

United States Institute of Peace
Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Iraq Experience Project

**CHRISTOPHER HUGHES
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

*Interviewed by: Mark Gribbin
Initial interview date: October 29, 2004
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LTC Chris Hughes is a career army officer. In Iraq, he was a battalion commander in the 101st Airborne Division. His unit rolled up from Najaf to Hillah and finally settled south of Mosul, at Qayyarah West Airfield ("Key West"), where he was the local commander for a 13,000 square kilometer area along the Tigris River. Hughes was stationed in Iraq from the beginning of the war up until early July 2003.

Hughes' command included a major highway, the Iraqi agricultural university, the only bridge over the Tigris between Mosul and Baghdad, and several important archeological sites. The region was also the heart of Iraqi agriculture. The population was a mix of Sunnis and Kurds. Hughes worked early on with the local sheiks (indeed, the military established their governance zones to accommodate tribal "footprints") and the regional sheriff, who was the only remaining vestige of the previous government.

Looting damage in the region was confined to government installations and archeological sites. Infrastructure and machinery was ancient and in a poor state of repair, Hughes does not understand how planners could have underestimated the poor shape of the infrastructure.

Existing systems were highly centralized and were not designed for efficiency but to control the population. Centralization made accomplishing simple tasks extremely difficult. For example, in the case of harvesting the wheat crop, combines were kept, owned, operated, and directed out of Mosul by the central government (not by local farmers). Getting the system to function required locating the right people and jumping through bureaucratic hoops. Disruption of the system and a lack of communications made getting government employees back to work difficult.

Early concerns of Iraqis were not about their political future or restoration of basic human services, but getting benzene for their vehicles so they could find loved ones and embrace their "right" as Iraqis. There was a sense of entitlement for subsidized goods, such as food, fuel, electricity, and even government salaries and pensions.

They nonetheless embraced political liberties; holding their own elections for mayors and city councils. Hughes worked with these bodies to establish civil governance, forming a special commission aimed at creating dialogue and idea sharing between local communities, especially for money-making ventures. The goal was to shift the mindset of locals looking "inward" to Hughes/central government for action (as they were accustomed) and instead take initiative to fix problems. Hughes assisted local groups by providing project funding accompanied by internal auditing systems.

Hughes' major goal was to restore essential public services (utilities, food distribution) and functions (judicial, education, and health systems). Getting students out of school before the summer heat was a priority. Law was restored in the form of the Sharia, although Hughes did not

allow corporeal punishments. A special "town team" of coalition military units was established by a regional commander. This team would descend upon a town and refurbish damaged or looted facilities (i.e. schools, clinics). He notes that Oil for Food was quickly and effectively back-up and running.

Hughes himself developed quick, short-term employment projects aimed at giving the large number of young, Iraqi army soldiers "in hiding" in his area something to do. He somewhat successfully combined this program with CPA's weapons handover policy, a policy he regarded as impractical. Funding for projects came primarily from Civil Affairs and CERP. Those few civil affairs officers at his disposal were essential.

Hughes used a patchwork Civil Affairs unit to set-up an "ad hoc" CMOC (Civil-Military Operation Centers) to take over functions of the central governmental (organizing the wheat harvest, distribute medicines) and perform additional tasks (help locate missing loved ones). Huges focus was on performing highly-visible, quick action projects to restore basic functions and placate the populace. The goal was not always to necessarily do complete those tasks which, from a technical standpoint, needed to be done first. Instead, the goal was often to meet the expressed needs of various communities and, by incorporating them in decision-making and implementation, garner their support. He believes that quick action was crucial to success in post-conflict Iraq.

LTC Hughes had originally thought that ORHA or USAID would be fulfilling this role. However, he notes that ORHA was focused on large-scale infrastructure projects and, during his command, were still in the assessment phase. He feels that the pace of reconstruction was too slow, and that planning for these sorts of projects should have begun sooner. There should have been greater focus on smaller-scale projects like reopening factories. This would be a productive use of funds and would have created employment. Hughes had no contact with USAID or its contractors.

Hughes sees the dissolution of the army as a non-factor with regards to security. He regards deBaathification as a poor policy in that (1) it tossed out the majority of qualified candidates for government positions, including officials that his unit had been working with (a policy offset by ad hoc Baath party renunciations carried out by his unit); and (2) it alienated several wealthy and powerful Iraqis by essentially saying they had "no future" in Iraq. He hints this may have been the root of the insurgency.

The entire police force in Hughes' area was reinstated. These police were largely complacent and ineffective as they were unwilling to enforce the law on tribesman-kin, violate Islamic values of brotherhood, and/or take personal risks. Alternate solutions (such as using members of different tribes as police) would have been disastrous. Grassroots efforts were made by local coalition military to train new officers. The effectiveness of new police is debated, but Hughes saw new police as more effective than the existing force. Sons and nephews of prominent sheiks have been useful in pointing out foreign fighters, or others who are "out of place", to coalition military forces.

Hughes also notes that the adoption of general strategies and policies lacked the regional specificity needed. He suggests embedding USAID personnel inside military units. Hughes also offers his opinions on the importance of switching out combat units to different regions, the subtleties of Islamic and Arabic culture, and the difficulty faced in occupying this corner of the world.

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Q: Today is October 29th. My name is Mark Gribbin, and my meeting today is with Lieutenant Colonel Christopher Hughes. Can you give us an idea of your background and how that led you down the road to Iraq?

HUGHES: I was a battalion commander in the 101st Airborne Division from Fort Campbell, Kentucky. I commanded the Second Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment, which is First Brigade, the 101st. The brigade was alerted and deployed to Kuwait in February. On the morning of March 25th we crossed the border into Iraq, as a part of the 101st, conducting a ground attack, initially behind the Third Infantry Division.

Q: You're a career officer?

HUGHES: Yes, right now I'm in my 21st year of the Army. At the time it was my 20th.

Q: Correct me if I'm wrong, but the 101st ended up being based out of Mosul?

HUGHES: Yes, we went through the whole length of the country by truck and helicopter. We fought into the city of Najaf in the latter part of March and pretty much controlled it by early April. We then attacked north to Hillah and were given responsibility to control it. That was the first government we put into place. We stayed there through the end of April. We did a relief-in-place with one-four Marines, then conducted an air assault to Qayyarah West Airfield, which was just south of Mosul. We seized the airfield, and then from there we established a full operating base.

My battalion was responsible for about 13,000 square kilometers just a couple miles south of the city of Mosul, where they operated until March of '04, as a part of First Brigade of the 101st. There were four major cities with about 52 towns and villages [in the territory].

Q: What did you do post-conflict, when most everything had settled down?

HUGHES: Qayyarah West Airfield was the resting place for the battalion and the brigade and where we ended up staying for the whole year. Some people just made in simpler and called it "Key West". It was a major Iraqi air force base just south of Mosul, which was essentially out in the middle of nowhere with a few small towns and villages around it.

There were several reasons why this was a key area; (1) we had the Tigris River come out of Mosul down through our sector. On the east side we had towns and villages that had been either Arab or Kurdish at one point in history. So, we had some land masses that were disputed and some cities that were disputed. (2) We had the Tigris River valley, including the only bridge across the Tigris River north of Tikrit and south of Mosul, which was a primary transit way between Arab-held areas and Kurdish-held areas on the Iranian border. It was the highway that led to the Kurds and also to the Turks, which was very important for the Mosul area as well as our immediate area of operations; (3) also key to that area was it was the seat of the northern wheat and barley agricultural complex for feeding Iraq. It was also the primary location where the negotiations with the Syrians took place, historically and while we were there, to sell wheat and barley to the Syrians; (4) the Iraqi officer corps was predominantly recruited from that particular valley area. The majority of the senior population living in that area were almost exclusively retired military, air force, and army officers. So we had to end up dealing with all of that, as well as the 15 sheiks that I had to deal with.

Q: The officers: were any of them Baathists?

HUGHES: Well, they were all Baathists. They would not have been retired generals and still alive if they didn't have either a historical or very recent affiliation with the Baath Party.

Q: When you arrived in the area, what state was it in?

HUGHES: The airfield itself had been bombed. The runways were cratered. Some of the hangars...

This airfield housed French Mirage attack aircraft, some of which had been moved out into the fields, some had been buried in the sand dunes just south of the airfield. There were no aircraft on the airfield itself, but there were training manuals in French and there were a number of French toolkits and supplies and things there. It was obviously a place where the French had sold them things in the past and had trained them how to use these aircraft. There were at least three French Mirages that I know for sure that were in my sector.

In addition to that, we found a number of Roland air defense artillery systems, which were French systems, that were positioned throughout the area. They had been abandoned with missiles that had dates around 2000, 2001.

The city that I was totally responsible for was the city of Al Qayyarah itself. My brother battalion commander, Marcus DeOlivera, had it for a while then gave it to me. I believe my successor eventually gave it back to Marcus.

What we initially had to do was figure out where the tribal footprints were versus drawing boundaries. We tried to go to some of the police stations and look at the maps they had behind the police chief's desk to get a feel for the very convoluted setups of these 3,000- and 4,000-year-old tribal footprints. Once we figured out where those tribal footprints were, that's how we drew our boundaries between the battalions. [The idea was for] you [to be] working predominantly with a tribe that was completely in your area, instead of having problems with

working with this sheik and that sheik (where you would have had to work on something in this sector that affected another guy's sector). So that's why there was some adjusting of the sectors between the battalions at first. But I ended up worked predominantly in Al Qayyarah, Al Sharah, Al Hadra, and Hamamamali.

If you went from north to south in my sector, Hamamamali was just outside of Mosul to the southeast. That was my most difficult city because a majority of the citizens, their families had supported the Fifth Iraqi Corps, which essentially just ran away from Mosul. So, there were an awful lot of young men that were from the Fifth Iraqi Corps that suddenly were home with nothing to do. Key to that city is they had a propane plant, a concrete plant, and it was right on the banks of the Tigris River. It also had the agricultural university.

The other significant thing up there, on the other side of the river—the only way you could get to it was drive all the way to Mosul and come all the way back down the other side—but just across from Hamamamali was a very significant archeological dig called Nimrod. That was significant because it had these very large slabs with writings on it from ancient Sumeria. The slabs had actually traveled to Japan and around the world in the '40s and the '50s as significant archeological artifacts. The reason I found out about it is because we had heard that they had been looted. They had at least been destroyed to a degree, so we went in there, secured them, and held those positions for quite a while.

South of that was Al Sharah. That was the hometown of Mosham al-Jabari, an Iraqi dissident who was friends with Uday Hussein and had done a lot of things for him in Syria. He came home "triumphantly" while I was there to claim he had been instrumental, if not the only reason, Mosul had surrendered, that Mosul had surrendered to him and not the 10th Special Forces group, which he didn't have a lot of good things to say about.

Al-Jabari came into his hometown with armed guards to visit a grave – having come over from Syria, I believe – and came into what he thought was going to be a grandiose reception. What he ran into was me. We almost had a firefight with them, but he was carrying a letter from General Petraeus, the commander of the 101st, which gave him freedom of movement in 101st's sector. So, although he turned out to be a very questionable person at best, he ended up introducing me to the al-Jabari tribe, which turned out to be one of the most influential tribes in my sector (and all the way to the Syrian border and all the way to the north of Baghdad).

