

David Petraeus on Strategic Command

CLIP 1 - PREFACE

Q: Can you describe the moment you were asked to take command in Iraq?

We were on a freeway. We'd just landed at the Los Angeles International Airport, we were going to see my dad, who was elderly and in an assisted living home out in Santa Clarita. And we were driving on an LA freeway from the airport to a valley or two out and all of a sudden every phone in the car went off—my wife's, and our son's, and mine—the e-mails started lighting up in my box and it was a call from Secretary Gates. So here we are on the freeway and I'm taking this extraordinarily important call. The coverage was a little bit spotty. We turned into a strip mall parking lot and I sat there and tried to have a conversation with him and to have some discussion about, you know, how I saw the role of a strategic leader, what the nature of the advice I would give over time would be, and so forth. The truth was he just wanted to get to yes, which I'd said right away, and he was ready in fact to move on at that moment. So we had a brief conversation. I said it would be an extraordinary honor to indeed be nominated to be the commander of the Multi-National Force in Iraq and to lead what was becoming known as the surge, and that was about it in the end, although I'd sought to have a little bit more in-depth conversation, but that was something that we had to save for later.

Q: What was the moment you were asked to take command in Afghanistan like?

Well, that was a tough day, frankly. I went to the White House for a meeting. It was the monthly meeting on Afghanistan and Pakistan which I attended as the commander of US Central Command, and this was one I was in Washington to attend. And I went to the White House for a meeting, I was waiting around, I wasn't clear at that time that General McChrystal had submitted his resignation and that the president had accepted it, but someone stuck his head in the door of the room where I was sitting and waiting to go into the situation room for the meeting and said "anybody seen Petraeus?" And I said "yeah, right here," and he said "well they want you up in the Oval." And so I went up, I was entering the Oval Office as the whole national security team was coming out, a lot of them averting their glances from me, frankly, and I went in and sat down alone with the president—a photograph was taken and he left—and the president started out by saying, with no small talk, "I am asking you, as your president and commander-in-chief, to take the position in Afghanistan and to become the commander of the International Security Assistance Force." And my response, again, was of course the only answer to a question like that has to be yes. I did, again, seek to discuss, to make sure he knew what he was getting, how I saw the responsibilities of a commander of a combat theater like that, Iraq or Afghanistan, and the basis for advice and recommendations that I would provide. Again, in truth, the instinct—and I think understandably—what someone who's asked that question wants is yes and then let's get on with it, and I could see his mind was probably already on the Rose Garden speech or whatever else it was he had to attend to. And so, having said yes, I went back down to the Situation Room and the rest of the national security team was waiting there. I said that, you know, I'd accepted the nomination to be the COMISAF [Commander of the International Security Assistance Force] and then we started talking practical details, frankly.

As you may recall, the confirmation process for that was remarkable swift, I think the fastest in history. I believe that was a Thursday, late Thursday morning. The announcement was made early Thursday afternoon in the Rose Garden. We started a flurry of activity in Washington. I flew on Friday up to my hometown. There were a couple of commitments I had made that I felt I really should carry through with and do. One was to the Purple Heart organization that is located right near my hometown. The other was to make the speech at the graduation ceremony at my high school, forty years after I'd graduated. I did that, and we cancelled everything else after that, got on the plane, flew back to Tampa, got in early Saturday morning, and I was back in Washington on Monday meeting senators in preparation for the Senate Armed Services Committee hearing associated with any confirmation--- nomination--by the president. And that carried through—I think the hearing was on Wednesday. When we were done with that I flew back to Tampa on Wednesday and I think I was confirmed on Thursday and headed to Afghanistan on Thursday evening.

CLIP 2 – THE FOUR TASKS OF THE STRATEGIC LEADER

Q: Can you give us an overview of your four key tasks of strategic leadership?

First of all, strategic leadership is that which is exercised at a level of an organization where the individual is truly determining the azimuth for the organization, is actually charting the path. And you have one person like that, certainly in a military organization, and typically it's the commander. And when you look at a combat theater, the overall commander of that combat theater—Multi-National Force-Iraq, International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan—is the strategic leader who, within the confines of the policy that is approved by the President of the United States and/or the NATO authorities, he's the one, again, that is developing the direction that the organization is going to go. And again, in essence there are four tasks. The first is to get the big ideas right. The second is to communicate them effectively throughout the breadth and depth of the organization. The third is to oversee the implementation of the big ideas. And the fourth is to determine how the big ideas need to be refined, changed, augmented, and then repeating the process over again and again and again.

Now, in my experience, getting the big ideas right isn't something that happens when you sit under the right tree and get hit on the head by Newton's apple—a big idea fully formed or big ideas fully flushed out. My experience is that big ideas result from collaboration, from study, research, analysis, having a large tent in which lots of people are engaged—no one of us is smarter than all of us together. Certainly the leader at the end of the day does have to make decisions, does have to identify, again, refine, settle on the big ideas, but again it's a very iterative process, or at least it has been for me over the years. And that's the way it needs to be approached.

Communicating the big ideas is an effort, a process, that takes place using every possible medium and opportunity. It starts with the very first day speech, if you will, the change of command remarks after having taken command of the unit. In the case of Iraq, it continued with the issuance of a letter that I'd written already to all of our soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines, and civilians indeed, of the Multi-National Force in Iraq. It then went on with a meeting—through a meeting—with the commanders of

the Multi-National Force who were all there for the change of command. In subsequent days I changed the mission statement, then over time we changed the entire campaign plan.

And indeed, you continue to communicate on a daily basis, through everything that you do, including how you even spend your time, which gets now into the overseeing the implementation of the big ideas task, which is one that involves a battle rhythm, if you will, of how is it that you're going to spend your time. How are you going to—each day, what will you do? The battlefield update and analysis, or BUA, that we went through, which is another opportunity to communicate throughout the organization, because there are a lot of people that are video teleconferencing into this particular event, it's a full hour, my comments were all transcribed and sent out via the military internet all the way down to brigade commander level. Beyond that, again, what are the metrics that you use, and we spent a great deal of time trying to develop those, refine them, and make sure that they were absolutely rigorous in application. How many days a week do you fence to go out and see for yourself, to go on a patrol, to meet with Iraqi leaders in their areas, to meet with our leaders all the way down to the company and platoon level, to get a sense of what they're experiencing, what their concerns are, whether they have been able to understand your big ideas, your intent, and then how they're operationalizing it at their level.

And then finally, of course, the process of identifying changes that are needed to the big ideas, some perhaps literally as we say shooting and leaving by the side of the road, others that we refine, and then perhaps adoption of some additional new big ideas as well. So it's a continuous cycle that is always ongoing. There are actions in each of those four areas and each of the four tasks, but one has to be very conscious of them. This is something that does have to be done systematically. It is something that has to have a rhythm to it. You need to return to examine the big ideas formally from time to time. You need to determine your communications process, and again it's not just down, it's also out and up. You have to communicate it to those above you, you have to communicate it to your coalition partners, to your host nation partners, Iraqi or Afghan, so it's a 360 degree effort in that regard. And then, of course, you, in the oversight of these, again, something you're constantly assessing, how is it going? Where do we need to make the changes, that fourth task. But that fourth task has, again, systems, processes, procedures, there was a Center for Army Lessons Learned team, a United States Marine Corps lessons learned team, a joint lessons learned team, the Asymmetric Warfare Group, the counterinsurgency center, on and on and on, and all of that formally had to be brought together, presented to me, and then recommendations made for how we actually operationalize, because a lesson is not learned until it has actually resulted in a change back in the big idea phase, again which can include very centrally the overall campaign plan for an operation.

Q: How did your experiences throughout your career inform your approach to strategic leadership?

Well I was very fortunate as a young officer, then a field grade, and then even in the early general officer assignments, to have some wonderful vantage points and some wonderful experiences. I had all the usual kinds of command and staff opportunities as a platoon leader, company commander, battalion commander, and so forth, and repetitive assignments as an operations officer, at battalion level, two different tours, brigade level, division level, UN force, NATO element in Bosnia, and so on. But I was also

very, very fortunate to be aide to the Chief of Staff of the Army, in fact during the operation in Panama and then Desert Shield and Desert Storm, executive assistant or chef de cabinet, if you will, of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff for two years during which we went after Saddam Hussein in terms of bombing Iraq at that point in time, did strikes against Osama Bin Laden, initiated the Kosovo operation with the air campaign, and continued the operation in Bosnia as well. These were fantastic experiences, frankly. These were extraordinary learning opportunities to be at the right hand of individuals who were in the Joint Chiefs of Staff, when I worked for the Chairman, in the situation room.

