



*Adjunct Professor of International Affairs*

November 4, 2008

**MEMORANDUM FOR:** Colonel Michael Meese  
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**CC:** Colonel Cindy Jebb  
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**SUBJECT:** After Action Report—General Barry R. McCaffrey USA (Ret)  
**VISIT IRAQ AND KUWAIT 31 OCTOBER – 6 NOVEMBER 2008**

**1. PURPOSE:** This memo provides feedback on my strategic and operational assessment of current security operations in Iraq. Look forward to providing lectures to faculty and cadet national security seminars.

Will provide follow-on comprehensive report with attachments of relevant unclassified data and graphs documenting the current counter-insurgency situation in Iraq.

**2. SOURCES:**

**A.) US MILITARY:**

- 1.) **General Raymond Odierno, Commanding General Multi-National Forces-Iraq (CG, MNF-I).** One-on-one working lunch. MNF-I overview and briefings. One-on-one outbrief.
- 2.) **LTG Lloyd Austin, Commanding General, Multi-National Corps-Iraq (MNC-I).** MNC-I Operations & Intelligence overview. Working breakfast including:
  - **MG Mike Ferriter, DCG-O.**
  - **BG Keith Walker, Commanding General, Iraq Advisor Group.**
  - **BG (P) Dan Allyn, Chief of Staff Multi-National Corps-Iraq**
  - **COL Jim Phelps, C2**
  - **COL Dave McBride, FUOPS**
  - **COL Mike Culpepper, C5**
  - **MAJ Kevin McAninch, C2 Plans**
  - **MAJ Kevin Brown, C3 Plans**
- 3.) **LTG Frank Helmick, Commanding General, Multi-National Security Transition Command -Iraq (MNSTC-I).** MNSTC-I program overview.

- 4.) **Working dinner:**
  - GEN Ray Odierno, CG MNF-I.
  - LTG Lloyd Austin, CG MNC-I.
  - LTG Frank Helmick, CG MNSTC-I.
  - GEN (Ret.) Buck Kernan. (Mentor).
- 5.) **MG Guy Swan, CJ-3 Director.** Briefing on current and future operations.
- 6.) **RADM Davis Buss. MNF-I CJ-5.** Working breakfast. Discussion -- future plans.
- 7.) **BG David Perkins. CJ-9.** MNF-I Media Operations Center briefing. **RADM Driscoll** (outgoing CJ9) and **LTC Amy Hannah.**
- 8.) **MG Jeffery Hammond. Commanding General, Multi-National Division-Baghdad (MND-B).** MND-B overview and working dinner. **BG Robin Swan, DCG** and **BG William Grimsley, DCG-O,** plus senior staff.
- 9.) **MG Charles Anderson. Deputy Commanding General, United States Army Central (USARCENT) Camp Arifjan. (Kuwait).** Working Breakfast.
  - **BG Kevin Wendel. Director of Operational Maneuver, US Army Central.**
  - **BG John Wharton. Deputy Commanding General, US Army Field Support Command. Army Materiel Command-Southwest Asia/G-4.**
  - **BG Phillip McGhee. Director of Resource Management, US Army Central.**
  - **RDML Mark Heinrich. Director, CENTCOM Deployment & Distribution Operations Center.**
- 10.) **Battlefield Update 3<sup>rd</sup> Army - CFLCC. (Kuwait).** Morning Briefing. CENTCOM Operations.
- 11.) **MG Mike Oates. Commanding General, MND-C/10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division.** One-on-one discussions.
- 12.) **MND-C/10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division Battle staff update.** Key participants:
  - **COL Joe Dichiard. Division Chief of Staff.**
  - **COL Jay Flowers, G3.**
  - **COL Glenn Goldman, FSCOORD.**
  - **LTC Cris Forbes, G5.**
  - **LTC Jake Conway, G2.**
- 13.) **Briefing Gulf Regional Division. US Army Corps of Engineers. MG Michael Eyre, Commanding General. Iraqi Reconstruction and Energy Fusion plan.**
  - **Mr. Michael Enschede, Director of Programs.**
  - **Brigadier Hamish McNinch, Commander, Energy Fusion Cell (UK-Scot).**
- 14.) **Battlefield Circulation Mosul, Iraq (with LTG Lloyd Austin).**
  - **MG Mark Hertling. Commander MND-N & 1AD Division Commander.**
  - **BG Tony Thomas. MND-N ADC.**
  - **LTG, Iraqi Army -- Ninewa Operations Command CG.**
  - **COL Mike Bills, 3<sup>rd</sup> ACR Commander.**
  - **LTC Keith Barclay. 3/3<sup>rd</sup> ACR Squadron Commander.**
- 15.) **BG Joe Carvalho. Multi-National Force-Iraq Surgeon.** Escort.