Sheik Athal al-Jabari was my primary sheik, and he was from the city of Al Sharah. I can tell you a thousand things about what we did. I used him as my primary baseline of how to deal and work with sheiks, how to work with a tribe that had almost a million people in it, and how to get things done using a 4,000-year-old tribal system, which was very, very effective in the north. Of course, the closer you got to Baghdad the less influence the families and the tribes had on the people.

South of Al Sharah was another smaller town—I can't remember the name of it—that was really kind of split between Qayyarah and Hamamamali. What was important about that town is I had another sheik, Sheik Aloosh, who was my "squeaky-wheel" sheik. His tribe was spotted through the al-Jabari tribe north to the Syrian border as well as through Mosul and Baghdad. He didn't

have a contiguous footprint for his tribe because it had been somewhat persecuted by the other tribes.

So, I had a historical built-in clan rivalry between Athal al-Jabari and Aloosh, so I had to deal with thousand-year-old issues between these tribes. In many of our initial meetings there were guys were jumping up, taking off their shoes and slapping each other in the head and fist-fighting. I figured out all of the different nuances of whose son killed whose son, whose daughter married out of wedlock to another guy. There was literally thousands of years of blood that existed within this one tribe.

South of that town you got to Qayyarah. Qayyarah was a little bit more modern than the other towns. It was essential because it was the market town where most of the vegetables and meats were. The animals were slaughtered there, and they had a very large market. The reason they had the market was because it had the only decent bridge across the Tigris River. That was a point of contention because that's where the Kurds wanted to come across and that's where Kurds talked Arabs into bringing them artillery rounds (because they wanted the casings to make teapots). There was all kinds of rub in that area, up to and including who owned land through that area there, because it was good crop land: wheat and barley as far as you could see.

Then, as you went south of that, I had a number of minor cities along the Tigris River. But Qayyarah was pretty much the seat of power. A sheik that was there... his name slips me.

From there it's a very, very long step to the west, because as you went west from Qayyarah it got kind of obscure. The primary highway, Highway One, came up through there to Mosul from Baghdad. So, I had a major highway in my sector which was the primary transiting route between Mosul, Tikrit, and Baghdad. To the west of that was another place called al-Hadra.

Al Hadra was important because it had a 4,000-year-old Sumerian palace, an archeological site. It also had an ammunition storage point for the Iraqi army. That was a tremendously large ammunition supply point we had to deal with. We also had to protect that archeological site.

So that was our footprint and some of the dynamics that were there.

Q: It sounds like you were mainly working with the sheiks and the tribal system. I'm assuming that whatever government was there had disappeared.

HUGHES: In that part of the country, government consisted of an area police chief. His name was Armir. He was in al-Sharah and he was a member of the Aloosh tribe. He was the center of gravity for about 80 percent of my sector.

Because I met Mosham al-Jabari right after we hit the ground up there, he introduced me to Sheik al-Jabari. Sheik Athal al-Jabari had a meeting of the elders, and that's where he was headed when I intercepted him. He invited me and my operations officer, Jim Crider to have lunch. We went in and that was the first time we'd sat down and broke bread with Iraqis.

That's where I met Armir. He was in civilian clothes. We had a long discussion and decided to meet the next morning and he would show me everything that he had been responsible for before the war began. As he took my through the countryside, to all the towns and villages, everywhere we went it was obvious that he was well loved, well respected, and commanded the attention of the people. He was a young man and very well connected, and he was somebody whom I felt initially that I could trust. It turned out that he was a very, very good person.

He asked if he could put his uniform back on so that people would recognize him, so we let him get back into his olive-drab uniform, the same patches and everything, which we hadn't done in the south. [When I was] in the south, we put the police in completely different uniforms that the mayor and I helped procure from some downtown businessmen.

Q: In the south the police weren't as well loved, I imagine.

HUGHES: Down south you had the Shia, and it was a whole different environment. But up north with Armir it took us almost two days to drive the sector to see what he had influence over.

We had already figured out how to put one government together. I had been involved in some of this stuff in Haiti before, and we had had a very interesting situation in Hillah when we put our first government in place. So up north I let them ask me (sic). [Prior to the conflict,] they didn't have a mayor and they didn't have a Baath Party headquarters per se, but they did have Baath officials that would come in and coordinate with Armir...

Q: These were the directors general for the various ministries?

HUGHES: That's the way I understood it. [We] then turned right around and we reestablished those relationships with the Oil for Food folks, the Ministry for Antiquities, the Ministry for Agriculture, and then the education ministry. All of the teachers that worked in this very rural area came out of Mosul by train and bus. These women [teachers] would not live in the small villages; they lived in Mosul. They were more educated than most, and they would come down and teach in these girls schools. We had 52 schools in our sector of various kinds, shapes, and sizes.

So Sheriff Armir was the center of gravity for a couple of weeks.

I will say from the very beginning [the Iraqis] were very comfortable with us. As a matter of fact, it was great; it was very easy to get things going. The most difficult part was [I had to get used to my new role]. Because they had lived under a socialistic society so long, a purely government-controlled society, I had taken that government's place: me personally. So for the first few weeks, everywhere I went, I wasted a lot of time being told what I needed to do by them, "This was wrong or that was wrong."

I just kept getting laundry lists of "When are you going to fix this, when are you going to fix that?" and a lot of times, at that point, I was getting very frustrated. I'd say, "Have you ever had this before?" and it was, "Oh, no, but you're Americans. You can make things happen right now.

We've never had clean water, but we want clean water. We've never had access to this, but we want access to this now."

In Hillah, down south, I walked in and I said, "Here are my five priorities." I learned very quickly that my five priorities weren't even close to theirs. I walked in and said, "I want to get the electricity on. I want to make sure you guys have food." I was following Maslow's hierarchy of needs. But the first thing out of the guy's mouth is, "No, I don't want food. I want benzene." "Benzene? What do you want benzene for?" "To drive my car." "Well, why do you want to drive your car?" "I want to drive my car because I'm an Iraqi and we have more gas than anybody in the world, and it's my right as an Iraqi, my freedom, [to drive]."

The only freedom he's ever had is to get in his car and drive. "Where do you want to go?" "It doesn't matter. It's the fact that I can have benzene because it's, like, a penny a gallon. I put it in there, and I can go wherever I want because I'm an Iraqi. I'm not worried about food. The government will bring the food."

See, when you're not in a society where they've had to fend for themselves, they're not worried about that. It's not a priority, because it just shows up. So the things they wanted were the things they had to usually go get, and they wanted to go get it again because they didn't know what else to do. So when I got up north, I said, "What are your priorities?" for every sheik, every tribe, and every town, that was a constant. So finally after about two weeks we [should] have gotten to, "Where are the teachers? Where's the 'on' switch for the power plant?" It was, "Where are the gas stations?"

Division [headquarters] was helping us because division was getting the propane [plant going] so they could cook their food. The division was also finding the benzene and starting to get the trucks to us and we had to secure them. I'm giving up manpower to open up gas stations and getting gas truck to come give them gas so they can get in their car and drive somewhere! The big thing I found, though, eventually was that it was a good idea because they wanted to go see if their relatives had survived.

The guys up north didn't see things as clearly as the guys in Baghdad, so they were really concerned about "Where's my son. My son was in this unit. What happened to that unit? Where did those kids go? His brother came back but his cousin's still missing." They really just wanted to connect with their tribes and with each other and make sure everybody was okay, because they didn't have telephone communications and the grapevine wasn't working at the time. That had been very disrupted. It's a very efficient thing for them, the grapevine system, as they prove every day in the insurgency. They don't need to talk on the cell phone to get things to happen.

Q: I guess that comes from years of living under authoritarian....

HUGHES: That's right. They know how to pass information without being seen by the authorities. So I just sat down and said, "Okay, look, I'm going to create a commission..." I'm getting ahead of myself.

I started to meet guys who were educated. I hired my own linguist, too. I had one guy who was great: Kadema Wiley. He had been super in the south because he was from Najaf. But he was also from Saint Louis, Missouri, so we had a kinship.

He had helped me tremendously in the south. Up north he was also helping me, but he was so valuable that I gave him to my brigade commander. So, I had to start hiring my own guys. In each town or each tribe, I coordinated with the sheik and said, "When I come into your area, I need to have a guy who knows your tribe, who speaks English, and who can help me."

In al-Shara, which was a hub, things were easier and moved a lot quicker. [One of the guys I worked with here was] Kaleme Hassan, who was a lawyer and was in the Baath Party. He was a real sharp guy, very smart. He had two brothers who spoke English like they were from Missouri, so those two guys helped me. But eventually they started talking about "Hassan wants to run for mayor. We want to have elections." I said, "Okay."

In Hillah, the CIA, the Special Forces, and I had driven the construct. Up there it evolved naturally. They came to me. I told them, "When you're ready to tell me how you want to do it, I'll be happy to listen to you, but I don't want to be the one to tell you that you need it," because they had their own chain of command, if you would, and I was okay with that. But if they wanted to have democracy, or to have representation, I thought it was important for them to tell me that. At that point in the war we kept talking about, "Democracy's neat, it's a way [to go], it's not the only way and we're not going to shove it down your throat. What's important is freedom, with freedom comes responsibility, and with responsibility you've got to get organized. You can't all be running around doing stuff. 'So how are you going to do it?'" That democratic cell began to grow on its own.

Up in Hamamamali I was told [flat out], "We've already had an election. We've elected this guy mayor. This is his city council. This is his minister of education, agriculture. We did this." My company commander was up there, Matt Cones, monitoring it. I didn't have to be personally involved in that one because it was out there on the fringes, but it was working. Again, that was my toughest town.

That's [also] where they had the agricultural university. I had a small cadre of about 35 academics whom we were guarding, who had been beat up and thrown out of the school when it was looted. We brought them back in and secured them. I heard this thing had gone down, and next thing I know I'm up meeting the mayor and the city council of Hamamamali. It was awesome.

The mayor was a great guy. Again, I can't remember his name. He was also a lawyer. It was very important to them that their mayors be lawyers.

So I had a mayor and city council going up there, which immediately inspired al-Sharah to get a mayor and city council, so they created one. At Qayyarah, Colonel DeOlivera had established one, so all of a sudden they stood up and they had a mayor and a city council. Then we eventually went out to al-Hadra. When I got there, they had heard about the mayors that were starting to pop up in these towns. I met the guy who they said was going to run for mayor.

Going through their regional police chief, he said, "I'm going to be the mayor." That election happened right as I was getting ready to go

So at that point, I now had a regional police chief, I've got a police chief in each town, we've got the doctors coming back to work, we've got the teachers back, and schools open.

The division was very quick to help the educational minister in Mosul write a final exam because my schools had to get the kids back to schools. We had to get all the bombs and hand grenades and all the ammunition and artillery rounds out of the schools first...

Q: Right, because they'd been ammo dumps.

HUGHES: They used them all as ammo dumps. [In any case,] we had to get the kids back into school so they could take their final exams in May, graduate for that year, and get out of school because it was hot [in the summer,] even for them. They'd say, "We can't go to school from mid-June through mid-August." It's too hot and they don't have any air conditioning. They have swamp coolers, but it didn't do squat for those kids when it's 108 degrees in those classrooms.