And then in an international sense, I was privileged to be the military assistant to the Supreme Allied Commander Europe, General Jack Galvin, someone I'd served for twice previously, including as his aide as a—when he was a division commander, and to see it in an international context during a very significant period that included the intermediate nuclear force agreement at that time between the U.S., NATO countries, and Soviet and Warsaw Pact. So these were, again, very, very keenly interesting to see the tasks that I've described perhaps not quite as explicitly identified, but nonetheless to see them carried out, to see very senior leaders grappling their way toward the big ideas that would inform a particular campaign or a particular operation, and to see the process that resulted in these big ideas. To see very senior leaders, all at the four star level, communicating their big ideas.

I remember the Chief of Staff of the Army, General Carl Vuono, tremendous, two years as his aide, the final two years he had in uniform, during some very key operations, who developed what he called the six imperatives for our trained and ready Army, and I can still recite those six imperatives, in my sleep in fact, because they were in every single speech he ever made. It didn't matter what the occasion was, he would weave the six imperatives into that speech because he was completely committed to them and felt that every time he literally opened his mouth, those who were listening should hear these played back to them. And he'd obviously adapt them for the audience, but that's how he communicated them, relentlessly. And something that I took a great deal from, in fact, when we developed the big ideas, say, in the U.S. Army when I was at the Combined Arms Center or indeed in command in Iraq or in Afghanistan.

I saw also how they developed their personal battle rhythm, how they kept tabs on operations, what metrics they focused on, what processes they installed, created, and then implemented. How they got out to see the troops on the ground, if you will. How they walked patrols or the equivalent of that for their respective positions. All of this, very, very instructive. And then I watched as they went through the various processes, the most deliberate being that carried out, again, by General Vuono, who had served also as the Combined Arms Center commander at Fort Leavenworth and had his hands on what we call the engine of change for our Army and knew the processes very well that went with the identification of lessons, again, on an operation, say, Panama or Desert Shield/Desert Storm, brought those lessons back and then determined how to actually quote learn them, so they became lessons learned not just lessons identified, and looked at the doctrinal aspects, the organizational aspects, the training piece of that, leader development, materiel, personnel policies, facilities, and so forth. It was a very, very formal process and he had enormous rigor in how he went about this and that was something I took and tried to employ myself when I was in a position of responsibility later on.

Q: How are the big ideas different from command philosophy?

Well, the command philosophy that's employed at least in the U.S. Army is a one or at most two page memo from a commander, an incoming commander typically, to the members of his or her unit—battalion, brigade, division. And candidly they all tend to be somewhat similar. They typically are “mission first, troops always” types of memos. Some are more articulate, more inspirational than others but, frankly again, they're all basically the same. Even more frankly, they're generally somewhat meaningless. The troops have seen these. There's one, a new one about every two years, the command tour length, if you will. Again, if you've seen one you've generally seen them all. And so one of the times I actually didn't issue one, and nobody even asked for it. It was just a test to see if this is really so important that folks would say “sir, where is your command philosophy?”

What I did do, though, in that particular case and in the others when I was privileged to command a unit, was to lay out what I thought was really important. And so I laid out the priorities, the areas in which we would focus, and I figured since the Chief of Staff of the Army had six imperatives I could probably stress five points. And I think, when I was a battalion commander for example, I was much like the Chief, I'd repeat these at every single gathering that we had. And I think, I'd like to think, that well over 20 years since I commanded that unit, if you found a member of the Iron Rakkasan battalion today from that era and asked him “well, what was Petraeus a nut about?” that the individual would get those right.

Essentially, they were discipline, physical fitness—serious, serious physical fitness and mental toughness as well. It was small unit tactics, techniques, and procedures with an emphasis on live fire and the training and conduct of those. It was air assault operations, since we were in an air assault division. And then it was the importance of Ranger school and Ranger training, particularly for our non-commissioned officer leaders. And again, I think if you went back and asked one of our troopers from those days, he'd probably get at least four of those five, if not all five, well over two decades since I was in command of the 3rd Battalion 187th Infantry Regiment.

In later years, when I was the commander of the Combined Arms Center and we had all the future battalion and brigade commanders and indeed command sergeants major come through there and spend several weeks in this pre-command course that we ran. I remembered telling them, essentially, that I didn't think command philosophy was particularly meaningful as a document. Go ahead and do it if you want to check the block, if you do want to say mission first, troops always and get a few other things off your chest. But really what the unit most would want to know is the areas in which you are going to focus. And again, identify them, and don't just state them. Then develop actual programs with serious detail in them. What does it mean to say that you are going to emphasize physical fitness? What are the elements of the program? How are you going to achieve great physical fitness? What are the standards? What are the rewards for excellence? What are the rewards for not meeting the standards? On and on and on in considerable detail. And at least in the, again, in the articulation of the big ideas or the areas of focus when I was a commander, there was a lot of emphasis on competition in this. I believed very firmly, and still do, that life is a competitive endeavor. And what really drives people to achieve excellence is competition. So if it was small unit tactics, techniques, and procedures, I mean we'd have competitions for everything, from marksmanship to the best mortar squad to the best scout

platoon to the best line platoon. Whatever it would be, there would be some aspect that would become competitive and would indeed spur people, again, to try to achieve true excellence. It was very, very important, in my view.

CLIP 3 – GETTING THE BIG IDEAS RIGHT

Q: What was the strategic context that greeted you when you took command in Iraq?

Well, the strategic context was a situation in which the effort was failing. It wasn't just a perception, it was reality. And the reality on the ground that greeted me when I arrived back in Iraq was even worse, frankly, than I'd sensed it was from afar. I'd tried very hard to keep a hand on this, if you will, or at least to keep my head in the game on it. I would go through the daily battlefield update and analysis slides that were available through the secure military internet. I certainly read articles from the embedded reporters in particular which were so valuable because they were out there with our troopers on the ground conveying back what our own small unit leaders were saying about it. I mean, one of them I remember the title of the article was "Driving Around Baghdad Waiting To Get Blown Up." I mean, this was not a reflection of a sergeant who was confident in the strategy that was being pursued. And of course it was a situation in which the president of the United States had decided to radically change what was being done, at least in terms of committing additional forces rather than drawing down, and, of course, replace the military and diplomatic leaders there as well.

When I went out in the first day after taking command, right away we went out and went on some patrols with some units in Baghdad and then subsequent to that went out to Ramadi to see the reconciliation effort that was going on there. But in the streets of Baghdad I was shocked. I'd been in Baghdad off and on since 2003, all over all the neighborhoods there as a three star. We rebuilt the police stations and a lot of infrastructure for the Iraqi Security Forces, and I was really stunned, frankly, to see some of these neighborhoods that I'd remembered as thriving, prosperous, even well-to-do neighborhoods where we'd built quite impressive Iraqi Security Force infrastructure, to see deserted neighborhoods, the police stations blown up, houses empty. In one place, in fact, we actually saw tumbleweed blowing down the street and it seemed to be an image, I guess, that spoke volumes about the situation.

So we went on patrol in these areas and frankly when I got back from that—it was a whole day out there, we talked to our leaders on the ground—it was clear how serious the situation was and how much work was going to have to be done to reestablish security in these areas to build our locations in each of them. And in fact we had one joint security station about to go in in one of these locations that became a little bit of a canary in the mine shaft for me ever after, in Ghazaliya, where the very first of the joint security stations, as I recall, in the Baghdad area. And periodically we'd go back and visit, and that was one that really showed what was possible if you lived with the people and they knew you were going to be there with them and not just drive back to your base at night for dinner and see them again the next morning. When they knew you were there twenty four hours a day, seven days a week, all of a sudden, usually within the first week or two, locals who stayed in those areas would start to share with

our soldiers information because they wanted to see the bad guys out of their neighborhoods and they wanted us to do just that, in partnership with our Iraqi police and army comrades.

So this is a very, very tough situation. Again, when I was done that day I actually, when we went back to the places where we had the—folks, places where people slept at night and so forth—I actually put my head down on the desk for a moment and thought to myself “why in the world had I taken this on?” It was a pretty desperate situation. Levels of violence were catastrophic. The month that the president decided on the surge I think there were fifty three dead civilian bodies due to violence every twenty four hours in Baghdad alone. That was what greeted us and that was the context in which we implemented the surge.

Q: How did you come to the big ideas when you were in command in Iraq?