- 16.) **BG Simeon Trombitas. Commanding General, Iraq National Counter-Terrorism Training (INCTT).** Visit Iraqi Counter-Terrorism Force Headquarters.
- 17.) **COL Phil Battaglia. Commander, 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade Combat Team, 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division, Asmara, Iraq.** BDE staff briefing – Security on the Iranian Frontier.
- 18.) **Baghdad-area Battalion Commanders.** Working dinner:
  - **LTC Kris Kramarich. 44<sup>th</sup> Signal Battalion Commander.**
  - **LTC William Wanovich. TF Dragon Special Troops Battalion Commander.**
  - **LTC Joe McLamb. 1-502<sup>nd</sup>, 2/101 Battalion Commander.**
  - **LTC Frank Curtis. 432<sup>nd</sup> CA Battalion Commander.**
  - **LTC Ken Royar. 4<sup>th</sup> Squadron, 3<sup>rd</sup> ACR Battalion Commander.**
  - **LTC John Hashem. PSYOP Task Force Battalion Commander.**
- 19.) **Visit LTC Ed Bohnemann, Commander 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division and CSM George Zamudio.** (I served with 2-7<sup>th</sup> Cav Vietnam '68-'69).
- 20.) **Visit Karbala. LTC Kenny Parks, Iraq Army Military Transition Team.**
- 21.) **Visit Special Forces Detachment Hilla. Iraqi Police SWAT Force.**
- 22.) **Visit JSS Sadr City (The Battle to take Sadr City):**
  - **COL John Hard, BCT Commander.**
  - **COL, IA Brigade Commander.**
  - **LTC Brian Eifer, 1-6 Infantry Battalion Commander.**
  - **CSM Dooley, BCT.**
- 23.) **LTC (P) Greg Salomon, MNC-I CIG Escort Officer.**
- 24.) **Captain Seth Bodnar. MNF-C Special Issues Group.** (Rhodes Scholar and former West Point student). One-on-one discussions.

**B.) US EMBASSY COUNTRY TEAM:**

- 1.) **Ambassador Ryan Crocker, US Ambassador to Iraq.** One-on-one hour long meeting.
- 2.) **Ambassador Pat Butenis. Deputy Chief of Mission.** One-on-one diplomatic assessment.
- 3.) **Ambassador Marc Wall. Council on Economic Transition in Iraq (CETI) Coordinator.** Office call.
- 4.) **Briefing Senior Intelligence Officer. OGA.**
- 5.) **Ambassador Christopher Norman Russell Prentice. British Ambassador to Iraq.** One-on-one briefing followed by working lunch with UK Embassy Team.
- 6.) **Dr. Megan O'Sullivan. Special Counselor.** (5 years in Iraq). One-on-one discussions.
- 7.) **Mr. Christopher Crowley. USAID Director.** Update on National Reconstruction.
- 8.) **Mr. Mike Dodman. Economic Counselor.** Update on Iraq's economic situation.

- 9.) **US Embassy Country Team Brief: Update on Iraq**
  - **Ruth Hall. Deputy Economic Counselor.**
  - **Karen Aguilar. Transition Assistance Office Director.**
  - **Phyllis Powers. Provincial Affairs.**
  - **Phillip Lynch. Rule of Law Coordinator.**
  - **Dundas McCullough. International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Director.**
  - **Brian Shukan. Deputy Political Counselor.**
  - **Michael Corbin. Political-Military Minister Counselor.**
  - **MG Guy Swan. Director CJ-3.**
  - **BG David Perkins. Director CJ-9.**
- 10.) **Visit Karbala PRT. PRT Leader, Mr. Don Cook.**
  - **COL Bill Stroud. Deputy PRT. (CMOC Commander).**
- 11.) **Briefing PRT, Amarah. Mr. Dan Foote, State Department PRT Leader.**