So, the key was getting social services back together, getting the schools back together, and formulating governance at the same time. You can imagine all of that coupled with the fact that you'd never know how many bad guys might still be out there. We didn't have a single incident. We had a couple of weddings where some rounds were shot and it scared some of my guys who weren't sure what it was [all about]. We didn't have any killings and we didn't have any attacks from May through early July, and that's about the time that I left and my successor came in. He didn't have problems for months after that, until they started coming up from the south.

It became apparent that I needed to put the onus on [the Iraqis] to tell me what they were going to do instead of [having] them ask me what I was going to do. It was an education process for them to understand [our limitations]. What I finally ended up doing was putting the mayors in a couple of trucks and driving them to my headquarters, where I was sleeping. I said, "This is where I live. This is what I have to give you." I fed them a couple of MREs and some hot water (because I didn't have any cold water or cool water in the middle of summertime), and I said, "When you say you need from me, I give you all that I have." That really struck home with these guys, because they were good guys. So, they went back [to their towns] and they were less apt to make demands and started to realize that they had to produce.

So I created the Tigris River Valley Commission, just came up with that shit driving down the Tigris River Valley, "I'm going to have a commission." We started off and we did it every week, every Tuesday. The mayor would bring himself, his deputy mayor, his sheik, his lead doctor, whoever was the superintendent of his schools, and then anybody from the city who had something they wanted to say or an idea of how to make things better.

We would have these meetings, and we rotated towns. Just to make it fun and to empower them I would fly helicopters and pick them up, fly them over their land so their citizens could see me come and get them, give them all of my praise, shake their hands, and legitimize them. The local

citizens would all come. They just thought that was awesome. It was a matter of pride for their cities. So we would fly them up there and they would land in whatever city [we were holding the meeting in]. And as part of that the [host] city realized, "We're the host for this big, important meeting," and the city[-folk] would just pile out to see these guys arrive and meet. It was really neat to do.

At the meetings, each mayor would get up and talk about what was working in his town. Instead of them getting up and bitching, there was peer pressure amongst the others [to do something positive]. What I would do is I would go around and coach them and I would say, "Look, you're not getting paid to be the mayor. I don't have any money to pay you, so what you've got to do is you've got to start to generate revenues." And I said, "Here's how we do it in America," and showed them how taxation worked and all that kind of stuff. I said, "However, the last thing you want to do is go to your people who may not understand taxation and start taxing them." I said, "It's completely foreign to your people."

These guys were lawyers, so they weren't stupid and they understood taxation and democracy to a degree. So what I did was challenge each mayor to come up with a money-making project in each of the cities. I thought if the mayor, through the combined efforts of the schools and the police, if any of those groups that came to the Tigris River Valley Commission could create one money-making project in each of their towns, then not only could it pay the city council and the public employees, but it would start to inspire other entrepreneurial activities.

Just by luck and happenstance, two of the towns sat on archeological digs that foreign press from Mosul were coming in to see every day. These places were awesome. They had a couple guards, guys who had always been the guards and got two dollars a day from Saddam Hussein's regime just to stand there. They said, "Well, the heck with them coming in for free. Let's put up a sign 'five bucks apiece.'" So those two towns immediately have the ability to raise money. Eventually, when the Ministry of Antiquities got operational, we had to give some of it to them. But at first, al-Hadra and Hamamamali, they were rocking.

We used Hamamamali as a place to punish people who were caught doing petty crimes. The other things was administering Shariah law, which is Islamic law, which was the only law we had. "Let's go ahead and do it the ways you guys always do it." If a guy was caught stealing or a guy did something wrong or one of the tribes complained about a guy, they had a pretty good system. The elders would bring in the guy, listen to his case, then they'd punish him. The problem was that they wanted to cut people's hands and heads off, so I had to start sitting on these things.

One of the things we did was use punishments as a way to fix things that were broken. We would have work details for looters, have them cleaning up the agricultural university, putting the books back. People started to bring truckloads of books back that had been stolen or looted, and eventually the agricultural university became operational after I left. We did things like put the agricultural university back together, put a fence up around the archeological dig site so you could control the reporters (and actually get money from them). We used [convicts] to clean up the market.

Qayyarah's big money-making project was to build a new area for their market, a project that we funded. The main road through my sector went right through their market, so there was constantly a traffic jam in the city. You had [exhaust] fumes, dead goats, nasty kind of stuff. So we got the market out of the town. We set concrete pads and eventually got 10 overhangs built. It was a very simple project that took them from the Dark Ages to at least the 1800s. We were able to clean it up because they were used to the government paying for people to come through there and clean up the town.

So those were all kinds of easy money-making projects, and that's when we started to use the CERP funds. Once I started getting the CERP funds, then I could give monies to the mayor, which empowered the mayor (not me) in giving it to the people. This meant we had to go one step further at Tigris River Valley Commission: I had to direct each of the mayors to have a contracting officer, so that he had somebody keeping his books and he was above board. They audited his books once a month. The people had the ability to come in and see the books and see who's getting the money and what it was going to.

We were very keen to clean up the markets and the streets, to get the trash out of the cities and paint the schools. Colonel Hodges was very keen to take some of our units that weren't involved in this activity, like our aviation units and our air defense units, and they put together what was called a "town team", I think it was. They got a big chunk of money and they would come into my towns, bringing desks, chairs, pens, paper, pencils, and paint. They would just descend upon one project with people, materiel, and money two days and then pull out of the town. All of a sudden, my school would be refurbished or the market area or this section of town would be clean. A chlorinated water purification system for the clinic was put in place, shots would be given to one of my doctors who was wanting to inoculate people, things of that nature.

Q: The general shape of all the infrastructure, was it damaged by the looting or was it the neglect of the previous regime?

HUGHES: The only looting—again, my area was under control when I got there—the only looting that I saw up there—now, I saw it at Hillah; I didn't see any in Najaf. I didn't see it up north at all except for the agricultural university, the things that were government. I did see it in al-Shara, where the Baath headquarters had been graffiti'd and all the furniture was stolen.

But the agricultural university, I don't know why they attacked that place and turned that place inside out, but when I got up there [the looting] was still going on. We jumped on them and we arrested everybody we could catch. I had them penned up in a building for two days. What was interesting about that was all their fathers showed up at the gates and wanted them back. So, I did a mass punishment with them where, in order for them to get their son out, they had to come back three days in a row with their son. I gave them a shovel and a trash bag and they helped clean up the mess that they created. I told their parents I held them responsible for their actions.

Americans don't have any idea. An Arab would rather have his head cut off than to be humiliated, and I learned that very quickly. I almost crossed the line by making a father and son go out with a trash bag and pick up trash. But that worked in that particular town.

Also, in Hamamamali there were so many guys who had showed up at home with their AK47 and their RPGs that we decided...

Q: These were people who had been in the army?

HUGHES: Yes, they'd been part of the Fifth Iraqi Corps of Mosul and they'd run home and were in hiding. We would see them. They weren't hostile to us. They just had nothing to do. Their parents didn't know what to do with them. It was like, "Holy shit, I've got this kid back." So we hired them.

We went to the mayor—Mayor Nimji—and said, "You know the people in this town, and I know you know that there's frustration..." He knew the undertones of what was going on but he wouldn't tell me because it would have been a violation of his tribal heritage. But he knew who to go talk to. I said, "I want you to bring me 50 of the poorest men in town, and I want 50 former Iraqi soldiers who've got nothing to do. We're going to clean up the agriculture university, and I'll pay all of them a dollar a day. If it's a former Iraqi soldier (and I'm not just going to assume that because he's young he's an Iraqi soldier), if he brings his ID card I'll pay him two dollars a day." So we did that, and that was working.

Every day it got bigger and bigger, and they were picking up [trash], they were cutting overgrowth, and then the books started to come back. We put the library back together. We couldn't do much for the windows at first, but that started changing. It gave the kids on the street some money in their pockets and something to do, but it wasn't even close to scratching the surface. We probably had about 1,500 involved, so we started increasing the numbers.

Then the CPA came out with this weapons confiscation program in June which was really hard to understand. We went to a couple of classes and tried to understand the legalities of it, but basically the way we understood it was every Arab household could keep one weapon for protection but needed to turn in the rest. I think that's what it eventually meant. I wasn't sure.

Q: It's hard enough to try and get Americans to get rid of guns.

HUGHES: That came down, the de-Baathification thing came down, and we were looking at each other [like, "What?"]. Anybody who has an education was in these top four tiers of the Baath Party. Do you want me to hire a farmer to be the mayor or a police chief? That doesn't make any sense." So we vetted them, and then we got some official paperwork down where we could get them to renounce the Baath Party and renounce Saddam. So my mayors were all okay, they all renounced the Baath Party, they all renounced the Saddam Hussein regime. We sent all that paperwork to whomever that goes to. But it was kind of weird at first. With all the progress we've made, all of a sudden somebody's going to come in and say, "Get rid of them all."

What we did with the weapons thing was... I knew who had the weapons—you could fly over and see an anti-aircraft gun in somebody's backyard. You could go get those. So we started to say, "Well, if you're a former Iraqi soldier and you're part of the crew picking up trash, if you bring us a weapon we'll pay you three dollars a day." So, for a very, very trivial amount of money, our battalion started getting a lot of weapons.

Well, not a lot of weapons but we had more weapons than anybody else, because everybody else was telling an Arab to give up his gun. That ain't going to happen. You've got to be a moron to think that an Arab's going to give you a weapon, especially [if he's in one of] the tribes we had, which were on a historical boundary with the Kurds where they've been raiding each other for a long time. So it was hard to get guns out of their hands, but we got it [done]. The Tigris River Valley Commission gave us a good peer-pressure thing, too, where at the end I would get to say things like "Wonderful initiative in Hamamamali," and "Sheik Aloosh has really got the key to this Turkish bath idea."

They had a Turkish bath and a water pool up in Hamamamali. There's this really neat underground cave system, I guess, if you want to get real romantic and row a boat through it. [When they took me to see it,] I thought they were going to kill me. They took me down in this cave system and I thought, "I'm going to go down and get my throat cut." But it turned out they were very legitimate. "Lovers have come here for thousands of years to look at these caves." That's pretty cool, and that became their money-making project. The peer pressure thing within the system started to get them self motivated. It was really neat to get started. So those were some of the kinds of things that we had done.

[This whole time] we were still waiting for this ORHA thing to show up, the task force, humanitarian assistance, or whatever it was. The sheiks were all very keen to tell me that the wealth of the tribe could take care of itself until we could get things moving.

General Petraeus and General Flakely were also really good. I don't know how they did it, but all of a sudden I would get word: "Tell the teachers to go where they've always gone to get their pay." That was slow but it started to work. The police: "Tell them to go where they always have gone." So what they did, they started trying to re-energize the existing technical components of the system.

But the system was like a 110 year old guy. He still has arteries and he still has veins. You can still thump on his heart and get it going, but it's still a 110-year-old guy. Everything you touched had 25, 50 years in some cases like some of the grain silos. It was Soviet technology that was 50 years old. ORHA would come in and look at it and go, "We might as well build a new one, rather than sink \$60 million into this thing and then only maybe we can get it working again."

So when the wheat harvest came in... I'm from Iowa, my Charlie camp commander and I are from Iowa, and we're sitting there playing with the wheat. As far as you could see there was wheat. "This stuff is about three weeks from coming in. I wonder where all the combines are. I wonder who the farmers are that do this. I wonder who owns this land." There's not a fence from Syria to Iran. There's no fence. The entire countryside is farmed, and clearly it's a communal kind of thing.