Well, first of all is what I did to get the big ideas right in my own head. And indeed to help our Army and indeed the Marine Corps, because we did this in partnership with General Mattis and the U.S. Marine Corps, what we sought to do to help those institutions develop the right big ideas as well. So during that fifteen month period that I was back in the United States, having returned from a fifteen and a half month tour as a three star heading the train and equip mission in Iraq, we spent a great deal of time working our way through, again, ideas, working our way through concepts, you know, what should the strategy be, and so forth. This included the counterinsurgency field manual, included articles for Military Review magazine, indeed we had a writing contest for counterinsurgency using Military Review which was also under the purview of the three star which position I held at that time, command of the Combined Arms Center. We worked very, very hard and with considerable rigor to try to get this set in our head so that when I actually did deploy—you know, I’d been told that it was quite likely that I was going to go back to Iraq. There was only one position to which I could return presumably, and that would be to be the commander of the Multi-National Force in Iraq. The call came, frankly, a bit earlier than I expected when the president decided to conduct the surge and decided to make the change of leadership at the time that the surge was launched. But when I went back over there, and having already had nearly two and a half years on the ground, I had a pretty good idea—as did our other leaders, who had, again we’d all been seized with this issue for a number of years. Most of the commanders that came to Iraq during the surge had had at least one tour, one full year tour on the ground by that time. Many had two. And so we were a reasonably experienced group, and, again, we’d worked our way through this. We’d made the doctrinal changes, we’d tweaked our organizations, we’d overhauled the training, the so-called road to deployment, every activity along it. We’d completely changed our leader development courses. And so we’d made a number of institutional changes to ensure that our leaders and our units were prepared for the tasks required in Iraq and of course in Afghanistan as well.

So when I went back over I knew that the biggest of the big ideas had to be that which focused on security for the people. The center of gravity, if you will, in Iraq was the people. And you can only serve and secure the people if you actually live with them. You can’t do it from a big base. And we’d been consolidating on big bases, we’d been gradually getting out of the cities. We reversed that completely. We moved back into the neighborhoods. Seventy seven addition joint security stations, combat

outposts, and other locations in the Multi-National Division-Baghdad area alone over the course of the next nine to twelve months, the first year of the surge, and we had to fight for a lot of those. So living with the people to secure them and indeed recognizing that the decisive terrain in Iraq was the human terrain, that was all big idea number one.

Big idea number two was also hugely important. It was that you can't kill or capture your way out of an industrial strength insurgency. That you have to reconcile with as many of the insurgents as is possible to turn them from being part of the problem into being part of the solution. Of course, that informed the entire reconciliation initiative, building on the case of Anbar Awakening that had already happened outside Ramadi but was still quite nascent, in a sense fanning the flames of that so it would ripple up and down the Euphrates River valley, creating critical mass that sets off a chain reaction and then goes up the Tigris River valley and into the Baghdad belts as they're called and then into the neighborhoods of Baghdad that were mixed as well. So that was yet another hugely important big idea.

Beyond that was recognition that, okay, we'll be able to reconcile with some of them, as many as possible, and by the way ultimately we had as Sons of Iraq some 80,000 Sunni Arab young men and some 20-25,000 Shia Arabs with whom we reconciled, who previously were at least, either actively or tacitly opposing us and the new Iraq from either of those communities. Then this third big idea relates to that, that there are irreconcilables. And that the senior leaders of Al Qaeda in Iraq, the most senior of the insurgent leaders, the senior militia leaders, were irreconcilable. Therefore, we had to kill or capture them, or run them off. There was nothing else that could be done. And that meant we had to increase quite dramatically the kinetic part of our actions. A lot of people, in fact, get seized on the counterinsurgency field manual and the emphasis on stability operations, but they sometimes forget that you also have offensive, and of course defensive—force protection—but particularly offensive operations in a counterinsurgency because you've got to clear and hold areas, then rebuild them and then ultimately over time, having developed the capabilities of the host nation security forces, to transition tasks to them in a progressive manner over time. But going after the irreconcilables, now we really unleashed the Joint Special Operations Command, our counter-terrorist units, not just U.S. but UK and other elements as well. Very aggressive conventional force operations, U.S. and increasingly joined by Iraqi and obviously coalition forces in that effort. Increasing the train and equip program so that would feed more Iraqi forces into this, and on and on in that particular effort as well.

Again, a number of other initiatives that we took, but those were the biggest of the big ideas, again starting with the recognition that the human terrain is the decisive terrain, we must secure the people and serve them, and you can only do that if you live with them. And then that we had to reconcile with as many of the insurgents as we possibly could. We had to give them incentives to support the new Iraq instead of continuing to oppose it, and then, very aggressively, go after those who are irreconcilable, all while achieving absolute unity between the civilian organization and the military, as well as with our Iraqi counterparts in that effort too.

Q: What were the main differences in strategic context and your approach to big ideas during your command in Afghanistan?

Well, Afghanistan was different in that there had been a very comprehensive policy review. That meant considerably more policy guidance, although still very wide latitude, to the commander on the ground, but within a certain number of constraints to be sure. And although there was a surge in Afghanistan and although President Obama did indeed direct substantial increases in the number of forces there, up to about 100,000, we certainly never got close to where the number that we had in Iraq, 165,000 U.S. soldiers alone in addition to the coalition troopers. Now we did have larger involvement of coalition countries in Afghanistan, by far. It was the largest coalition, I think, just in terms of numbers of countries, in history, somewhere around sixty or so, as I recall. And the coalition contribution was fully half, in size, that of the United States, which was considerably larger, again, in percentage and in absolute numbers than what we had in Iraq. Beyond that, of course General McChrystal had been on the ground for a year. He had been overhauling the strategy. He had been sent out to do just that, to take what we'd learned from Iraq where it was applicable, noting the two circumstances, the two contexts were very different in many different respects. In fact, I'd actually—back in 2004 on the way home from Iraq in conducting an assessment for Secretary Rumsfeld, came back and in the very first slide of the briefing that I provided to him the title was “Afghanistan Does Not Equal Iraq.” It enumerated all the differences in several different elements that we'd looked at. But General McChrystal had been modifying, overhauling the strategy, and so it didn't require the kind of fundamental rethink and fundamental change that we undertook in Iraq. Rather, it required modifications, and there were a number of those that we did undertake. But again the basic thrust of the strategy that he put in place we felt was valid and needed to be continued. I did have to certainly put a great deal of emphasis into developing the concepts for and conduct of transition, and we worked through that in the first probably four or five months in considerable detail, and then presented that at the NATO summit in Lisbon, where we also had very the significant action, agreed to extend the horizon for Afghanistan, if you will, from 2011, the following year, to 2014, and of course it's subsequently been pushed out beyond that.

Beyond that, I felt quite strongly that there needed to be a program, again, somewhat similar to the Sons of Iraq program. I could do the math, I could recognize we were never going to achieve the numbers in the Afghan Security Forces necessary to push security out into a number of areas where it was lacking without a local program, and this ultimately became known as the Afghan Local Police program, and our special forces organizations were the ones that drove that and then implemented it. We pursued initiatives in terms of countering corruption. We brought over Brigadier General, then, McMaster, H.R. McMaster, a very talented individual who had worked on numerous occasions for me in Iraq, and then subsequent to that also oversaw the assessment that was conducted when I assumed command of Central Command. He established what was called Joint Task Force Shafafiyat, or transparency, which really was a nicer name for anti-corruption task force, which we pursued jointly with the Afghans appointed by President Karzai to do that, and achieved, again, some significant results. The firing of the Air Force chief of staff, the surgeon general, the heads of some of the hospitals and a variety of others, but not, again, the kind of wholesale impact across the board that we would have liked to have seen, and that was so important to be achieving because this was—corruption is a cancer that eats at the very institutions that we need to hand off tasks to in the process of transition. We made tweaks also to how we would actually implement the rules of engagement, how we employed close air

support, indirect fires, and so forth, and loosened that up a bit. There was a sense among our troopers, legitimately, I think, that we were a bit too restrictive on that, and so we looked at the lessons of a year of that policy and then made refinements to how we did indeed allow units on the ground in tough circumstances to bring all the assets available to bear.

Q: In Iraq, were you given very specific direction from the president or a wide latitude?

Quite a wide amount of latitude, frankly. I did go to see the president after I was confirmed. And, candidly, the president had gone all in on this, or at least that's what I—the way I characterized it to him. He actually said “well, we've doubled down here general,” and I said, “with respect, Mr. President, your military is going all in and we need all the rest of the U.S. government and our coalition partners to go all in as well.” Beyond that there was not any specific guidance. It was basically to get over there and do everything that we could to reverse a very seriously failing situation. There was nothing about “clear, hold, and build” or “I want you to conduct a comprehensive, civil-military counterinsurgency campaign.” In fact, frankly, really, we had a pretty broad amount of latitude. And as I mentioned earlier, I changed the mission statement in the first few days. And frankly, I thought that was within my purview and latitude and I didn't bother to ask permission. We were told to get on with it and that's what we sought to do. We ultimately overhauled the campaign plan after conducting a joint strategic assessment with a team of military and diplomatic and development work experts and then began the process, obviously, of implementing these big ideas that I've described of living with the people to secure them, pursuing reconciliation and promoting that very actively, increasing our operations against the irreconcilables, achieving civil-military unity of effort, overhauling our detainee affairs operations, and a variety of the other initiatives that we took in terms of stopping transition until the Iraqis could handle the tasks being given to them.

Q: As a strategic commander, where is the boundary between your role, your big ideas, and wider US foreign policy considerations?