**C.) IRAQI OFFICIALS AND MILITARY LEADERS:**

- 1.) **Minister Jawad Karim al Bolani. Minister of Interior.** Hour discussion with Minister and LTG Frank Helmick on Iraqi security and political situation.
- 2.) **LTG Taleb Al-Kenani, Iraqi Counter Terrorism Bureau Director.** Office call and briefing.
- 3.) **MG -- 10<sup>th</sup> IA Commander and MG -- Police BDE Commander.** BDE overview briefing, ISF meeting and discussion. Border Forces briefing.
- 4.) **Discussion and working lunch:**
  - **Iraqi General, Commander Army Brigade, Iranian Frontier.**
  - **Iraqi General, Commander National Police Brigade.**
  - **Iraqi General, Commander Border Patrol Brigade.**
- 5.) **Visit Iraqi Police General -- Regional Police Training Center.**

**3. THE BOTTOM LINE:**

- a. The United States is now clearly in the end game in Iraq to successfully achieve what should be our principle objectives:
  - The withdrawal of the majority of our US ground combat forces in Iraq in the coming 36 months.
  - Leaving behind an operative civil state and effective Iraqi security forces.
  - An Iraqi state which is not in open civil war among the Shia, the Sunnis, and the Kurds.
  - And an Iraqi nation which is not at war with its six neighboring states.
- b. The security situation is clearly still subject to sudden outrage at any moment by Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) or to degradation because of provocative behavior by the Maliki government. However, the bottom line is a dramatic and growing momentum for economic and security stability which is unlikely to be reversible. I would not characterize the situation as fragile. It is just beyond the tipping point.
  - Daily attacks hit a high of 180+ in July of 2007--- they are now down to 20+ per day.

- Civilian deaths dropped from 3700 per month in Dec 2006 --- to 400 + in October 2008.
  - US military deaths dropped from 110 in May of 2007---to 10 in October 2008.
  - Iraqi Security Forces KIA dropped from 310 in June 2007--- to 50 in October 2008.)
- c. The genius of the leadership team of Ambassador Ryan Crocker, General Dave Petraeus, and Secretary of Defense Bob Gates has turned around the situation from a bloody disaster under the leadership of Secretary Rumsfeld to a growing situation of security. Ambassador Crocker will be very, very difficult to replace in February 2009. We are fortunate that General Ray Odierno has stepped in to take Joint command of MNF-I. He is very experienced, knows all the players and has sophisticated situational awareness. The Iraqis trust him enormously--- they refer to him as the “big man with the quiet voice.”

#### 4. THE CONTEXT:

- a. It is unarguable that the past 18 months have witnessed a dramatic, positive change in the Iraqi internal security situation. Iraqi and Coalition Security Force casualties in a comparative sense are now at rock bottom. Ethnic strife between the Shia and the Sunnis has all but stopped. The Shia militias have in general been neutralized--- and the Sunni insurgents bought out by the Sons of Iraq Program. Indirect fire attacks (mortars and rockets), IED explosions, High Profile Attacks (suicide car bomb explosions) have all plummeted in the past year. An enormous amount of insurgent war material has been taken out of the battle as 8097 caches were found and cleared in 2008 by Iraqi and US security forces.
- b. The lawless disintegration of the state at province and municipal level which was apparent on my earlier visits has now largely abated as the Iraqi National Police (306,000 strong with eight National Police Brigades) have regained control of conflict areas in Basra, Sadr City, DIALYA Province, Anbar Province, and parts of Mosul. The Iraqi Army has gained enormous numbers (211,000 current manpower organized in 169 battalions ---with a target growth of an additional 77,000 personnel), equipment capabilities (US small arms, a substantial increase in US armored HUMWV's, pending receipt of 240+ US M1 Tanks), and new leadership who are prepared to fight and die to keep Iraq together.
- c. Iranian intervention is relentless, lethal, and implacably hostile to US interests--- but has to a great extent alienated the southern Iraqi Shia and been largely ineffective. There is a steadily growing presence of Iraqi Border Security Forces and US and British border screening operations.
- d. Turkey and the semi-independent Kurdish north (KRG) have developed enormously important and profitable mutual economic ties. Oil is now flowing north. There is a huge amount of cross-border truck and rail traffic. There are commercial, civil aviation flights into Irbil. US-Turkish military cooperation has reduced tensions and the impetus for Turkish military ground intervention. The Kurds have a lot to lose from hostility with the Turks and have moderated their behavior toward their powerful northern neighbor.
- e. The Maliki government remains largely dysfunctional in its ability to deliver services to the population (jobs, electricity, clean water, infrastructure repair, oil production, budget expenditure, etc). The Prime Minister has little political support from any party to include DAWA. He has attempted an end run around the parties by attempting to create (and fund) so-called Tribal Councils as a counter-power with loyalty to the central government. Most factions begrudge his victories in subduing the rebellious Sadr forces, although the Sunnis and the Kurds favorably regard his willingness to take on his own ethnic group.
- Mr. Maliki clearly has matured and gained stature as a political leader since he assumed his very dangerous and complex leadership responsibilities.
  - The Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of the Interior now have moderate, comparatively apolitical, and increasingly competent senior leadership which seems dedicated to holding together the state as a multi-

