you to go on and on about it. I need you to define it, sharpen it and put it in some sort of logic that will have attention getting possibilities for the President of the United States and the Secretary of Defense. But I am really starting to lose my temper

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about complaints. There are lots of critics out there in the motion picture world. But there are very few directors and producers. We have producers and directors. I'm not so sure that we are not the director to a certain extent. AMB Bremer is the producer because he has the funds. We are the director because we have the capacity. We ought to ask our self the question about integrating the chain of command in Baghdad. If this isn't working then what had we ought to do? Should we say that LTG Sanchez is subordinate to AMB Bremer and takes orders from him or should we say we better have someone else in charge out there or a different type of organization or what? Certainly, the State Department is going to be in charge of the Embassy in June and reconstruction and every thing else in June. Who is it?

I think it is time for action. Clear the decks for action - battle stations. I am of the opinion that we must really put our heads together and quit being unorganized and each coming up with non-coordinated, non-synchronized thinking in our own staff. Let's put our heads together and synchronize our thinking and get it to me. This is the most important thing you guys have to do for me. Feel no pressure [b 3, b 6] but if you don't do this you will be shot. I want you to be the guy that figures out how to get it organized. Get it organized, get it teed up. Whatever schedule changes I need to make to be available for you, I am happy to do it. During the war when I was deputy commander, I used to spend a lot of time over there in your little tent where all these great thoughts go on and talk. I can still do that, but we can not waste any time.

Let me just absolve anybody of responsibility before we walk out of here and someone says "Oh my God." There is no "Oh my God." It is just a change of direction. If you are not smart enough to figure out when you better doing something about a problem looming on the horizon, then you are never going to achieve success. I have probably been too late to come to this conclusion, but we are just not getting at it in a way that is being helpful enough to be successful right now and I want you guys to change that.

In Afghanistan we have been successful, but even there we are out there flapping on a few things. I want an immediate emergency thinking and presentation on Iraq within three days. I want the same thing on Afghanistan by the end of December, and on GWOT by the end of January. What we will be doing is getting our selves set for where we want to be in May and June; which is back to being a strategic level headquarters. Then we can audible off of that framework. Thanks for your presentation and your work.

We know how to do this but I think if we don't spur ourselves on we are not going to cross the finish line. We shouldn't just muddle through. We

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tried to muddle through in Vietnam and we weren't successful. We better not muddle through here. We better come up with some hard and fast way ahead.

I appreciate what you are going to do. Which staff section will be in charge of this effort? It's a joint combination effort with J3 and J5, with J3 in the lead. Let's work our way through this and understand the decisive points. Let's work to solve the decisive points. If there are decisive points that we can not fix at USCENTCOM, I want to understand what they are anywhere so I can tell my leaders.

There is nothing like it and that's why we are all here. I sure appreciate everybody's hard work and everybody's good intellectual effort on this. That is what we do at this headquarters; we've got to provide an intellectual framework for success. I think it has slipped a little and it is not your fault, its mine. Now that I have decided to focus on this I will torture you for awhile; but it will be for the good of the order. Thanks.

MajGen Sattler (J3) held the staff back after General Abizaid's departure and added: "That was what we wanted: clear guidance, intent, and timeline. This is the point of our main effort."

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