Well, even as the commander in Iraq I was concerned about developments in the region that did have an influence on Iraq, and I think that was understandable. And in fact we suggested to our higher headquarters and indeed to the State Department and White House actions that could be taken by those who were well beyond our purview but would help dramatically to reduce the problems that we were facing. Actions by, for example, the State Department to convince countries in the region to not allow military aged males to fly on a one way ticket to Damascus, Syria and then make their way into Iraq and blow up Iraqis or coalition forces or, in some cases, blow themselves up. We tried to figure out what could be done to influence Iran to be less nefarious in its provision of assistance to Shia militia that were causing problems for the new Iraq. We worked on the neighboring countries, the Sunni Arab countries, to try to encourage them to engage Prime Minister Maliki even though he is a Shia rather than a Sunni Arab. And, so, again, even though these were beyond the confines of Iraq, there were still issues that very much concerned us and therefore issues on which we had some suggestions, recommendations, and encouragement to other elements that were supporting us well beyond the boundaries of the country for which we were responsible.

CLIP 4 – COMMUNICATING THE BIG IDEAS PART 1

Q: How did you communicate the big ideas?

Relentlessly and continuously. You have to seek every opportunity, make use of it, exploit it. Every medium, every possible way in which you can communicate the big ideas as effectively as possible throughout the breadth and depth of the organization, but also to our partners, our Iraqi and obviously coalition partners, and indeed to the greater audiences out there, certainly to our chain of command, our bosses in the U.S. and coalition chain, and indeed to the people of our nations, the citizens of the United States and the other coalition countries. All of these had to be audiences, each of them needed to be provided what it was that we were trying to do, we needed to explain that, we had an obligation to do that. I think they even had an obligation to get to know a little bit about the individual who was commanding their sons and daughters, who was taking this important effort forward together with Ambassador Crocker and all the other members of the team. And indeed we then owed them an objective, a frank, a realistic assessment, a forthright assessment of the situation on the ground, how we thought it was going, what we planned to do in the future in a general sense, and what we thought we could and could not achieve.

Q: How did you personally interact with the media when you were in command in Iraq and Afghanistan?

We let them have access to me. We took them out with us. You know, it wasn't quite like having someone embedded with you the way I had, say, historian Rick Atkinson riding in my own Humvee in the fight to Baghdad, but we'd take them out for a whole day. We'd, again, do interviews with them, we would spend time with them, I'd have my—the strategic communications chief would do formal, on the record briefings, background briefings, again, you had to invest a great deal in this. But above all, you had to be forthright in what you were conveying. And I had, we had a guiding mantra in this regard, and it was to be first with the truth. In other words, to beat the bad guys to the headline if we could, knowing that some of them had CNN's Baghdad bureau speed dialed into their cell phones and would be communicating even as we were pulling out of an operation, say, in Sadr City or somewhere else. But to be first with the truth so that you beat them and you convey reality. Again, you can't put lipstick on pigs. If it's a bad day, you or the spokesman has to step up to the microphone and say "we had a horrible day today." 150 people were killed in bombings in two markets in Baghdad—an event, events that did take place on a single day—and this is horrific, barbaric. Here's what we have taken from this, and we and our Iraqi partners are going to take steps to mitigate the risks of something like this happening in the future. But you can't come out to the microphone on a day like that and lead off with talking about, well we reopened three schools and the hospital's working again and the water treatment plant is coming online. You've got to step up and acknowledge reality and reality, on many days in Baghdad, at least until the four, five month mark, and throughout the country was pretty gruesome and quite difficult indeed.

Look, I realized very early on in the surge in Iraq that I'd become the face of the surge. It wasn't necessarily something that I sought, but in truth it wasn't something with which I was uncomfortable. I

realized—again, I thought this was my last assignment in life, and sometimes I acted that way and it had a liberating quality to it. And I had a president that was fully supportive and was not going to question if I was on the cover of Newsweek or Time or something like that, he just wanted to win. And I felt totally committed to this effort and therefore I had to communicate to the press. I had to be very open to them. I had to be candid, forthright, I had to maintain credibility, but I also had to maintain lines of communication. And in turn, I expected, and we made sure the press knew, that we expected them to try to be as accurate as they could in every story that they filed or filmed, that they would provide the right context, and that they would characterize the situation correctly. These are very, very important, I mean the context matters. If one of our troopers shot through the window of a speeding Iraqi car, it mattered greatly if it was in the middle of the night in a driving rainstorm in the toughest place in Baghdad where three car bombs had already gone off that night and another was reported to be on the way toward that checkpoint, as opposed to, say, in the far south where there hadn't been a car bomb in six months and it's broad daylight and there was no reason, more likely, to pull the trigger. So that mattered. And, again, how a story is characterized, how you can't extrapolate from one company's experience to say that the overall mission is improbable or impossible. So we worked on meeting our responsibility to the press, which is a recognition that you can't win if you don't play. By the way, you can't lose if you don't play either, and I had some losing episodes with the press as well, and got bruised and banged and scuffed up quite a bit. But you know, you dust yourself off, try to figure out what you learned from it, and drive on. I mean, life has adversity, life has setbacks as well as successes. And the truth is that the mark of the individual is generally more how he or she responds to setbacks, especially if they've been personally inflicted, frankly, than how he or she responds to successes, that's pretty easy. So dealing with the press was an inescapable element of command in Iraq in particular. I'm not saying it wasn't also hugely important in Afghanistan, but I don't think I was the face of Afghanistan in the same way that I was the face of the surge in Iraq.

CLIP 5 – COMMUNICATING THE BIG IDEAS PART 2

Q: Did you have a specific approach for communicating down to your combat force?

It started on the very first day with a letter to all the troopers and to the civilians as well of the Multi-National Force-Iraq. And in that, right up front, I wanted to establish the importance of securing the Iraqi people, the concept, again, that the human terrain is the decisive terrain and we must secure it. And the fact that you can only secure the people by living with them. And so I sought to convey that right up front, and also to do that in the remarks that I made following the change of command ceremony. I then gathered the leaders together and echoed those comments and gave a few more mentions of the big ideas that were going to evolve, then over time, literally in the first few days, changed the mission statement to focus, again, on securing the people and not to focus on transitioning to Iraqi security forces which had been the previous focus, at least not until conditions warranted. And then, over time, change the campaign plan, the overarching direction. I issued counterinsurgency guidance. In one case, I allowed, I actually provided it to General Odierno, the operational level commander, the three star at that time, who spent the first fifteen months or so of the surge in that position, then went home and ultimately came back over as the four star to replace me when I went home. So we had a number of these different mechanisms. And then I did it on a daily basis, through the

comments that I made in the battlefield update and analysis. We tried to make this a learning organization, to constantly be reflecting on what had transpired and what that meant for us, what actions did we need to take, what initiatives should we launch, and so forth and so on. And there were numerous of those as you might imagine.

The counterinsurgency guidance that I issued I think was particularly important. In fact, it was a personal work. This is not something that someone else drafted for me in the beginning. It was something that I'd been working on even when I was back at Fort Leavenworth before deploying. And it was, in a sense, a living document. I actually kept it open in the Microsoft Word part of my laptop all the time. And I would come back to it, tweak it, refine it, when I'd had an idle moment sometimes on a helicopter or a plane or what have you, I would pull it back up and refine it a bit more. I'd add anecdotes to it as they occurred to us. I remember we talked about the idea of promoting initiative. And so when I was on a patrol in what had been a very difficult neighborhood in Iraq a year earlier, I found a transformed situation and a company commander who, when we went back to his command post, who had on the door of that command post a sign that said "In the absence of guidance or orders, figure out what they should have been and execute aggressively." I took that and actually incorporated it into our counterinsurgency guidance as an example of how one commander at the level at which big ideas are turned into reality on the ground, how he was actually thinking about this and how he himself was promoting initiative in his own organization. So it was something I was constantly refining, and every now and then I'd hit the send key and would send the latest version out to everyone.

Q: How did your communication upward, to your chain of command, Congress, and the president, work in the context of Iraq and Afghanistan?

Well, in each case there were formal activities and events that facilitated this communication. I had a weekly video teleconference together with Ambassador Crocker, for example, every Monday morning, Washington time, 7:30 Eastern Time, for an hour. The president and his national security team assembled in the situation room and did a video teleconference with the two of us in Baghdad. It was religiously conducted. It started on time, it finished at an hour, and the president turned to us completely. There was no discussion from around the table unless he wanted to guide it that way, but he turned to us for our description of what was going on, what we were seeing, what we were planning, and then dialogue with him, and occasionally others would get to interact as well, but it was really the president's meeting, it was hugely important. On Tuesday at 7:30 Eastern Time in Washington I had a one hour video teleconference with Secretary Gates, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and just a very small handful of the most senior folks in the Pentagon. That was just for me. And that also was hugely valuable. Every Sunday night I would send back a memorandum that went simultaneously to the commander of U.S. Central Command, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and the Secretary of Defense. It did not go through that chain of command, it went directly to all of them. And that was, frankly, it was information. In some cases there were implications in it or even somewhat code worded requests that the Secretary might focus on a particular issue a bit more intently than the bureaucracy would seem to be doing, but it was a very effective means as well. All of these were very valuable. Now on top of that, of course, the members of the chain of command, in addition to the service chiefs and a variety of others would all come out. The same with the coalition countries. We got to know a number of the

ministers of defense, chiefs of defense staff, and indeed leaders. The prime minister of the UK, for example, came out several times a year. I went through London any time I went back to Washington. And so we had quite close relationships with a number of individuals in these key positions as well, and we worked very hard to communicate what was going on to them, so that they had a forthright, up to date, and objective analysis.