We had to go find the guy who was responsible for taking the official stamp. We had crayons that we melted and dripped onto wax. I used my class ring to certify and get this guy to bring in the combines. Then you had to find the special oil-fuel mix to put into the combines, and the

combines were as old as the Russian technology (most of it was Russian). So we had to put our patch and certification...

[END SIDE]

HUGHES: One of the biggest lessons learned was don't try to turn on the hydroelectric plant yourself; find the guy who has always turned on the hydroelectric plant and convince him to come back to work. Having a mayor helped at that. When these guys came forward and said, "I want to be the mayor. We need electric power," and the answer is, "Well, how did you always get power before?" "Well, we would call Ahmed and Ahmed would turn on the power." I said, "Well, do you have Ahmed's number?" He said, "Yes." I said, "Why don't you call him and tell him to turn on the power?" "I have no authority to do that." I said, "Well, who has the authority?" "You do." I said, "Okay, I give you my permission. Tell Ahmed to turn on the power." "Well, I need something in writing." Everything in that culture is in writing.

So I would write it, and they would want to know where my seal was. I had a 'no slack' battalion stamp and I started to put that on things. It was funny: we were getting stuff from school kids in these big packages, and some school decided to send us a bunch of crayons. So I got all the red ones and used them for my seal. I was a certifying, stamping, sealing, 'trying to make everything look official' kind of guy. They would literally walk around with that piece of paper and that was their authority to turn on that electric plant or to fill the gas tanks. To move through the sector and negotiate, they needed a piece of paper from me.

It was the way things worked. The only reason I let Mosham al-Jabari just go through my sector was because he was certified by General Petraeus. That's what they were used to, that kind of control. It was comical. It was almost like in some parts of their culture they're brilliant, and in other parts of their culture they're like children. All of a sudden the power came on everywhere. Again, because [the attitude is] "I get power," they don't ever turn it off. They don't understand fiscal management with lights. There were towns [where,] at night, I would sleep outside and I couldn't sleep because the damn city was lit up bright as hell.

Q: That's because they're not paying for it.

HUGHES: That's exactly right. It's like the benzene: "I've got it so that's my excess, that's my gratification within my government." One time my exo and I sat and watched two guys trying to drag a lamppost across the street: a huge metal and concrete streetlight that they had unbolted from the concrete slab. They had cut the wires and were now dragging this big thing across the street. There wasn't even a house nearby. Finally I got the linguist out and said, "Please ask them why they're dragging that lamppost down the road. We're in a desert." He asked them where they were taking it. They said, "Taking it to the house." He said, "Why?" They said, "It's because we want light, we want electricity." They literally thought if they put that lamppost in their yard it would come on and they would have electricity. Things like that were just comical.

Iraqi soldiers would come to the gate and say, "Hey, look, I didn't get any pay for March and April for fighting you. I want my back pay."

Q: They're telling that to you, the guys they were supposed to be fighting?

HUGHES: Yes, because we're the government. That was a slap in the face of reality. Holy cow! The typical American response is "Get the hell out of here and get a job." Well, you know what? They don't have jobs. Especially in that area, there were so many military retirees, everybody was on some sort of a pension. And everybody else was on a salary. They kept asking me, "When do the salaries start?" I was like, "What are you talking about?" They would show me these chits, like ration cards, and the ration card would literally say "Head of household, three or four wives, and 27 kids." They were perforated, so you'd tear them off, and that's how much money they would get, that's how much Food For Oil they would get, that's how much benzene they were authorized. It was a whole number of different things within the socialistic society.

Q: Was that system still running, the Oil For Food, or was it like a hiccup and then it was gone?

HUGHES: It started. General Petraeus got it going again.

When we were down in Hillah we actually accidentally attacked into one of the major distribution compounds [and seized it]. I used that down south when they wanted to do the Hajj. My brigade commander, Colonel Ben Hodges, was very keen to understand that we were coming up on the Shia 'walk to Mecca' equivalent, where they all walk to Karbala, and they were going to come through my town. We were trying to figure out ways to facilitate it, because it hadn't happened in 30-something years (because Saddam wouldn't allow it).

I was tempted to take this foodstuff [and distribute it], because what you do is you pay alms and you feed Muslims along the route for free. I wanted to put up an American Kool-Aid stand and say, "Hey, we're all for you guys. This is awesome," but it became obvious that we didn't need to be out there doing that. So, we were taking tea, Vietnamese tea, and rice and milk, things like that down to the mosque, distributing it to the mosque so that the mosque could then feed these people along the route. The [pilgrims] just basically grab a blanket and move out and walk all the way up to Karbala to do their thing.

Up north, all of a sudden trucks were coming to town [with Oil for Food stuff] and they knew right where to go. They had their routine, and they just started doing the routine. The division was taking care of paying them to distribute the food and whatnot. But where we were hurting in this particular area was a lack of clean water. They were sucking water straight out of the Tigris, and the Tigris is filthy.

Q: Even that far up?

HUGHES: Yes. We were south of Mosul and were receiving all the crap coming out of there. Even though it did get a little better, it wasn't great. The medical clinics didn't have clean water.

That was [another] big thing, the medical clinics. You could see different kinds of diseases amongst the children and the elders, like growth anomalies. My doc was always telling me what

different kinds of malnutrition and birth defects they had. There was quite a bit of it there, plus it was a very tight tribal area too, so there was a lot of first cousin inbreeding problems too.

Q: With regards to the infrastructure, I understand that from all accounts it was in pretty bad shape because it had never been repaired.

HUGHES: They had everything that you would want but it was just all patched together; it was held together by gum and tape throughout the whole sanctions period.

[It was also set up so that] Saddam could turn it on and off whenever he wanted. One of my brother commanders, Joe Bush—there's a great video on this—had a lake in his sector over by the Syrian border. In the middle of the lake there's this kind of strange-looking manmade rock pile. It's like everywhere else around Iraq: after you've looked around for a while, there's stuff that just doesn't look quite right.

[Joe] got on a boat and rowed out to this little rock-pile island and found a big metal door. He opened up the door and went down this staircase, got onto a landing with an electronic elevator, like you would find in a coal mine. He went down the elevator shaft, went downstairs and flipped on a switch, and there was an entire underground water irrigation system. It made water from underground streams and aquifers start bubbling up in all of these thousand-year-old irrigation systems that were dug out by a guy with a hoe. It was in first-rate operational condition. It had had money applied to it, and it worked.

What they were able to surmise from that was that Saddam, to control those tribes in that area, [had to be] godlike. If you were in compliance with him, if you assisted him or you did the things he wanted you to do, then he would bless you and suddenly the water would appear. There were things like that which were just absolutely bizarre.

[For example,] in the south, Hillah was on the site of ancient Babylon. [Next to Hillah, Saddam had] reconstructed [the] city of Babylon, [which was] scary beautiful. Next to the rubble of the archeological site he's reconstructed the wall of Babylon and the market area of Babylon—it's world class 100 percent. He's created lakes and concubine huts like the sultans had. All the little hutches have got first-class facilities for people to come stay. He even built a brand-new, beautiful castle on a 500-foot mound. He actually built three 500-foot mounds that overlooked the old city of Babylon, because he was rebuilding Babylon.

You'd go in there and go, "Holy cow! Hot and cold running water, he's got a pool, he's got it all," and you'd go 20 yards and you'd see the people who have been the keepers of Babylon for 2,000 years living in absolute squalor. When those people wanted [to steal] the gold toilet seats [from Babylon], it was hard to deny them that. I'm not going to shoot somebody who wants to go up to the castle and take something that he and his tribe could probably live off for 100 years.

It was a scary contrast. You would see agricultural infrastructure that was barely maintained, just enough [was kept working] to get by. The water, sewer: not much had been done on that for years and years. Medical was just barely enough to keep the heartbeat going. Water purification, depending on where you were, was marginal at best. You would go into a water

pumping station and there would be eight generators, but only one's working. Only one is pumping water, so that water pressure in the villages would be just enough to get by. Everything was 'just get by' kind of stuff. So anything that you wanted to work on, it was like pissing in the ocean. You'd paint it first so it would at least look different.

Q: You left in July, which meant you were there in that early period where everything was still gearing up. What first steps were you taking in your region, not necessarily just you personally but everybody in your region, towards addressing some of these concerns? Were you doing things or were you waiting for ORHA/CPA to gear up?

HUGHES: When we were down south, I really was under the false impression that there was going to be a convoy of trucks with humanitarian supplies and somebody coming right behind me that I was going to give to the city of Hillah. It became obvious that that wasn't coming anytime soon, at least in Hillah.

When we moved up north, I won't say I was disillusioned but reality had slapped me and said, "It isn't coming." However, General Petraeus was busting his butt to get some money coming. So then I started trying to figure out, "How do you take large amounts of cash and inject it into a society that doesn't have a ready pool of plumbers and carpenters and masonry guys," because it was all centralized. Those type of guys would come down from Mosul, like the teachers come down from Mosul. If you want to get the wheat in, you've got to go find the guy with all the combines and then it comes down to town. Everything was so centralized.

ORHA did visit, and took them to a couple of places. It's like, "Hey, this is a big cement factory. Do you want to get it going?" I had a sulfur plant. "Do we want to get the sulfur bagged and shipped, exported?"

Q: What do they do with sulfur? Is it for gunpowder?

HUGHES: No, predominantly in the Middle East, surprisingly enough, they use it to sprinkle on their crops to keep the bugs from eating their crops, and there's some other medicinal uses for it. They had literally, I would say, hundreds of thousands of metric tons of this stuff. It was mined and it was stacked up nice and neat all through this place.

For some reason they also had a production area where they turned it into sulfuric acid. There were warehouses stacked with glasses bottles full of sulfuric acid, which scared the hell out of me, but it was all in there. The pH in water runoff (from the steam systems) there was so high it would essentially eat through your hands, so we had [contaminated] water squirting out someplace. That place caught on fire after I left, and they put it out.

So I brought in ORHA to see the Sulfur plant, and go, "I've got this big plant, which used to have 1,500 people working in it." Of course, in Iraq what that means is it really can only truly employ maybe 150 people. So you put 50 to 100 people in it, because it's usually about a 20 to one ratio [of workers employed to workers needed] with the way they've been raised.

[Take the] propane plant, [for example.] The propane carousel would go around like a milk carousel. This thing would come down and squirt propane into the big propane bottle, like the kind you use for your grill, and then go on out. It took one guy to squirt, one guy to watch the carousel, another guy to take the bottle and stack it on the pile, another guy to wheel it out, and two guys to put it on the truck. But you employed 150 people to do that and the rest of them would all sit under a tree, smoke cigarettes, and bullshit all day and watch those five guys [work]. They would rotate out about every 30 minutes or so. Horribly inefficient.

I remember at one point saying, "We could probably save tons and tons of propane if we just bought new propane bottles because half of them leak." You were sitting in a propane plant just smelling propane all day. It was nauseating.

Q: Not very safe either.

HUGHES: No, and they're all smoking five-pound cigarettes while they're doing it! "Okay, we've got an OSHA safety problem going here."

Everything was just absolute bare-bottoms capability, everything. I have seen the results of UN and US sanctions in places like Haiti, and that's what those countries look like when you get into them. When you've imposed economic sanctions on a country... You get there (and the reason you've gotten there is because all the different instruments of power eventually come to culmination the military is now standing there), you say, "Okay, let's rebuild it."