ethnic and nationalistic entity. (A year ago the Iraqi Interior Ministry and the National Police were murderous Shia militias in the uniform of the state.)

- The Sons of Iraq Movement has absorbed more than 100,000 Sunnis insurgent fighters and brought them into a neighborhood watch program which has successfully confronted the remnants of the insurgency. These fighters must be integrated into the Iraqi Security Forces (20%) or given jobs. If they are kept in the cold and left unemployed...they will turn on the state and the insurgency will re-bloom.
  - It is almost the case that an Iraqi government in the classic sense does not yet exist. The glue that holds Iraq together is the US Armed Forces, the US Embassy Team, tribal leadership, and the Iraqi Army.
  - We should have a sense of empathy for these Iraqi politicians. They have survived a poisonous Saddam regime and a culture of intrigue and murder from every side. Reading their personal bios one is struck that nearly all of them have survived multiple assassination attempts. The majority have had family and political supporters murdered in brutal fashion. And yet, they are still seeking leadership power ---instead of grabbing some loot and running for Amman, Damascus, Tehran, or Paris.
- f. The political trajectory of Iraq is headed toward provincial elections in January 2009, district elections mid-year 2009, and national elections around December 2009. The struggle for power and resources seems to have increasingly moved to political warfare—instead of the battlefield of the streets. Some of my interlocutors insisted that a re-opening of the murderous post-Samarra Shia-Sunni ethnic strife simply will not happen.

## **5. HOW SUCCESS IN IRAQ COULD TURN TO COLLAPSE:**

- a. If the Iraqi politicians in the Council of Representatives and the Executive branch cannot generate the political courage and wisdom to legitimize and agree on a “Status of Forces Agreement” and the follow-on “Strategic Framework Agreement” ---then the entire enterprise may yet unravel beginning at midnight on the 31st of December when the UN Resolution authorizing our military presence in Iraq expires. Only the Kurds now strongly and openly support the SOFA. This would be a shameful outcome which would return our US military units to their base areas and begin a unilateral withdrawal and the cessation of formal US support for the Iraqi government. The SOFA Agreement probably will not fail, but the sense of irresponsibility and political opportunism among the contending factions is hard to understand. They are holding a gun to their own head.
- b. The Iranians are following a course of action that is illogical for their own security interests. They have significant covert resources in Iraq and maintain a hostile interventionist political stance. They are developing nuclear weapons and will achieve their purpose within five years. They have developed a serious naval-missile-air power capability to close the Persian Gulf and interdict the flow of oil. This Iranian action would prompt almost certain international crisis and a probable massive US air and naval attack on their armed forces and means of production. (My own view of the probable outcome).
- c. The war waiting in the wings is the “War of the Kurds and the Arabs.” Mosul, Kirkuk, and the expansive and aggressive Kurdish line-of-demarcation is a kerosene pit waiting for a spark. The Turks are prepared to pounce and subdue a separatist Kurdish state fueled and resourced by the massive oil potential of the Kirkuk basin. The Sunnis (20% of the population) see themselves as isolated and impoverished in the western deserts if separated from the petroleum of the Kurdish north and the Shia south. Mosul -- the home of the Saddam General Officer Corps is now dominated by the Kurds. Much of the western part of Mosul (Route Tampa) looks like Beirut on a bad day in the 80’s ---and is a study in ethnic hatred and struggle among the Turkic, Kurdish, and Arab populations. Only the moderation of a historically immoderate group of Kurdish and Arab politicians ---and a US diplomatic resolve to defer decisions on all critical political questions in the north--- can prevent all out war.
- d. Precipitous US military withdrawal before the Iraqis have developed a fully functional security presence among all eighteen provinces would also imperil the enterprise. The Iraqis do not have a functional Air Force (lift, gunships, transportation, and close air support). They do not have a Navy and Marine Corps yet capable of