And we had a lot of interaction with Congress as you might imagine. They came out when they were not in session. We would get as many as three congressional delegations in a single week when they were in recess. And of course I had to testify to them. I did this once by video teleconference in the first couple months of the surge. I went back and did a closed door hearing to all of the senators, for example, and then a number of members of the House of Representatives. I was assigned at that time others that came with me, the Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, and the Deputy Secretary of State, and it was in that session that I realized that it was great to have these representatives there but the truth was I knew more about Iraq than they did even in their respective areas because I was living it and they had the whole world to worry about and that better would be to have Ambassador Crocker go back with me, and noting though that when we decided to pursue that that we would each have to testify before two additional committees because I would not only have to do the House and Senate armed services committees with him, I would also have to do the House and Senate foreign relations committees, and he would of course have to do the same with the armed services committees. But we thought that was important. We'd linked arms in almost everything else that we did and we figured we should link arms when we came back to Congress. And we did two of those multiple day hearings, one in September and then another the following year in April.

Q: Did you always feel you had the backing of your chain of command?

It's interesting, because I think that, frankly, there was question, at various levels between me and the president. Certainly the commander of Central Command when I initially took command had been one of those who had felt that our forces were like sand in the oyster, but not producing a pearl, producing problems, and that we needed to get out of the cities and so forth. The policy we had implemented in 2006, which I think clearly had been demonstrated to be ineffective and wrong. He was replaced after a month or two by an individual who had not served out there before and who, again, I think questioned whether we could do what we set out to do and felt that what we needed to be focusing on was drawing down at a time when we were just two months into the five month build up. And so we worked through issues there over time. Ultimately, I think, he became convinced that this was the right policy, or the right strategy, and that indeed it was succeeding, but it took quite some time to get to that point. And then I think it's understandable that the service chiefs, from whom I was asking for everything we could possibly get—you know, the reason we got five and two thirds brigades additional, the reason we asked for it, in fact, was that that was literally all that was available.

And of course then we had to extend the forces from twelve to fifteen months. These pose enormous challenges to the service chiefs who are trying to manage a force, trying to retain it, trying to educate it periodically. To carry through all the tasks that they have, for which they're responsible, in providing forces to us and equipment and so on, but frankly I was making life difficult for them by asking for as

much as we requested. And of course you had Afghanistan going on at the same time. The Secretary of Defense I think quite supportive of the president in the effort, did suggest at some point that we might be at numbers below what I thought were anything reasonable. We had that discussion, that was sorted out. Then you get to the president, and at the end of the day all that really mattered was that the president was absolutely committed to the surge, he was absolutely supportive of what it was that we were seeking to do in Iraq, and communicated to me both directly and indirectly that if we needed something, don't worry about those between us and him, ask for it and he would do everything he could to try to support it, and indeed we did, we did do just that. Once I got on the ground I realized that we really needed an additional division headquarters, that's a very substantial structure, but there was no way that Multi-National Division-Baghdad could manage all the brigade combat teams and other assets in areas that it was responsible for at that time. We recognized the need for an additional aviation brigade, again way over a hundred aircraft and a very substantial contribution, but also a substantial demand, again, on forces that were already stretched very thin and already had budgetary strain on the force issues and all the rest with which they were having to contend.

Q: How did you communicate with the host nation government? What are the limits of the extent to which you can persuade a sovereign government to do the things you want them to do as a strategic commander?

Well, this is often a challenging endeavor. Indeed, on arrival in Iraq I was summoned by the National Security Advisor—this was a month before Ambassador Crocker had even arrived, so this is with Ambassador Khalilzad. We went over to see the National Security Advisor and he levied a series of demands that he said were voiced by Prime Minister Maliki and which were essentially the opposite of everything that we intended to do in the surge. It was, once again, get out of the cities, consolidate on big bases, hand off to Iraqi forces faster, release detainees, reduce night raids, again 180 degrees different from what we intended to do and were starting to implement. And that is where I think you have to be quite seriously straightforward, and I was. I said Dr. Mowaffak al-Rubaie, with whom I'd worked as a three star when I was there, if this is truly what the prime minister wants and is going to direct, I think he probably should communicate that to President Bush in his regularly scheduled video teleconference. I'll be sitting in on it with him, as is customary with the ambassador, but he should know that if he does that he will implement that without me, because I'll be on the next plane to the United States and I intend to take the policy with me. That was about as direct as it comes. There were only one or two other cases in which that kind of threat had to be put on the table, and indeed I never heard anything about those demands again, although I was sweating bullets in the video teleconference the next day.

So you, that's the kind of issue you work through, and in Iraq I worked very, very hard with Ambassador Crocker so that the two of us were literally always together. When I had a meeting with Prime Minister Maliki, he came along, and when he had a meeting with Prime Minister Maliki, I went along. And you just sat in different chairs. A couple of times we'd actually change places during a meeting so that the prime minister knew that it was now Ambassador Crocker's meeting, not mine, or vice versa. And we tried to be joined at the hip, we tried to achieve unity of effort among our respective organizations, to the point that he actually issued quite pointed statements at some times when it became clear that

some diplomat or other elements of the country team were not fully willing to cooperate, to coordinate, to synchronize actions with the military effort.

We had a similar situation in Afghanistan, challenges there as well in that regard, and perhaps a bit more so because this was not solely a U.S.-led multinational force, this truly was an international security assistance force, and I had a NATO senior civilian representative, numerous NATO ambassadors who were contributing substantial forces, and of course the U.S. ambassador, representative of the largest commitment of all by far, but 100,000 out of 150,000 as opposed to say 165,000 in the situation in Iraq with only tens of thousands of additional coalition forces. And so it was a bit more complicated there. The campaign plan that we had there could not be a U.S. civil-military campaign plan as it was in Iraq, truly integrated. It rather had to be a military and overarching NATO campaign plan, and that was just much more cumbersome and much more challenging. And frankly, in the situation in Afghanistan we had the additional complicating factor that the ambassador, someone who had had a very close relationship with President Karzai and earlier tours in uniform did not have that kind of relationship as a diplomat because of some leaked cables and other unfortunate instances. But that meant that it was less possible to truly link arms every single time and go in together or I might hear reverberations, again, playback of what was in a particular cable where the Ambassador said that President Karzai was an unsuitable partner and called other qualities of his into question. So it was a good bit more complicated in that regard there than it was in Iraq where you had almost an ideal situation for a civil-military perspective and total commitment from the president of the United States as well.

At the end of the day there is a limit to what a counterinsurgent force, a counterinsurgent commander, can do. The host nation clearly has to take issues forward, has to take initiatives forward, has to take ownership over time. Inevitably, the counterinsurgent force is going to hand off tasks to the host nation, to their security forces, and other authorities. Inevitably over time the counterinsurgent force is going to draw down. At some point it's going to go home. And then the host nation has to take that forward. What we should try to do always, of course, is to try to retain influence, try to retain capabilities that can both encourage, and help, and guide the host nation leader as he or she goes forward. And it was tragic to watch what happened as Prime Minister Maliki undid some of what it was that we did together. He and I were partners in reconciliation and bringing the Sunni Arabs back into the fabric of Iraqi society, in trying to get the Shia militia less visible, less influential, less problematic. And unfortunately, actions that he took after our combat forces left at the end of 2011 inflamed the very tensions that we'd reduced. It left the Sunni Arabs feeling alienated once again. He reneged on commitments that were made during our time together. He undid the process of reconciliation that we'd fought so hard to foster. His actions brought about the return of Shia militia to the streets. So you have to recognize, again, that it is host nation leadership at the end of the day that is absolutely vital and key and that's something that we have to keep in mind as we do, in fact, draw down, reduce our forces and, ultimately, remove them.

CLIP 5 - OVERSEEING IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BIG IDEAS

Q: How did you oversee the implementation of the big ideas in Iraq and Afghanistan?

Well, in a very structured way. You've got to understand that this is not going to be an effort that's going to culminate with taking the hill, planting the flag, and going home to a victory parade. Rather, it's going to be a set of small successes and perhaps small setbacks along the way, certainly. It will be the gradual accumulation, the gradual achievement of progress that does then start to accumulate over time. And you can map it, you can see it, you can feel it. You'll see it in the metrics.