In Haiti it was hilarious because the only productive power plant they had was in Port-au-Prince. Well, okay. We think, as Americans, "They've got to have electricity..." They haven't had it for three and a half years! But, for Christ's sake, part of production and showing progress is we've got to turn on the power.

As soon as you turn on the power, you kill 12 people in the city because everybody's got a piece of bare wire that they've drug from the main 300,000-volt cable, swung into their house, and plugged into a fan. All of a sudden 'tzzzz...' you turned on the electricity. You kill those people because you can't talk to everybody in the city that has no communications means. You also electrocute a poor Bangladeshi soldier who's standing up too high in the back of a truck.

[Additionally,] you have to bring in your own fuel to get it going. It takes 600,000,000 gallons of this stuff a week to keep it going. They can't afford it, of course, and you provide it for them for three or four months and then you go, "Now you guys have got to take it from here." It goes back off because they can't afford it. They've got no resources. They can't tax people who've got nothing. And they go back into the Stone Ages, and all you've done is aggravated it by saying, "You guys have got it so bad you don't even have electricity. This is that it looks like to have electricity for three months. Now we're not going to let you." It's a self-licking ice cream cone in some of those cases.

[So in Iraq,] I had to go through that thought process of a mayor going, "I want fresh water. That makes sense to me as an American, but now as a commander in Iraq, do you really need fresh water? You've been drinking this stuff for how long? 7,000 years?" Granted, it's not like the

water back in Red Oak, Iowa, but I'm going to send my doc down and see how many of your people are sick and get with your doc." He'll come back and say, "Nobody's sick. They seem to be fine. Their bodies have adjusted to the parasites; they're okay with that. I can't prove that it's causing anything unusual. Everybody's got two eyes, two hands, a nose and a mouth; there was no third-eye thing going here." "So do you really need [clean water] right now? Do you really want me to divert from getting the wheat harvest in, cleaning up the streets, getting some more security police to protect you as things get different and violent over a while? Oh, by the way, your town's getting a lot of money. Who knows what kind of crime might come in here from the soldiers up in the Hamamamali who don't have anything to do. If they find out things are going pretty good in al-Sharah because they've all got benzene now, they'll drive down there and start causing you problems."

Then there were these tribal rivalries. It's kind of like that old movie about the Coke bottle that falls out of the plane and lands in an African tribe.

Q: The Gods Must be Crazy?

HUGHES: Yes. Do you really want to quickly raise expectations, only to have it fall back off again? It's really hard to figure that out. It's really a situational-dependent, case-by-case basis.

Then you also have to caveat it. I know I caused problems in Baghdad because Sheik Athal al-Jabari, his tribe went to Baghdad and it was out of my sector, it was out of my span of influence. Things would be rocking where he was at, and he would drive down and see some of his cousins and things weren't going so well down there—much different environment; very, very difficult conditions down there. People were still looting and criminals were running all over the place. He can't control his tribe down there. He doesn't have any direct influence. He doesn't have any ability to take kids who have been intentionally lured into the cities by Saddam so the tribal fathers would lose control over them.

So he would go down there and he would see his people suffering in Baghdad, and it would disillusion him as to "Are the Americans really taking care of us?" It wasn't enough that his tribe up north was doing okay, because these guys down south weren't doing so well. That would bother him. At the same token, a bunch of 'schmuckatellies' (sic) get in their car and drive up through my sector and see a new market. [They see that] you can get gas at the gas station, that we eat hot food because we've got propane. Now I'm screwing my brother, the battalion commander and division commander in the Tikrit area, because they don't have this.

Some places it raised quickly, some places slower. Some places it took a long time because some of my other brother commanders did not have the luxury of having an established chain-of-command construct. Some of them, quite frankly, didn't know how to use that construct and caused themselves more problems too, because heaven forbid you disillusion those guys [who held positions of wealth and power].

The big thing that I will tell you is that, in my personal opinion, the decision to do the de-Baathification was a significant mistake. You cannot tell Baath officials, who all were very wealthy—and in the eyes of the Iraqi economy they were [very]wealthy people; some of them

were millionaires, multimillionaires—you can't tell a multimillionaire he has no future in his own country. "You have no future"—end of discussion, we're not even going to talk about it with you, [we'll] completely disenfranchise you. [Combine that with] so many people living at the lower spectrum of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, [and you] provide that millionaire [with] a lot of deviant and nefarious options. We saw it.

The decisive point for me was to placate the rich, make sure they felt they were still at the higher end of Maslow's hierarchy needs, they still had self actualization. They weren't quite there yet, but they're at least a part of something, they're a part of the future. They're one tier down from self actualization. "Get the oil flowing. Take care of your tribes. We'll eventually get to all these things you want to do, but right now you've got to be a part of the team, you've got to be part of something to make that happen, and to do that we've got to keep control of your poor, your widows, and your extended tribes, and your young men. We've got to get them to feel like they're a part of something. Get them water, food and shelter; get them security; give them a sense of belonging, the third tier of Maslow's hierarchy."

I know that sounds very academic but that was what my commanders and I started talking about. "How do we move them up, but at the same time how do we take our expectations as Americans...?"

We all walked into this war. No matter what socioeconomic background you come from, our soldiers, our most junior soldier is at least a part of the team in Maslow's hierarchy of needs; he's at least at the third tier because he's got food, water, shelter, and security. He's there in Iraq because he knows that my wife's taking care of his wife back home. His family's back there and he's got a salary being paid to her. No matter what happens in Iraq, she's getting paid, she's got free housing, and there are all kinds of programs back here to take care of her. So he's at the third tier. At a minimum we're all there. In America really everybody's at self actualization and very few people are at food, water, and shelter.

So, you take Americans and you put them on top of Maslow's true hierarchy of needs and they don't understand [the situation in Iraq]. When you walk up to some [Iraqi] kid and say, "I know it sucks that you don't have a job but, man, but you've got democracy and freedom and liberty. Lucky you!" The guy goes, "Those words mean nothing to me." So you have to ease into those situations.

Q: How did the disbanding of the army then play into that: the official disbandment?

HUGHES: Other than deBaathification, that was one of the big mistakes that everybody talks about, the disbanding of the Iraqi military. From my perspective there was no military to disband. I saw this in Haiti, too.

In Haiti, we were very keen not to destroy the military and the police like we did in Panama. That was one of the great lessons learned: don't go in and crush the PDF, because you're now the PDF and you have to do all the policing and administrative work. We knew that, so in Haiti the FADH stayed there, worked for Cedras [head of the former military regime] until he left.

Then we coaxed them in and we vetted them through a school, so you still had some hard-nosed guys with some experience.

[In Iraq,] those guys were gone. We asked them to capitulate. I don't know if it was all coordinated or not, but you could have said, "Okay, on this date you guys all come back and we'll sit down and we'll reestablish this army." They may have been able to do that, but in hindsight, or even when I was there, I didn't think there was any way to bring back the military, because all the officers lived in this town, and all enlisted came from that town, the NCOs were over here...

Q: But they all still wanted to be paid.

HUGHES: Oh, Yes, they wanted their back pay, and the retired guys wanted their pensions. Retired teachers and lawyers too, they all wanted their pensions, because they were just used to this check. The price of that check was based upon their compliance to the regime. My sheiks were starting to ask me about cars, because every year they got a new Mercedes, so they were saying, "Where's my Mercedes?" We did have a few cars we gave them eventually.

It's like the police chief, he needs a car. "Where's your car from before?" "Well, they were all taken to Mosul and consolidated before the war." So you go up there and you find all these cars locked up, and you'd bring him a car, but is it the right car? It's amazing. You started at ground zero in this society.

Q: What was your relationship as ORHA came into CPA? You mentioned that you had taken them around and showed them some projects. Did anything actually come out of that? Did money start flowing, at least in your time?

HUGHES: ORHA wanted to come in and do multimillion-dollar projects

Q: They were looking at big infrastructure projects.

HUGHES: Yes, it was big, big, long-term stuff. Those [of us at] the tactical level were looking for positive, immediate, certain things. But, the things we were doing were too small...

Q: Like slapping paint on the walls?

HUGHES: Yes, they were immediate things but they were just tiny little things. [The Iraqis] were always keen to point out that, "You're Americans, you can do anything." This was evident especially in Hillah. They expected tremendous, immediate things to happen. It would be interesting to have some of them come in and tell what their visual fantasy was that was going to happen when we arrived.

They called us Hollywood characters. We were Hollywood. We looked just like they thought we would, with our stuff on and everything, and they expected Hollywood things to roll up right behind us. Even the most educated guys up there, I had to take them to my little rolled-up

sponge pad in the corner with an extra pair of boots and a rucksack sitting next to it and say, "This is where I live," for them to realize that I wasn't holding out on all this stuff at the airfield.

But ORHA came in. I remember I went all the way over to Muktar, which was the granary over in first and 327 sector. We got over there and we had a meeting with these ORHA guys were. A couple of guys show up in their decaled corn-green hats and a couple of clipboards. You tell them what you're looking for, and they tell you, "Well, we're really looking at spending at this level." They were just kind of doing an assessment.

Okay, that was a waste of time. They didn't bring anything. It would have been awesome if they said, "Hey, look, here's Biffy the plumber and Bob the carpenter." It would have been neat if they brought them in and just said, "Here you go. They're yours, and we're doing to establish a distribution center at this location. This is how we're going to get [materials] to you. These guys will come with you right now to your town." [If they had done that,] then the sheiks could see these guys. [I could] say, "Okay, Sheik al Jabari, what are the top three things you're going to do?" He could get on a cell phone, [figure out what needs doing, and] call back there. The next morning we would be in there starting to do something.

Anything would have been awesome. I didn't have the ability to do that. What I ended up doing was organizing to receive that by establishing civil-military operation centers and police headquarters in my town.

Q: Were those the CMOCs?

HUGHES: Yes, but because I had been in a CMOC in Kigali, Rwanda, I knew what was in a CMOC.

I had to have a guy who was in charge of agriculture in my sector, so I went out and fanned my lieutenants. I found a kid who had an agricultural degree. That lieutenant became my chief of agriculture. I had a guy who had an education degree, and he was my chief of education, and so on and so forth for my chief of security and my chief of medical. [They all] established office hours.

My teams moved between three places where we would hear grievances, accumulating a list of projects. We had money-making projects, we had reconstruction projects, we had new projects, and we had medical goals. Okay, we have to figure out, "When do plant? What's the timeline? Where's the seed come from? Where's the fuel? What are we going to do with the surplus we have? How do you protect it in the wintertime?" We were working through all those different aspects.

Q: It was the old regime that was completely in charge of agriculture, then? That's why you set up a guy in that position? They're weren't local farmers managing farms?

HUGHES: No. You'd go, "Where are the combines?" and they say, "They show up." "When do they show up?" "Usually between X week and Y week?" "Really? Where do they come

from?" They'd say, "We don't know." So we had to find the combines. We got them and we got [the system] working. They planted and the harvest, from what I understand, went pretty well.

Q: I had no idea it was really that socialist. So most of these projects that you're doing, this is all Coalition Military, Civil Affairs, and I guess you're doing this mainly with CERP funds, or are you getting other funds as well?

HUGHES: CERP funds were the ones from the regime, right?

Q: The funds they took from the banks. I think they came out of the DFI. I'm not sure.