protecting their Gulf transportation and petroleum infrastructure. Their Border Security Forces are still anemic. **The Iraqi Armed Forces in general lack adequate armor, artillery, maintenance, logistics, medical, and communications to function in counter-insurgency operations or border defense without US support.** Their military officer corps is immensely better than a year ago--- but the bench is thin. The young officers at company and battalion level show great promise and courage. The legacy of the Saddam nightmare weighs heavily on the culture of the more senior officers. Finally, the confidence of the Iraqi combat force is still dependant on US mentoring and backup. Their officers are very explicit on this point---THE IRAQI SECURITY FORCES DO NOT WANT THE US COMBAT UNITS TO LEAVE---YET.

## 6. THE ECONOMY:

The economy has improved immeasurably in the past year. The markets are open. The roads are again viable. Oil and electricity is no longer routinely sabotaged by the insurgents and criminals. Cell phone communications, satellite TV, and radio are all operating. Clean water is increasingly available despite a long term severe drought. Some investment dollars are flowing into the country. (The Kurdish north has enormous economic growth.) Inflation has decreased to a 10% annual basis from 20% in 2007 and 60% in 2006. The monthly food welfare program which goes to every Iraqi citizen is still functioning. Iraqis although impoverished are not malnourished. The stock exchange is working. The Central Bank works and is independent. The Central Bank Governor is honest and technically competent. Iraq is largely compliant with the IMF--- and the recent positive report from the Paris Club may bring increasing debt relief to their finances.

### *However:*

- Business enterprises to include electricity and oil are still largely (80%) state owned and lethargic--- not entrepreneurial. Ministries don't talk or communicate by email---they send letters.
- Enterprises are run with badly maintained, outmoded equipment. There is a severe lack of investment capital.
- Agriculture (mostly in private hands) is still grossly underfunded and lacks fertilizer and adequate pest control. The agro distribution system is state run. The irrigation system still suffers from leaks and lack of pumps caused by the neglect of constant warfare. Date farming which was a source of Iraqi national pride has been mostly destroyed since the Iran-Iraq War.
- Unemployment is 20% and under-employment is probably 60%.
- The financial system is immature. This is still mostly a cash based society.
- The worst problem facing the economy is the "brain drain" of both intellectuals and experienced managerial talent which has either fled the country because of the danger and chaos of the past years--- or been murdered while trying to rebuild Iraq.

## 7. THE US ARMED FORCES:

- a. General Odierno commands 52 US brigade equivalents in Iraq with 140,000+ troops. (15 combat arms brigades and two Special Operations equivalents). There are two allied brigades left --one UK and one ROK. Both allied brigades are leaving. The other allies are all also essentially withdrawing.
- b. MNF-I has the challenge of a phased retrograde operation in the coming 36 months while maintaining a balanced US force protection capability. We must successfully back haul enormous tonnages of logistics material, vehicles, ammunition, and equipment. We must turn over hundreds of US installations and fighting/patrolling positions. During this retrograde we must finish building the Iraqi Security Forces with a partnership and mentoring program among US and Iraqi units.