We worked very hard to have a whole series of different metrics on which we focused, whether it was daily attacks initiated by the enemy, suicide car bombs, regular car bombs, improvised explosive device explosions, sectarian violence, our casualties, Iraqi casualties, civilian casualties, again across the board. Even into how many megawatts of electricity are being produced, how many barrels of oil produced and exported. Every element of Iraq, its society, its political progress, its social progress, basic service provision, hospitals, schools, rule of law, you name it, we had to track all of that, in addition to the normal military measures, if you will. And we had, again, a very, very structured process.

Every single day we had the battlefield update and analysis. It started, I think it was at 7:30 in the morning to 8:30, our time, a full hour, at the end of which we had a small group meeting with a select group of the highest, most senior coalition leaders, and then ultimately a smaller group with just U.S. and UK, and then perhaps the smallest of the small groups, which was just Lieutenant General Odierno and me sitting there looking at each other asking when each of us thought this thing was going to turn in the early, very, very tough days. But then we would have a series of other events during the week. There was a whole matrix, in fact, that we worked out over time, again, a living document, but one that got an hour each week at minimum with the three star train and equip commander, another hour minimum with the special operations commanders, there was a special intelligence assessment that we did every Sunday that used to be frankly very stimulating and enjoyable. We had marked out two days a week minimum where right after the battlefield update and analysis I'd get in either an up-armored Humvee or one of the other vehicles or a helicopter and we'd drive or fly somewhere and then go on a patrol with a unit, spend time with that unit, get an update from them, get their overview, get a feel for myself of what the situation was on the ground, meet with Iraqi leaders while I was out there. There were certain Iraqi events every single week. There was a National Security Council meeting of the Iraqis that was conducted every single week, as an example. There were periodic other activities. There was a Baghdad security council that we did every week as well.

And then, as I've mentioned, we had the video teleconference with the president of the United States, Washington time, 7:30 on Monday morning to 8:30. I had the video teleconference with Secretary Gates and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs every Tuesday at Washington time 7:30, and so forth like that. Then there were events that took place biweekly, there were monthly events, and there were even quarterly events, all the way up to the so-called strategic campaign plan assessment that Ambassador Crocker and I conducted with all of the leaders of the diplomatic—the U.S. and coalition diplomatic communities and embassy teams with the development and intelligence leaders there as well, and then obviously all of the senior coalition military leaders present also. And we worked through how were we doing. We had quite detailed analytics that we looked at for how were we coming in the train and equip mission for the Iraqi security forces, the overall security situation, gradually areas that were assessed to be safe, and so forth and so on all the way through all the civilian lines of effort as well.

Q: People say that the commander should be at the decisive point. In Iraq and Afghanistan, as the strategic commander, where did you think the decisive point was?

Well, it's a wonderful question, because you tend to think "well the decisive point is at the point of decision," at the front lines, it's on the hill overlooking the Battle of Waterloo or whatever it may be. But that's not always the case. In—particularly in a small unit endeavor like a counterinsurgency operation. You may have a very large battle, you might have the Battle of Ramadi, for example, which unfolded over a month of clearing operations and so forth. You might have the Battle of Fallujah, Baquba, or various Baghdad neighborhoods. The Battle of Basra, a major Iraqi initiative that almost went south. And, you know, for the strategic leader, you may want to go out there, certainly, and see it for yourself. I was on the ground in the Battle of Ramadi, Baquba, these others. You get up as close to the front as you can responsibly, you've got to walk patrols.

But the truth is for a strategic commander nowadays, you're probably more likely to find the decisive point, if you will, to be in a headquarters, of all things, where you can actually see what the Predators and unmanned aerial vehicles are seeing. You can gather what is coming in in terms of communications and signals intelligence. You can get all the other sources of information from the battlefield. And keeping in mind that the strategic leader is not the individual who's ordering squads or battalions or even brigades around on that battlefield. He's an individual that is setting in motion an operation and then letting it unfold and obviously not only monitoring it and overseeing it, but recognizing that between him and that trooper on the ground with a rifle is a three, two, one star, colonels, captains, and all the rest of that. And so you have to figure out how to get that right. Where is the point that you should be? Where is the decisive point for a strategic commander? And don't think that it's always looking over the shoulder of the point man, of the lead element in an attack, but recognize it's where you can bring in the information and also where you have the communications and other means to direct the kinds of big shifts, big decisions to those who are the operational commanders, the tactical commanders, and those actually out fighting their way through a city or a tough spot.

In the Battle of Basra, for example, I went to see Prime Minister Maliki and he asked me if I would support him. He said "I've just ordered two divisions south to Basra, we can't take this any longer, we must deal with the situation there." And this is a considerable acceleration, to put it mildly, of what it was we were planning to do in a much more deliberate fashion. And I said "of course I'll support you Prime Minister. I'm your soldier as well as President Bush's, and a soldier of the other coalition leaders. But I'd like you to set conditions, I'd like you to get us a couple of days in which we can reposition forces and baselines and communications and command posts and all the rest. We didn't get that in the end. He agreed to that, he said yes, that makes eminent sense, that's what we will do. But what happened was the Iraqi forces got sucked into a fight the minute they were on the outskirts of Basra, and we were into it. In that case, what was important was getting the operational commander down there. And Lloyd Austin, the Lieutenant General at that time, subsequently General Odierno's replacement as the Multi-National Force-Iraq commander and now the commander of U.S. Central Command, he went down and he assessed the situation, and without asking permission—and he shouldn't have—he directed his corps tactical command post to deploy to Basra to augment the British based Multi-National Division headquarters for southeast, so that it could integrate all of the U.S.-unique feeds and oversee and

control the different assets that we were repositioning from U.S. elements down there to support the Iraqis down in that fight. Even as we raced to get advisors with them, raced to get joint tactical air controllers out on the ground and all the rest of that.

So you can see how this all plays out, and see how a strategic commander, rather than being the individual, as in the days of Napoleonic or even more recent combat operations, is, whether he likes it or not, probably more likely to find the decisive point in a headquarters rather than out on the ground watching a particular operation unfold. As much as he may want to do that, and indeed should do that periodically, just to ensure that he has his own feel, his own sense of the situation, but recognizing that he's not out there directing battalions, brigades, divisions, that's going to be done by an operational level commander, perhaps at his direction. But he needs to be in a position to have a sense of that, and that's probably going to come back at a headquarters somewhere.

CLIP 6: REVISING THE BIG IDEAS AND INSTITUTIONALIZING LESSONS

Q: How did you go about revising and institutionalizing the big ideas in Iraq and Afghanistan?

What we sought to do was constantly to have teams out on the battlefield who were looking for lessons, recognizing that all they were doing was identifying lessons, and then a lesson became learned when it actually resulted in a change of a mission statement, a policy, a campaign plan element, or what have you, in a concrete action. And so what we wanted to do is have as many sources as possible to develop a culture of learning, one that was constantly inquiring how we could perform a particular task better, and then to have a formal process that indeed brought this to my attention periodically, and even, in fact, brought it to the attention of the institutions back home. So periodically I'd do a video teleconference, in fact, with U.S. Army leaders, including the leader in the position that I'd come from, knowing that that's the individual who is responsible for doctrine, some of the organizational structural changes, the training scenarios at the Combat Training Centers, leader development for commissioned, non-commissioned, warrant officers, so forth and so on. But doing it in theater as well. And to help us we had the Center for Army Lessons Learned teams, we had Marine teams, we had joint teams, and of course we had leaders and commanders. And in fact every gathering I ever had of all of our commanders—and we would have a monthly commanders conference—there was always a portion where we went around the room to each of those leaders and asked him or her to give I think it was two lessons, two best practices that would be relevant to the others. Good ideas that others should consider adopting and implementing in the context in which they were engaged. So we were always emphasizing this. This is a key piece of the counterinsurgency field manual. We actually had this as an emphasis, that what you're trying to create always is an army, an organization, a unit that is focused on learning, that it's a learning organization, constantly going through that cycle, and that you facilitate this with formal processes. And so we had, I think it was every month all of the different elements had to come in and tell me what it was that they'd identified of significance that they were sending back to their respective home station organizations and that we were sharing in theater.

This is not just when you're at war. In fact, when I was privileged to be the commander of the Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth where you wear a number of other hats which give you considerable

responsibilities for all the combat and combat support schools and centers and courses and so forth for all of the commissioned, non-commissioned, and warrant officer training and education, and for the scenarios at the Combat Training Centers and direct oversight of the Center for Army Lessons Learned, the Center for Doctrine, the Army Center for Leadership, and so on.

