

## **Major General Joseph Anderson and the War in Iraq**

### **National Strategy Forum Event Summary**

By Eric S. Morse

*Major General Joseph Anderson, Chief of Staff, United States Forces-Iraq, addressed the National Strategy Forum on January 19, 2010, at the Union League Club of Chicago.*

President Obama's new strategy has shifted public focus to the war in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, the war in Iraq continues with quiet progress. When considering the war in Iraq, the pressing issue is: what legacy will the U.S. leave in Iraq? Will the American legacy strengthen our interests, or is Iraq likely to distance itself from America in the future?

MG Anderson briefly described the transition of Multinational Forces-Iraq to United States Forces-Iraq and command of the 118,000 troops in Iraq. The goal is a smooth exit of American troops from Iraq by December 31, 2011. MG Anderson demonstrated his strong sense of purpose in the mission and his unwavering optimism for mission success.

Despite the full withdrawal date, major drivers of instability exist which could interfere with the smooth transition out of Iraq. MG Anderson listed several that were most pressing: the communal factual struggle for power between Shia, Sunni, and Kurdish groups; the difficult ideological power struggle between an Islamist-based state versus a democratic-based state; the Kurdish drive to secure oil resources and their desire to expand their territorial line westward; the continued presence of al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI); and the looming threat to Iraq from Iran's political leaders.

To maintain stability, U.S. forces are pursuing two operational goals. First, U.S. troops will continue to fight AQI. Despite a stronger central Iraqi government and improving Iraqi security forces, AQI continues to pose a threat to the stability of the country. Second, U.S. forces are engaging in the critical information operations that encourage Iraqi political participation and dispel false political propaganda from extremist groups.

After the presentation, MG Anderson took questions from the audience. When asked if the draw-down in Iraq was related to the surge of troops into Afghanistan, he replied that there was no correlation between ongoing operations in Iraq and operational changes in Afghanistan. He reiterated that the two separate war theaters had two separate strategies, chains of commands, and operational structures. When asked about the long-term establishment of American basing rights in Iraq, he replied that, in his opinion, there will be some form of basing rights for U.S. forces in the long-term future.

Another question asked about the effect of the Christmas-day "Underwear Bomber" on U.S. operations against AQI. He replied that threats from Yemen were "another ballgame," and that there would be no change in the way that operations are conducted in Iraq. What will it take to establish sufficient security? According to MG Anderson, the toughest problem with establishing security and development is finding competent, corruption-free people. While a

lack of technology and a sophisticated economy (Iraq's is primarily oil-based) drags down long-term growth, infiltration of extremists within the Iraqi political and military system is a big challenge. Establishing competent, corruption-free leadership will be a major component of Iraq's political success or ultimate failure.

There are some potential challenges that may impede the successful draw-down of U.S. operations in Iraq. Nevertheless, Major General Anderson remained optimistic about U.S. force capabilities and military strategies in the war in Iraq.