- c. We should assume that the Iraqi government will eventually ask us to stay beyond 2011 with a residual force of trainers, counter-terrorist capabilities, logistics, and air power. (My estimate---perhaps a force of 20,000 to 40,000 troops).
- d. The courage and effectiveness of US combat units are remarkable and inspirational. We have sustained serious US casualty rates. (4000+ killed) Many of the leaders are on their third or fourth combat deployments. Fortunately, it is my impression that the most effective Captains of the combat forces are staying with us. We are having greater challenges keeping the mid-career NCOs' at grade E-6. However, the bottom line is that the operational effectiveness of these Joint US Forces is simply unbelievable. Their leadership at company command and battalion command is powerful. (Both of the battalions that I visited in the field were commanded by Lt Colonels on their third combat tour...both told me that every one of their company commanders were on their third combat tour.)
- e. Finally of note--- the senior leadership at general officer and brigade command is remarkable. They are visible to their troops and share the personal risk of the battlefield. (This is in marked contrast to the stacked helicopters of the Vietnam War commanders.) General Odierno has personally been under direct small arms fire and IED attack during his three combat tours at Division, Corps, and now theater command. LTG Lloyd Austin nearly got nailed by direct machine gun fire while directing forward operations during the recent battle to control SADR City in Baghdad. LTG Frank Helmick and BG Tony Thomas both recently survived an IED attack of an 800 lb suicide vehicle bomb which totally destroyed their MRAP vehicle. (The survivability of the MRAP vehicles has drastically reduced casualties among our forces.)
- f. The leadership and courage of our US military forces in Iraq (and increasingly the Iraqi Security Forces) has literally kept the country together. We and the Iraqi people owe them a great deal.

## **8. SUMMARY:**

- a. The new Administration will have to think through their military options in the coming six months and devise a regional strategy for CENTCOM. General Petraeus will no doubt have a new concept to recommend for the rapidly deteriorating tactical situation in Afghanistan. The available US Army and Marine combat forces are insufficient to support continued robust presence in Iraq while also rapidly reinforcing our presence in the Hindu Kush with mountain infantry capable units.
- b. The likely strategic outcome will be a more rapid forced drawdown than desirable in Iraq in order to enhance combat power for Afghanistan. It will be a tricky balance--- but in my judgment we will pull this off successfully. Iraq will stabilize with the rapidly increasing power of the Iraqi Security Forces ---while we reinforce the inadequate NATO combat power in Afghanistan.
- c. It is hard to not be bitter about the misjudgments and denial of the DOD leadership during the first years of the war. It did not have to turn out this way with \$750 billion of our treasure spent and 36,000 US killed and injured.
  - If we had employed adequate ground combat power in Iraq during the initial intervention with the needed Military Police units, Civil Affairs, Engineers, Cavalry forces, and reconstruction assets.
  - If we had not dismissed the Iraqi Army and thrown thousands of Saddam's penniless officers out on the streets.
  - If we had not dismissed the Baathist cadres in the government, academia, the Iraqi Armed Forces, and business -- leaving the state rudderless.
  - If we had put together an international coalition with a clear UN mandate before we intervened in Iraq.



- If we had not lost the support of the American people with misjudgments about Iraqi WMD programs and Secretary Rumsfeld's subsequent, egregious misstatements of facts about the reality of the growing insurgency war on the ground.
  - If we had not issued illegal orders which resulted during the initial years in the systematic widespread mistreatment (and occasional torture) of thousands of Iraqi and Afghan detainees under our control. (This shameful situation has now been completely corrected.)
  - If we had made leadership of our allies to gain their cooperation a primary objective of our diplomacy --- and allowed the Secretary of State to take the lead instead of the Pentagon.
  - If we had understood the requirements of COIN operations earlier -- and not arrested and then turned into insurgents the thousands of Iraqi young men who we dragooned into detention centers with inadequate control.
  - If we had more effectively engaged Iraq's neighbors---in particular the Saudis, Kuwaitis, Jordanians, and the Turks.
  - If we had seen the growing strain on our ground combat forces and expanded the US Army by 200,000 troops beginning in 2002.
- d.** As the Saudis note with great sadness---we entered Iraq uninvited...but we must not leave the same way. It is essential for both US and Mid East security that we pull out of Iraq in a deliberate and responsible manner---and leave a stable and functioning state. This is clearly within our capabilities.

*This academic report was not submitted for clearance by MNF-I or any other HQS. It is based upon my own judgments and my many visits to the area of operations. The purpose of this report is to serve as an unclassified and objective analysis of the challenges facing our national security leadership.*

Barry R. McCaffrey  
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 USMA West Point, NY