What we identified there was the criticality of taking lessons that were identified, again not yet learned, but identified on the battlefield or at the training centers or wherever, and then through a formal process look at the changes needed in what were termed the DOTLUMS, doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leader development, facilities, personnel, and so forth. And so you looked at each one of these key areas, and this is again in the Army hierarchy, to determine what changes were needed. Did we need a change to a field manual or an entirely new field manual, which of course is—an example of which would be the counterinsurgency field manual that we produced during that fifteen month period that I was the commander of the Combined Arms Center. Are there organizational changes that need to be made, structures that need to be modified? How should we modify our collective training, individual training? What about leader development, again, all of these different commissioned, non-commissioned, and warrant officer courses? How do they need to be tweaked or perhaps overhauled, as was the case in fact in many respects, that we had to make real changes to what it was that we were teaching at these different courses, so that captains at the field artillery school were not just prepared to do big artillery missions and massing of battalions and all the rest of that as we used to prepare to do during the Cold War, but perhaps for other tasks that field artillery battalions were having to do, where a single battery would be operating off by itself supporting a battalion or smaller in some cases in Afghanistan. Where it might end up doing route security, or even be responsible for an area of operations, or detainee affairs of all things. Whatever it was that we were actually going to actually require these units to do, these were topics that obviously should be part of the instruction of the commissioned and non-commissioned and warrant officers of that particular branch at the branch schools. So you work very formally through this and that's very necessary. This can't just be ad hoc, it just can't be something that happens intuitively, it's something that has to be addressed explicitly and formally, and that's the way we sought to do it in the Army, and I'm sure in each of the services of the U.S. military, but also when we were in Iraq and in Afghanistan there were, again, formal processes that we went through to make sure that we not only focused on what the lessons were that were identified but how we needed to operationalize them by modifying elements of what it is we were doing.

Q: In either Iraq or Afghanistan, could you give us an example of an important big idea which was revised?

Well, I'll give you an example of one that was created. In Iraq, I'd not focused a great deal on detainee operations in my previous assignments as the division commander or the commander of the Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq, the train and equip mission. But now, all of a sudden, I realized that we've got, I think I started perhaps with somewhere short of 20,000 detainees and it went to twenty seven or twenty eight thousand during my time as commander of the Multi-National Force during the surge. And I realized that we had to completely overhaul what we were doing. We had a riot one night early on in my time in command where there were some 10,000 detainees rioting. And there's no fence in the world that can stop 10,000 detainees if they all work together. And we ended up

mustering every single person at that particular camp, in riot control gear, with the fire engines and everything else we could. Every non-lethal munition we had, shot thousands of rubber bullets that evening, before finally getting it under control. And I realized something was seriously wrong.

The new detainee joint task force commander had just taken over, and we underwent a very systematic assessment and we came up with a number of big ideas for detainee operations. The first of which, by the way, was that again we're not releasing any more detainees until we get it under control and we have a rehabilitation process. But the second was that we can't do that until we've identified who the extremists are, the true hardcore extremist leaders are, and getting them out of these detainee facilities—and keep in mind, these may be as many as 800 people in an enclosure, humane, well-fed, well looked after, but still very large, and you have to go in without a weapon, because if you go in with a weapon a detainee will seize it and kill your guards or precipitate some other kind of violence. So this was called carrying out counterinsurgency inside the wire. It's very similar to what you do outside the wire in the neighborhood. You've got to identify the bad guys, you've got to figure out how to kill or capture or remove them from the general population and put them somewhere safe, and we had to do that in the detainee operations affairs as well. And again, not something that I thought would be a very significant part of my effort. I thought we'd be focused on securing the people, reconciliation, going after the irreconcilables, but this was actually probably one of the top five. Because ultimately we had to figure out how to rehabilitate these individuals, release them, but with a much reduced recidivism rate. And so we developed new big ideas there, did refine those over time, developed a review process and so forth, and we developed the rehabilitation programs and then began implementing them and experimented with them and tweaked them, obviously, again, as a learning organization should seek to do.

CLIP 7 – LEADERSHIP

Q: As a strategic leader, what was your general approach to leadership?

Well I often got asked, when I was in uniform and indeed when I was Director of the CIA, "What's your leadership style, General?" And I would respond by saying that I'll tell you what my leadership style is if you'll tell me what style is required to bring the best out in each of those who reports directly to me and in the organization collectively. Because I think you need to have a variety of different leadership styles. I think they have to evolve over the years. That what works as a romping, stomping airborne infantry platoon leader may not be the same leadership style that is particularly inspirational when you're leading a large organization that now includes women and men and young and old of a variety of backgrounds, ethnic groups, sectarian preferences, and everything else. So, again, one has to have a variety of leadership styles. You might need a pat on the back once a year, I might need a pat on the back once an hour. And whatever it is that's required to bring the best out of each individual, to help each individual be all that he or she can be, that's what you're trying to achieve as a leader and that's the style that you're trying to employ as you are leading an organization at any level, but certainly at the strategic level in particular.

Q: As a leader, are there, as you have said, "two Petraeuses"?

Well, it's interesting, because different people have said that Petraeus was like this and others said gosh, no, he was like that, and the truth was I could be both. One was somebody who'd drill details with the best of them, just drive a policy, really almost impose your will on an organization if it's not clear that that organization is getting it. And you have to do some of that. There have to be areas— there inevitably will be areas where folks aren't completely getting it, where it's not clear that they've absolutely recognized the imperative of taking certain actions with the alacrity that's called for in a situation, and in those cases you are going to dig deeper and deeper and deeper. And we did this, for example, in great detail into the Iraqi security force effort, into certain of the other activities that we undertook, again to get basic services going again in Iraq, I realized the only way to get people to focus on this is to have metrics for it, and so we created metrics. Again, for the amount of electricity produced on a given day, and then you figure out how you can do that better. Oil production, pipelines, bridges blown up, you name it. You focus on the details and people realize that you're not going to stop that and, you know, if they ever want to get you off their back that they're going to have to fix what it is. I mean, there was one that became a metaphor for this, it was called Tower 57. And I kept emphasizing, initially gently, suggestively, that, you know, we really needed to get these towers back up and there was this particularly important one south of Baghdad, Tower 57. And this kept on, and Tower 57 was still on its side, and I'd fly over it every now and then when we were transiting that area, and after a while I started deliberately going over it. And finally, ultimately, in one of the daily battlefield update and analyses, I had a picture of Tower 57, which I'd taken myself and we'd made a powerpoint slide of it. And we said, you know, if I don't see the division commander on the top of Tower 57 in the next photo then we may have to consider some leadership changes here. He was actually a terrific division commander, and we'd asked an enormous amount of him, but he actually sent me an e-mail that night that said "Hey sir, got it. Tower 57. Wilco." Will comply.

On the other hand, there's another Petraeus. And this is a guy who develops confidence in key individuals and who says "Hey look, I'm going to chart the left and right limits for this azimuth, I want you to get on down the road, you just move out. Exercise initiative." Again, in the absence of guidance or orders, figure out what they should have been and execute aggressively. And you know, if you have a chance, come up on the net and tell me how you're doing. If you don't, don't worry about it, I'll come out and see how you're doing. But as long as you're between those left and right limits, just keep driving on. Don't wait. Just exercise initiative. And so that—trying to promote, again, a culture which not only promotes but even rewards the exercise of initiative is very, very important, particularly in a counterinsurgency effort which is all about small unit activities operationalizing big ideas in the actions that they're taking outside the wire under Kevlar and body armor on a daily basis. And I'd even try to cut through the chain of command to just get a sense for what was going on. I would give my e-mail address to company commanders with whom I met and challenge them. I'd say, if you are ever so frustrated with something—this is about life and death. You have a responsibility to your young men and women who are fighting to e-mail me. You might info everybody in the chain of command and make sure that's done appropriately, but if it's something on which there's not being action taken in accordance with what you think is right, you owe it to your troopers to get that to me. I'd even, I'd take junior officers running. There were two days a week when we would try to fence time off to go for a run around this big compound in which we had our hooch. So we'd get majors over, company commanders, and one

time a major told me, he said “Hey sir, you know we’ve got this particular development in our area, this one bad guy has already—all of a sudden decided that he wants to oppose Al Qaeda and he wants our support but folks are really nervous about it.” And on the spot I said, “You support him, you get after it, I’ll take care of the chain of command between you and me and the Iraqi leadership. But you go back, tell your battalion commander, ‘Don’t let our bureaucracy stand in the way of supporting this individual.’ You put him in the backs of your tracked vehicles, your fighting vehicles, you give him ammunition, you give him supplies, but help him, and again, I’ll make sure--I’ve got your back.”

Q: How should the U.S. train its officers to become effective strategic leaders?