HUGHES: At first I was given \$25,000. That went real quick. I don't know if that was operational money at first or if it was CERP funds. Then we started getting [what] they were [officially] calling CERP funds, [and I] started getting bigger chunks.

Colonel Hodges was pretty good about [distributing the "town teams"], the units that he had going around doing the projects. He kind of created what I had thought ORHA was going to do for us.

For example, the aviation executive officer would show up, we would sit there with the town council and he would get his top two [priorities], "We're going to go out and tackle these top two." He would go back, he would complete the projects at division, he would get \$10,000 cash handed to him, and then he would put everything together. He would buy the materials; then he would take his soldiers, get to town and say, "You give us X amount of people [to help]." They would have the project together and they would descend upon it. It was almost like USAID; it was the same kind of construct of USAID, whom I never saw.

Q: You really didn't see any AID...?

HUGHES: I never saw any AID folks, not where I was at. Now, they may have been up in Mosul at the division level, but where the rubber meets the road, where the things were happening, [I didn't see them].

Whatever had to happen [had to happen] fast. You could not wait for the bureaucracy to make it happen. If you did, you lost control. Everything that I just told you was not being done by any agency outside of my normal infantry task organization. I was lucky; I had some Civil Affairs guys, and they were awesome. I had some psychological affair guys, with their speakers and stuff; they were awesome. I had a few linguists and two counterintelligence folks, and that was it. The rest of that was, "Second Lieutenant Jones, Rifleman, Bravo Company, Second 327th Infantry Regiment, with an agricultural degree from East Tacoma, Washington, Community College, you're in charge of the entire wheat harvest in the sector."

Q: What happened to the government's old agriculture guy? Had he disappeared?

HUGHES: Are you talking about the agricultural minister?

Q: The guy who told them to send out the combines.

HUGHES: That guy lived in Mosul. The combines were in another town to the west of Mosul. He had a map in his office at the Agricultural Ministry, and he would tell that guy to take the 27 combines and go to "Sector A", cut till it's all gone, come back up here, go to "Sector B", cut till it's all gone, and so on. It was just magic [to the people out in the countryside].

Brilliant people, who were educated in England at one of these universities, didn't know how the simplest things worked because the government did everything for you. You did not have to think, and that's what was amazing about it. The combines show up. The most educated people in the town would say, "They just show up. The cut it, and then take it over to Buktar."

Q: "And it comes back to us at some point."

HUGHES: Yes. Then they show up and they plant it. Then they go away and it grows. We stay out of it; otherwise, we get our asses chewed.

Q: You said there's no USAID presence. How about contractors? Were they any contractors in your region, or was just you guys? Were the ministries sending people out?

HUGHES: The ministries were months behind us. You could not wait for those things to start again, because they were inefficient even under ideal conditions. The entire system was broken. Everything was off, everything was gone, everybody was scattered. There's no ministry to go knock on the door and say, "Hey, why don't you guys come back to work tomorrow and start doing this?" Those people hid. The ministries were not operational. Everybody had fled.

It's a grassroots thing. It's always going to be bottom up when you're rebuilding a country. It's never going to be from the top. It's magnificent that they got a CPA. It's incredible that they have an interim Iraqi Governing Council. It doesn't mean jack shit if everybody's just sitting there going, "Wow! We've got a government." Can you imagine if nothing worked in this town right now? Would it be impressive to you that we have a president? "Great, we've got a president, [but what good is that doing me?]"

Again, a lot of my experience base is the almost a year I spent in Haiti. I would always tell [the Iraqis], "I have seen worse," and they never could believe that because it's their own country. But I have seen worse and it was Haiti—because they didn't have oil, they didn't at least have the potential to begin to generate resources to kick-start the economy and progress out of the hole they were in. In Haiti there are no trees, the island's deforested. I don't know why there are even people alive there. But they've got a president. We returned a democratically elected president. That doesn't mean jack shit.

Q: And he's gone now again anyway.

HUGHES: [My unit in Haiti would] go out and survey a road, but we didn't have any money to pay the guys who make the roads. We didn't have any tools or bulldozers to move boulders out of the road. We know we need a road to connect this village or this town to the city (because the

old one got washed out). There were no trees, so it's going to get washed out again because the entire hillside is eroding. It doesn't [even] make any sense to put the road in even if we put it in for them because the purpose [of a road] isn't served. Why are the people even coming out of the town? They've got nowhere to go. There's no food to go get at the other town. It's so hard to understand unless you've seen it over and over again. Were you here during Hurricane Floyd?

Q: I was down in Richmond right after it and everything was out.

HUGHES: Everything was out. Do you remember how you felt?

Q: Yes, you couldn't get a cold beer.

HUGHES: It's like, "Oh, what was I thinking. I didn't get any ice. Somebody ought to be distributing damn ice." All of a sudden Americans are like, "Well, dang,, how much longer?" We just had a major hurricane hit our power grid, and we're looking at our watch waiting for the power to come on. Imagine no fire, no police, no infrastructure, no system, nothing. You're just sitting there, and it's as quiet as it was after Hurricane Floyd.

After that, I said, "This is what it was like in Haiti, except we've got food in the fridge that we've got to eat real fast and we've got gas coming through the lines so we can cook stuff," but they had nothing and they'll never have anything. There's nothing that will grow there. So you start at that point, and the way you do that is you do regional distribution to immediately start helping things.

Look how FEMA does it. FEMA immediately enters an area with supplies and communications and two or three top things that they're going to put in place and start making it happen right now. They know they're going to have to turn on the power. They know they're going to have to put information out, so they know they're going to have to get something on the airwaves, even if they have to distribute radios, so people know where to go and what to do. That's the hardest part for me, to go from village to village and say, "Tell your teachers to go back to where they've always gone to get their money," and then a way for them to tell me, "I went there and it's not there," so I can call and find out why it's not there. "Stay there. Don't come all the way back until you get it." That stuff causes riots.

It [has] caused riots here [in America]. You [need to] have these [essentials] arrive at key nodes, [those essentials] that you need to jump-start things, and then you have to expand it from there. If you have a [guiding] force on top of it, one that can help distribute it, it can help start standing everything up from the bottom up.

We saw those hurricanes hit Florida this summer. It doesn't start off with, "We've just elected Jeb Bush and he's your governor and he's going to bring you freedom and democracy." Even though you say that's not the purpose of the hurricane, to take out the regime... But the bottom line is you don't start off saying, "I'm Jeb Bush, and I paid for this advertisement." Nobody gives a rat's ass. They're trying to find their dead. They're trying to gain shelter.

Everybody started [back off] at the bottom tier of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The quicker you can get them out of the bottom tier to the second tier, which is safety and security, the quicker you can get them up to becoming a part of the team. If you can just get them there, whether it's by giving them food, water, shelter, or information (let them know it's going to be okay), [you need to] drive them out of that lower spectrum of Maslow's hierarchy needs as fast as you can.

Q: Let them get into the process.

HUGHES: [Yes,] then [have them] tell you what they need next. Let them be a part of the process, because your and my priorities, to a third world nation, are laughable. "Holy shit, man, I don't know how you survive without your blackberries." "I just want some water." Let them tell you what's important.

You know what? [In Iraq,] benzene was important, and we got them benzene. So at least when I got them benzene and they were bitching about something else, I'd say, "You got benzene and all those big muckity-mucks down in Baghdad, they don't have any benzene." They're like, "Yes, that's right, we do. We've got benzene. Hey, you're the man." You give them something that they ask for, whether it's purple Jell-O or benzene, and at least they've got that. But then you've got to be thinking about what's next, what's after that, etcetera.

Q: It seems that, at least in these early days, there's a big disconnect between you, on the ground assessing the needs and getting people involved, and policies. At this point, were ORHA or CPA issuing policies that were trying to direct you in a certain direction? What's the disconnect there?

HUGHES: You've got to understand that all I saw was my myopic picture of what was happening. I knew what was happening with my brigade because I was going to meetings and seeing the same kind of things, and learning things from my brother commanders. We had commanders' conferences up in Mosul, so I got a big-picture view from the division commander at the commanders conference of what he was trying to accomplish and how we were all nested within what he was trying to accomplish.

I went back in November of last year in a different mission and had an opportunity to sit up in the Joint Operations Center and listen to General Petraeus up north give a battle update summary. I also listened to General Swanick in Fallujah give a battle update summary; the Fourth Infantry Division commander, General Oliano, give his update; the Polish commander in Najaf give his update; and then I think a British commander in the south gave his update. So I got to sit there and watch them talk.

You only had to see it once, and having been at the lowest level and now being at the highest level and looking at it, connecting the dots, it was obvious that the autonomous situation that we found ourselves in, the case that I just gave you, was important to do. That was because there was nothing between that highest headquarters and those divisions, there was no FEMA-like thing between them that was supposed to [fill that interim role].

I don't think you can have, especially for Iraq, an overarching FEMA-like campaign. You can have themes, but it's regional, it's very regional specific. The things you need up north are not necessarily the things you need in the southeast or in Baghdad. There are vastly different kinds of things that you need, vastly different kinds of operational security environments that only a FEMA-like representative can have, like a USAID representative working for a division commander with complete control of his own resources. [You needed that sort of] nesting.

You also need an overall theme for the nation, but ideally it would be like, "If [this commander] in Mosul takes his top 10 percent of his resources and applies them to the Agricultural Ministry, he'll make more money than if the guy in Anbar does. The commander in Fallujah knows he's got to put his top 10 percent in security and police to capture all these criminals that were released from the prisons. The USAID/FEMA rep working for the Polish commander, understands that he's got to work an information campaign [to reach out to] Sistani, the grand mullah, the primary ayatollah for the Shia, and to de-legitimize Moqtad al-Sadr (who is a relative nothing down there)."

So that's what you had; you had vastly different cultural, religious, agricultural things going on, and if you don't have individuals guys working [each one]... it was too hard to be too central too fast.

But I think what happened was—and this is secondhand information—was that when CPA came in, they had read some World War Two stuff, they had read some de-Nazification stuff, they had looked at how MacArthur did it in Japan. They had tied it to the past....

Q: Those are all very homogenous societies.

HUGHES: They're very homogenous societies with vastly different religious values. [They weren't] Islamic. [In Iraq, there were] differences in terms of what they would and wouldn't do collectively. [There are] different religious sects within that and different national affiliations within it. In the Kurdish [regions] you had a [de facto] nation state. You had two languages, Kurdish and Arabic.

Q: They also have different tribal affiliations and sects within the Muslim community.

HUGHES: You know, the Sunnis talk directly to God; the Shias talk to clerics and ayatollahs to talk to God for them. You've got all that dynamic going on, and I don't know if you've really got any one person who understands it all.

[END TAPE]

HUGHES: You had some people who understood that and some people who didn't. You also different kinds of military units that had trained for different kinds of warfare. [Each unit had its own culture.] I think it would be very interesting to look at the difference in how things turned out in sectors not only from the cultural, demographics and security perspective within Iraq itself but to look at, say, for example, [what happened under] the Third Infantry Division, a heavy, mechanized armor force.

The Third Division trains at the Army's National Training Center, which is high-intensity, counter-Soviet, desert warfare in the Mojave. Now, they've changed this to a degree. They've added some villages, some interaction with civilians and stuff, but what you didn't have was a lot of guys trained in low-intensity conflict. They had done some peacekeeping but they hadn't done a lot of peace enforcement.

You [also] had Marines who don't go to our training centers. I'm not sure what kind of small-wars kinds of things that they do. I do know that they're very familiar with the three-block war and they did have a lot of success in Hillah and some of the other places with their training culture.

So there's a cultural capability of units in terms of experience base.

The 82nd and the 101st, those guys go to the light infantry training center, the joint readiness training center. On that battlefield they have seven villages, they have civilians on the battlefield, they've got donkeys, goats, carts, gardens, pigs, and chickens to deal with. They've got media on the battlefield, they've got civilians on the battlefield, they've got complicated relationships between town mayors, ranchers, and farmers. So you go down there as a light infantry or ranger guy and you learn how to deal with the dynamics of a very complicated battlefield versus 'Echelon left. If my tank shoots that tank, I win.'

What's interesting is, and I'm sure there's no design to it but happenstance, we attacked with the heavy guys into the city. It worked very well for the high-intensity conflict, and they did tremendous things, but then they stopped there. They're in the seat of the most complicated place on the planet, and you don't have the experience-based guys who are used to training in that kind of environment to go, "Okay, let's start organizing by neighborhoods, and let's find out what the power base here is." Now, they did do that [eventually], I won't take anything from them, but they were less prepared to do that than maybe the 101st or the 82nd was. [That is] just by [looking at the] pure nature of the type of unit: not the leaders, not the soldiers, but the type of unit.

The second issue is that when you fight in a battle and then you go into peacekeeping it's not the same unit. I can't be the same guy who killed your son last week, and now this week I'm trying to help you get a power plant turned on and talk to your doctors and lawyers. Army doctrine says you pull the combat unit out and you replace it with a different unit.

So, the commander who's replacing comes in, and when the sheik, mayor, or police chief says, "You son of a bitch, you killed my son," he just points at his patch and goes, "Hey, you know, that's a bad thing to happen. It's horrible. I apologize. It wasn't me, it wasn't my guys, it was the other bastard before me. He's gone, I've gotten him out of the area. I am here in a different capacity, I am here to help." That's a start point.

Now, for us we were lucky. We ended up in the south, but by some stroke of genius or accident—I don't know—they decided to move us up to Mosul after the fighting and to move the marines from Mosul to Hillah and Najaf. Then the Polish came in and took over Najaf; 101st

guys killed their sons. 101st also killed Hillah's sons. So when the Polish Marines came in they could blame [those deaths] on me, and they came in and they could blame it on me. I got up north and I went, "I don't know what the heck those 10th Special Forces guys were doing. They're a bunch of animals. I'm here to help. Let's fix this together. Let's be a team."

Q: That's part of the Arab culture too, that you can't deal with somebody if they killed a family member or tribesman, "I cannot deal with you, you are now my enemy."

HUGHES: That's right, and that's why a lot of shoe fights happen between the tribes, and they never forget that. They never get over that. It was neat because, once they forgave us, they would come to me with pictures of their sons or nephews and ask me to help them. That just rips your heart out when you know you've just passed through an area, you've probably fought his [son's] unit down south, but you don't tell him that. You say, "Well, where was your son serving?" "Well, he was with the Medina Division in Karbala, and I haven't seen him. His cousin walked all the way back from Karbala and just got here yesterday, but he has not seen his cousin. Can you help me find him?" So we would do a legitimate effort to try. I would put teams together to go down there and take the guides and try to identify him, but just trying was enough for them.

Q: I know they did a lot of that with the IAC (Iraqi Assistance Center) in Baghdad. Were CMOCs also involved in things like that? Can you give me an idea what the CMOCs were doing?

HUGHES: I have no idea what the 'real' CMOCs were doing because I didn't see any. My ad hoc, made-up CMOCs were doing those sorts of things. But in their defense, I did have a Civil Affairs officer who was assigned to me. He managed all that for me. There was a Civil Affairs officer at our brigade headquarters who was tied into the network and, yes, that did help [in locating missing Iraqis]. They had a form they would fill out. They would try to get a picture [of the missing person].

It would go through the system, but a couple of times we would throw some guys in armed vehicles and go down [with the concerned party] to the last place [the missing guy had been] heard from. It was enough for them just to go down to Karbala and walk around the streets and realize how difficult it would be to try to find somebody in all this. They buried so many guys. They were burying them before the sun went down. I have no idea where they buried them.

Q: You said you kind of had ad hoc CMOCs. What were Civil Affairs doing in relation to that in general? Were projects and interactions still being managed through you and the relationships that you were building with different people in different communities?

HUGHES: In my task organization I had one Civil Affairs team. The brigade commander had a Civil Affairs team and he broke that out to his three battalions, so working for me was one Civil Affairs officer and an NCO. Underneath them I attached my counterintelligence cell, which was a three-man team, and my psychological cell. I put them together with him. I augmented his team with my fire support officers. So we ended up making a CMOC in al-Shirah and

Hamamamali, and I tried to keep those as centralized as I could so everybody in the sector could come to them.

The Civil Affairs officer with me had operational money. He could buy me a linguist, he could help me get information, he could help me get things because he had that little bit of money that was available to him. He provided me assessments in situations.

The guy I had helped me a lot in Hillah, because at Hillah, through the CIA, we discredited a group that wanted to be the government. They turned out to be a really bad group of guys. [So] we [had to hold] an election, put together a government. He facilitated that. They turned everything on. We re-armed and re-uniformed the police and were running. We had that town for about 28 days and then turned it over to the Marines.

[That civil affairs officer] was very instrumental there in letting me know how to deal with the sheiks and the clerics in that area. He set up operations in the mayor's office, so he could help the mayor deal with issues that emerged. That was kind of what his role was down south.

Up north, that guy ran two CMOCs for me and he also was a source of money outside of CERP funds. They had Civil Affairs money, and when he needed things like we've got to get the teachers to get their salaries, we've got to help the doctors get the medical supplies.

Everything was centralized. They had to go find the warehouse in Mosul. He was the guy I tasked to do that kind of stuff. He would get with his boss, who could communicate with the Civil Affairs guys up at division in Mosul and then, as everybody started realizing they needed to get to wherever this warehouse full of medical supplies was, they would get the right guys in town to open it back up and start the normal distribution. I would then send combat forces to my Civil Affairs officer to help the doctors go get their normal issue [of supplies] and get the clinics up and operational again. It was constantly a challenge of using the Civil Affairs guys to find the old system and make it start working again. That was the biggest thing I used them for first.

Q: That was your goal in this early period: to get the system running? You weren't looking at doing any systematic reforms at this point?

HUGHES: Well, [the agenda] was to get the heartbeat of the 101-year-old man going. He's dead at first; I've got to get his heartbeat going. Then I could figure out what limbs I've got to replace, which limbs are most important. What kind of vitamins I've got to get him on, and how much water. It was literally like being a doctor: we've got a dead man on the table, I take the defibrillator out. Okay, he's breathing again. Now, from that point I've got to start figuring out what are the most important things first to keep him breathing. It was getting all those little things to keep him breathing, and then it was let's start thinking about the 'nice to do' things.

Q: The hierarchy of needs all again.

HUGHES: Exactly. My predecessor, when I left, he was really getting into some nice cosmetic surgery kinds of things. They got roads built that they'd always wanted, they got bridges repaired, they got plants operational, and those sorts of long-term things. But the thing is you've

got to start building that program over here, your long-term goals; you've got to start doing those upfront.

I think what would have helped us a lot would have been if somebody was thinking about the big, long-term, systemic things that were going to be needed by region upfront and would have been manned, organized, resources, and have all kinds of contracts with Turkey and contracts with Syria and Jordan ready to descend upon those things, get them going, get them operating while I'm getting the heartbeat going of these people over here. Then the next thing you know, not only would the propane plant be operational, but the new wheel opens up about the time I hire another 500 people to work there.

In reality I would have the mayor cutting the ribbon, 500 people with a heartbeat, and now I've got to start negotiating with some bureaucratic thing called ORHA (who only wants a billion-dollar project}, who's trying to figure out where in the country he wants to do something.

I can't believe somebody didn't know that propane would be an important thing, that benzene would be an important thing. They've got all these big factories up there. Maybe the factories would be important! Maybe coming in with 1,000 plumbers to fix all the water-pumping stations would be important. If somebody would have just thought, "Let's get 20 guys to fix every pumping station that the Army could seize, then we'll increase the flow of water and water pressure in all the cities immediately."

Q: Wasn't that one of the problems of expectations, though? From a lot of my interviews I've gathered that people were expecting the infrastructure to be in better shape. They were only thinking in terms of war damage.

HUGHES: If people were thinking it was in better shape, they're absolute morons.

Q: That's been the consensus.

HUGHES: I never for a minute thought it was going to be in as good a shape as it was. It's UN sanctions! How many times had [Saddam] been stupid enough to run up to the border with his army to try to get us to drop the sanctions? They were clearly hurting him. And, it's the Middle East, so they're [just] above the subsistence level to begin with. They're not at surplus. He was kind of at surplus in the late '80s and early '90s because we put him there. After they shot the stork, that's when things started to go down in terms of their capability.

So if anybody thought when you attack a socialist society, that's a Muslim religion in the Middle East – in a desert – and thinks they're going to get in there and everything's going to be okay; that as soon as you stop shooting at them, they're all going to stand up and go, "Oo oo, we're going to just turn the switches and it's all going to come back on," when it hadn't worked for the last 10 years; that is somebody who hasn't paid attention to the sanctions that have been imposed upon a third world country where the only thing they could sell their oil for was *food*.

Q: Looking at the security forces, you mentioned the police chief. What about the police officers? How was the security force being resurrected?

HUGHES: It was great because [the sheriff] had his cops. He was the head guy and, in every town, he had cops. That was part of our first piece, to go around and get them all to come back to work. I would meet with them and guarantee that.

In the north, because of the way the tribes are constructed, because of all the retired military, it was extremely important for [the police], and very prideful as part of their masculinity, to wear that uniform. So I let them wear it. That caused a few problems because you'd see a couple guys in a car going by with Saddam Hussein-looking uniforms on. There were a couple of times vehicles got chased down and when they'd get out they'd go, "I'm the police chief of this town." Those guys started to come back out of the woodwork. It only took a couple of days for those guys to start coming back.

The problem is that they're cops in their own tribe. Now, I don't know how big your family is. My family's not that big, but I've got enough cousins to know that I'm not going to take a billy-club down to my cousin's house, drag him out in front of my uncle, and beat the piss out of him. If I know it's my cousin who did it, I'm probably not even going to finger him to the police chief. So, even if every police officer in the entire country was in place when we got there, what you'd find is they're wholly incompetent.

The ones that really got my gander were the guards I had up at Nimrod who let two guys with a handgun come in and destroy some of the beautiful, 4,000 year old Sumerian writings (from the money-making venture). A bullet hole was shot into the guard shelter, then they took an ax or a pick and tried to chip a corner of this slab. The three guards who were up there basically just ran away. They dropped their AK47s and ran away. When I got there and said, "Where are your AK47s we gave you?" "We dropped them and they took them." That was the incompetence.