Well, I think again if you go back to the tasks of strategic leaders, of developing big ideas, communicating them, overseeing their implementation, and determining how they need to be refined, changed, overhauled, if you work your way through that I think that you see that you want to develop a certain intellectual inquiry, an ability to communicate in writing and verbally, to be able to think through complex issues, to bring people into this, to engage them, to inspire them, to guide them in a process of developing the right approach, the right big ideas, the right strategy. Help them understand the kinds of structures that need to be employed to oversee the implementation of the big ideas, to appreciate the need for a personal battle rhythm, an organizational battle rhythm, and so forth. The need to see it for yourself on the ground, but also to not just spend all day out there because, again, the strategic leader has to perform a lot of other tasks that may not be as much fun, but have to do with care and feeding of a coalition, of one’s political as well as military hierarchy, congressional leaders, host nation leaders, populations at home, populations in the host nation, and on and on and on. So what is it that does create that kind of individual? And certainly it is certain types of education over the years. Obviously, that you must be grounded as a military professional, must understand that, that’s job one. If an individual can’t oversee a combat operation, then the fact that he or she may be a wonderfully congenial, diplomatic, thoughtful individual is, is irrelevant. The basics must be present. But then these other elements must be present as well. And I think we want to give developing leaders what you might term “out of your intellectual comfort zone” experiences. They should be encouraged to travel, to see other cultures, to experience individuals who have a different perspective, who come at the world from a different vantage point, who see reality through a different prism, if you will. For me graduate school, civilian graduate school, was a hugely developing experience. It not only improved, I’d like to think, the ability to communicate, to analyze, to assess, to write, to speak, it also imparted a rigor in some of the analytical processes that are necessary. It helped me develop knowledge of techniques, of some of those associated with operations research systems analysis, regression analysis, all these tools, statistical analysis, a basic knowledge of economics and political philosophy which, of all things, turned out to be very useful as we were seeking the way forward in the early days in Iraq. But above all, again, a sense of awareness that there are seriously bright people out there that don’t see the world the same way we do, and why they don’t, why they may not, why they may have different assumptions about everything, starting with the so-called state of nature, to use a Hobbesian term. This, I think, is very, very important. And again, as I said, it comes back to these developing experiences, which include education, which certainly include the assignments, professional assignments. Again, one has to be grounded in the unit tactics and operations, has to be a competent commander at all the levels leading up to the

strategic level, but ideally has had a wider aperture as well, again has had some of these other experiences, has had the vantage point assignments that I was privileged to have—aide to a service chief, military assistant to the NATO commander, executive officer for the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and so forth. I mean these are very, very wonderful development experiences and professional experiences. So I think all of that together is what produces somebody, I think, who can perform these four very important tasks that I've outlined and do it—do them well.

CLIP 8 - EPILOGUE

Q: As you cast your mind over the entire canvas of your experience in strategic command in Iraq and Afghanistan, what's the memory that stands out the most?

I remember that occasionally at night when we'd have a little bit of spare time, I'd actually just take the security chief, only him, and I'd say, "Let's go for a walk." And we had this big huge compound, you know, a couple miles, many miles around, actually. And we'd just go out walking and I'd be thinking, frankly, and he'd be walking along with me. Sometimes we'd talk, sometimes we wouldn't. He'd been with me for quite a long time at that point, and stayed with me and did the Iraq—or the Afghanistan tour as well. And, you know, once I remember he said, you know, "Hey sir, what's it like to be the commander of the surge in Iraq?" And by this time it was succeeding, everybody recognized it was succeeding. I think even those who were the surge critics conceded that levels of violence were down by 80% or whatever it was. There was a real prospect for conducting transition, for reducing our forces without the situation turning south again and so forth. So it was sustainable progress at that time, at least. And he said, "What's this like? I mean what's—how would you describe it?" And I said, "You know, it's the most unbelievable, most extraordinary experience you can imagine on a good day, but there aren't many good days." A good day, in truth, was a day defined by no casualties, no serious wounded, no deaths. A day where there were elements of progress in various of the lines of effort, not just military, but the civil ones as well. A day where you were seeing demonstrable achievements. And, again, in that kind of endeavor there are very, very few good days.

Q: What kind of pressure were you under as a strategic commander?

Well, leading an endeavor like the surge in Iraq in particular involved a considerable amount of pressure. You are overseeing an operation in which your forces, your host nation colleagues' forces, civilians, are taking terrible casualties. And in my experience, that kind of bad news, news of those lost and seriously wounded, doesn't get easier to take. In fact, I've said over time that there's a vessel, each of us is a vessel, it has holes in the bottom, and bad news is poured in the top. And the worst of bad news is reports of casualties, and the bottom only drains so fast. And you have to keep your eye out for leaders, in fact, whose vessel may be overflowing. And a couple of times over those years we had to move an entire unit or change individual leaders or staff officers. The pressure is enormous. The pressure is—I don't know how to express it. There's one person, at the end of the day, who really is seen by everyone as being in charge. That doesn't mean the ambassador is certainly not feeling those same pressures, but if it's a military operation at its heart, if security is the bedrock, the foundation for all other progress, it's the military commander, I think, that ends up feeling an extraordinary amount of responsibility and

accountability. It can wear at an individual. It can, you know, you can have sleepless nights. You can have nights where you won't sleep at all except with the aid of Ambien or some other drug or what have you. This is tough, it's very, very hard and I think you have to have a degree of resilience, of fortitude, internal fortitude, sheer determination.

I took great strength, actually, from reading about General Grant during the Civil War. Someone gave me the book by Bruce Catton, *Grant Takes Command*. And I'm not trying to liken the job of command of Multi-National Force-Iraq to that of leading the Union forces in the U.S. Civil War, but some of those pressures were the same. And Grant responded to those with enormous determination and fortitude and quiet confidence. Disregarding even Sherman's objections to the campaign that he pursued at Vicksburg, which was so bold and audacious that others counseled against it, questioned it. Where he hits Lee finally when he's moved to the East and he writes to Lincoln and says, "I intend to fight it out all summer on this line if that's what it takes." That is, again, just extraordinary determination. And I think the individual in command of that kind of endeavor, or an endeavor like I was privileged to lead in Iraq and indeed in Afghanistan, you've got to steel yourself for that, you've got to be ready for it, you have to be capable of handling it. You have to recognize the grinding experience that it is going to be and you have to remain steadfast in the performance of it. There are some things you can do. We did try to fence time a couple of days a week for example where I could actually go for a run with the members of the team. I did try to work out each morning before going in for the morning battlefield update and analysis, even though I might be reading the intelligence book from the night before as I was peddling the stationary bike, so you're constantly multitasking. I tried to read a few pages of *Grant Takes Command* or some other book before I fell asleep, often with the books falling to the floor. So you try to have some of that, but at the end of the day this is a seven day a week, twenty four hour a day exercise. And the challenges of it should not be minimized, they can't be, and you have to be ready for that, you have to be equal to that, and you have to stay strong in the face of all the pressures that are brought to bear.

You know, there's no greater privilege than leading America's sons and daughters, the sons and daughters of coalition countries, interacting with host nation forces, these are extraordinary privileges, extraordinary responsibilities. They add rocks to your rucksack, to be sure. I wrote more letters of condolence to those at home than probably any other commander over the years in Iraq. We had the toughest of the casualties during the years of the surge. And so this responsibility, this awareness, of this great privilege is always in the back of your mind. And it is indeed yet another of the elements that produces some degree of pressure, as you are discharging the awesome responsibility that is command, especially the awesome responsibility of command in combat.

Q: Do you have any advice for future leaders?

You know, there are people over the years that said Petraeus was lucky. He got a break here and there and gosh he gets thrust into this situation and the country's committed and he's lucky and fortunate enough to be in that position. And there's a lot to that. Again, life is about luck and timing, about being at a key position at a key time. And you know, there but for a year or two this way or the other, someone else would have taken the call. There's a saying by a Roman philosopher that luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity. And I'd like to think that I was prepared, that I had

worked assiduously, hard, academically, militarily, physically, whatever it may be, over the years to be ready if the call came. You know, there was a saying, Napoleon had that saying that every soldier has a marshal's baton in his field pack. And one time as a young lieutenant I jokingly went out looking to buy a marshal's baton at Aldershot, as a matter of fact. We were there with a parachute regiment. And the man in the store said, "Well jeez we're fresh out of those right now, but you know how about a swagger stick?" And so I actually had a swagger stick, and it was a metaphorical image to me. I actually, I tied it to my rucksack frame and I left it there for years. And it—every time I looked at it, I remembered that, you know, each of us needs to be ready when that call comes. And, you know, I really did devote decades to being prepared, to being as ready as I possibly could be, to having studied, practiced, examined, and so forth what might be necessary in a particularly difficult challenge, and I'd like to think that that hard work and study and work and so forth did indeed pay off, to some degree at least, when opportunity knocked and called for that preparation. That was luck, but it also was an awful lot of hard work and an extraordinary amount of preparation over the years. And so, for those who are perhaps looking at this video, for those that metaphorically have that marshal's baton in their own rucksack, I say drive on. I say—I encourage you. I push you, frankly, to do everything that you can in your studies, in your assignments, in all of your activities, many of which I hope will take you out of your intellectual comfort zone so that you too can be ready if opportunity comes your way.