I had [police] up on a bridge trying to control the flow of traffic, and they would just stand there. They didn't do anything, because it's their tribe. It's the weirdest thing. So at one point I had talked to Armir about it and I said, "Let's take the police from this town and have them work in this town and take the police from this town and put them in that town, and then it won't be their cousins." He said, "Well, they'll kill them. The tribe will gang up on the police and kill them, because that tribe doesn't like that tribe. His cousin killed his cousin." So now you get West Side Story kind of crap going on. You've got all the Sharks and Jets going after each other. So it was a very, very interesting dilemma, where they were unable to police their own.

The way Saddam controlled his population was godlike (with the turning on and off of water and power plants). He controlled the infrastructure, so what little there was he could turn on and off [was under his control], "Mosul, you're not doing what I'm telling you to do. You guys are talking to the Kurds. You're off."

[So, the philosophy on keeping order was,] "We go up and cut off a couple heads or chop off a few hands, maybe throw a couple guys off a building, and scare the piss out of them. Then we go away."

Pride in your uniform or your city, the salary that you're making, none of that has anything to do with how hard you work. It's like any other [Iraqi] employee. You don't have to work to get paid. [So, it's like,] "I get paid just as much to arrest you as I do to stand and watch you steal. And, oh, by the way, if I raise my hand to you, your cousin, uncle, or your sister-in-law over there are going to kill me."

Q: "And if I don't arrest you, there's no punishment." They don't get in trouble for not taking action.

HUGHES: I've talked to my brother battalion commanders [who are] now over there training the Iraqi military, and that's the hardest part to instill in them. It's a Muslim too, not just a tribal thing. If you talk to an Arab, predominantly Arabs, walk up to him and say, "Who are you?"

As an American, you would say your name, you say you're American, and then you list whatever else is important under there. You go up to one of these people and say, "Who are you?" and they say, "I am a Muslim." It starts off at Muslim, then it's, "I'm a member of the al-Jabari tribe," and then maybe they'll say, "I'm an Iraqi."

So, what you find is that you could steal from me today and I'll still have you in my house tomorrow and take care of you because you're a Muslim. I'll fight you in combat, and when you're out there in your fighting position at night and I'm in my fighting position at night and you go, "Hey, brother, have you got any water?" I'll get out of my hole and I'll give you water because you're a Muslim. It doesn't matter that I'm going to try to kill you tomorrow. It's just that you're a Muslim and I'm going to give you water. Those are contradictions in culture that we just can't even begin to understand exist.

It was like what are they going to do about Moqtad al-Sadr. When we (CIA or the "OGA" – "Other Governmental Agency"), brought in Sistani's predecessor, this ayatollah, from Iran. This guy's father had been Sistani's predecessor. He was the grand ayatollah of the Shia religion in Najaf. We used this guy's requisite power to talk to Sistani. Moqtad al-Sadr's people stabbed him to death at the Mosque of Ali. I know this Moqtad al-Sadr guy's running around, but he's nobody. I'm dealing with the 10th-degree black-belt karate guys, and he's some kid who has seen karate on TV running around saying he knows karate.

Q: Living off of his dad's name, right?

HUGHES: Yes, but even with his dad's name he was a chump, an absolute chump. What was funny was we started hearing about how he had this guy killed, and I looked to my 11-year American brother/Arab Muslim from Najaf, Free Iraqi fighter, and I say, "What should we do about the Moqtad al-Sadr guy?" He said, "You know, we ought to kill the bastard, right now. We just ought to kill him. But, you know, we also should consider bringing him into the government when we stand it up and make him part of the government, and then trivialize him then." I go, "Which one do you think we should do?" He said, "Yes."

That's the mentality: "Yes, we should do both." What the hell does that mean? For Americans it's yes or no, it's kill him or placate him. For them it's, "Yes, I think we should." "You think

we should do what?" "I think we should do both." We have yet to figure that out. We have yet to figure out how to deal with that. That's the same thing we're seeing [now]. What we call 'corruption', they call 'being on both sides'. It's a very Arab thing to do within their culture. But the thing we have to always remember is: it doesn't matter.

Everything about them is all connected because their Muslims. Even if they're Shias and Sunnis and they think the other one is an absolute moron who strayed from his religion and they apostate themselves because they're Shia and they followed Ali when he was truly not the caliph and blah-blah-blah, all that stuff that goes back 2,000 years (and we go, "What a bunch of idiots,") that's very important to them.

They will follow that code first before they'll follow common sense, because to them it's not whether you (1) die for your religion or; (2) you fight and win for your religion; it's (3) when you fight and die for your religion. It's how you die that's important to them. It's not that you win: it's how you die. There are mothers who would encourage their sons to come out of the basements to fight us when it was clearly obvious that they would be killed as soon as they came out the front door. They're easy people to fight. All you have to do is establish a free fire zone and just keep shooting in it, because they'll just keep coming because their mothers are in the basement saying, "Get out and go die like your brother. You're embarrassing me as your mother."

Q: It goes back to the whole thing with pride, right?

HUGHES: That's right. That's why it does not humiliate them to cut their heads off, but it does humiliate to treat them like a dog or a woman, or to place your foot on them. That's why the greatest insult is that I'm going to place my foot or my boot on your neck. That's the great insult, and that's why as they go to cut somebody's head off they'll put their foot on them and give them the greatest insult. We just don't understand that.

Q: Can you talk more specifically about the security forces?

HUGHES: I'm sorry, we've strayed. Eventually what we had is the brigade commander had an MP platoon attached to them. Again, from the grassroots level we started building our own police force, and so what she did—I can't remember her name; her call sign was Rooster Six—she set up a small academy at the airfield and then the sheiks started nominating nephews and sons to attend the academy.

Q: Were any of these former police officers under the old regime?

HUGHES: Well, no, they were new people, they were new recruits, because I had all the former police under the old regime.

Q: They were already back?

HUGHES: Yes, they all came back. They were just as worthless as this water bottle when it came to being police.

Q: The sheiks were nominating all their nephews and whatnot to come in and form the new police force?

HUGHES: Yes, and the sheiks were nominating sons and nephews because I was getting tired of them asking me, "When are you going to come clean up my city," when I would see their sons sitting around smoking cigarettes. I'd ask them what the hell their sons had done today to clean up the city. It was more lucrative and it was more prestigious to be in a uniform, so the idea that the first guys were going to be uniformed, these police, motivated them to provide us some of their good kids at first. But then it was kind of like anybody we could recruit. I saw that begin.

Before I left I saw one group graduate. It was that thing you've heard bad-mouthed, you can't train somebody in two weeks. I said, "Well, you know, two weeks of training with these guys was eons better than the regime's guys." That always kind of stuck in my craw: if the Iraqi military had come back we would have had a humongous logistical nightmare, because they were worthless. They were just a rabble, like the police. They were oxygen thieves.

[To use those guys would have meant] trying to take an oxygen thief – who's always been an oxygen thief – and make him productive. In my own personal opinion, that is a hell of a lot harder than taking some buy who's never been an oxygen thief—he may have been a food booster—and make him into something new. That's why I think they're doing well with it now. That was General Petraeus' [idea] and that's why they sent him back, because he started making these police inside [the country].

We learned a lot of lessons with it in Haiti we brought a police chief in from New York City, a retired police chief. Anticipating [the force would be horrible] upfront, he immediately vetted the old police and created his new police. He learned the same lesson: once you're taught that the preferred technique of a police officer is to use a machete and cut a guy's arm off, then he won't bother you anymore (which is what the FADH did in Haiti when they worked under Cedras) it becomes harder for them to talk to a person first. Trying to reduce their level of violence was difficult.

I think the same is true for someone who has used no violence to [go to] suddenly using violence. [It's] just as hard. So we had [the old police force] come back, but they did not help us. So wherever I had them [posted], I had to have soldiers standing there with them to shore them.

They were good, though, at pointing out problems. The best thing they did do was they would go, "That guy's a Kurd." You'd go, "Oh, shit. What's a Kurd doing here?" They knew who should be here and who shouldn't be there. So eventually we formed a thing called—and this was in my next job back up here—the Iraqi Advisory Task Force.

Based on that experience we put together a team that went back in there and, using some third country nationalists to help us, hired sons and nephews (who spoke English) of 52 sheiks. We've put them at the tactical level so platoon leaders and company commanders, when you move into a village, you've got a kid from the village. He speaks English. He gives you requisite

power because he's the son or the nephew of a sheik, and he can go, "That guy is Syrian." You can't tell; he can. He knows what right and wrong look like in that town.

That has helped ease some tensions in the Anbar region, something that we learned and fixed up north but they never fixed it. We tried to bring some of those lessons learned down to the Sunni Triangle, to see if some of these different techniques would work. We did that when I was on the Army staff working for General Cody. Those were his initiatives. Time will tell whether those things really have an impact.

Q: Do you have anything else you'd like to add, any lessons learned if this was going to happen again?

HUGHES: I think I've covered all of them. I'll be curious to see what you guys come up with. It's frustrating because it went really well. Some of us saw some things go tremendously well. It's very frustrating to come back, because you watch TV and it looks like everything is absolutely out of control and you constantly hear people say, "It's out of control, it's just completely out of control over there." It's not completely out of control. You could go over there and you could travel all different kinds of places and it's not out of control.

[Of course,] There are a few places where you could sink the entire national treasure of the United States, every soldier, every seaman, every Marine we've got, into and you'll never win because for 7,000 years those areas have been oppressed.

Kubla Khan went to Baghdad. He sent a peaceable caravan to go do trade with the brilliant Muslims in Baghdad, who were in the golden age of Islam: art, culture, science, written language; they were doing all this great stuff. Well, this caravan comes over from the Mongols. [The Muslims] kill everybody in the caravan except one guy. They cut off all their heads and sent them back, and said, "Don't come over here." Well, Kubla Khan gets pissed off at this, goes to Baghdad. He puts a siege on Baghdad, cholera breaks out, half the city's population dies, and then he turns around and wins the siege.

[Khan's] solution was, because you cannot defeat these people, to march the population out of the city (anywhere from 800,000 to 2,000,000, depending on what history you read), saying he needed to do a census so he could bring his 'humanitarian assistance' in and help them after his siege. He marched them all out into the desert and then killed every one of them by the sword or by the arrow. That's how he dealt with it. But you know what? A couple hundred of them survived in Baghdad. They remember that occupation. They remember the Ottoman occupation, the Turks, they remember the British.

When I entered the city of Najaf and we stood at an intersection and had an incident when I was over there, it didn't mean jack squat to me. We were trying to link up with Sistani, and we had a riot break out. My tanks were sitting and we backed off. When I came back here, I learned that when I stood at that intersection, I was the 31st commander of a foreign army in the history of Mesopotamia to seize that road intersection. In hindsight, we're just another group of people coming in there to oppress them.

That's why you see articles where a guy goes and works for the CPA during the day, he goes to the store that's been opened from some entrepreneur and picks up his groceries, he goes home and he watches his satellite TV (the satellite TV that he bought with the money he earned from CPA downtown, which he purchased at the now free-market in Baghdad), and then at night goes out with five of his buddies and lobs mortar rounds at the Green Zone. What is his problem?

See, that's that Arab mentality. He has resisted the resistance because in the Koran it says you will go to hell if you don't recognize the oppressor and resist him, so, "I'm going to resist him first even though the guy's paying me, even though he's made the market operational, even though there are things to buy I could never buy before. I still have the religious obligation to lob mortar rounds at him at night."

Q: So what's the solution to that then? Just get out?

HUGHES: The other 30 commanders before me got out. It just took some of them a long time to figure that out.

[END INTERVIEW]