

GENERAL DAVID PETRAEUS (USA), COMBATANT COMMANDER,
U.S. CENTRAL COMMAND, DELIVERS REMARKS AT THE
WOODROW WILSON CENTER

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SPEAKERS: GENERAL DAVID PETRAEUS (USA), COMBATANT COMMANDER,
U.S. CENTRAL COMMAND

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PETRAEUS: Thanks very much. I think I'll start out over here. I think I'll start out over here.

And, if I could, I probably should correct one of the last things that you said. But it'll be difficult to be off the record with seven cameras in the back of the room.

(LAUGHTER)

So I guess I will concede that this is probably on the record, and go to it.

But I thank you very much for your kind introduction, Ambassador. It's great to see you again.

More importantly, thanks for your great service to our country as a diplomat, as a corporate leader here in Washington and, of course, your leadership here of the Woodrow Wilson Center.

Your generous words, though, bring to mind an admonition from Mark Twain. It goes something like this: Try to do the right thing. It will please some and amaze the rest.

And thanks to all of you for being here. It's great to see this wonderful turnout. I guess there's a few more in breakout rooms somewhere. It's one of those occasions where you say it looks like we've got everybody here except for the fire marshal. And it's just as well that he's not here, I guess.

I did just get back, at 3:00 this morning, with Ambassador Holbrooke, from a trip to Afghanistan, where we hosted a civil military review-of-concept drill. This is not just U.S. civil and military. It was also all coalition civilian and military leaders and our Afghan partners, with very strong representation from the different ministries.

And we subsequently had a two-hour meeting with President Karzai before getting on the plane last night, Kabul time, to get back here at about 3:00 this morning. I say that just up front in case my usual swift flash-to-bang time is a bit delayed here this afternoon.

Congressman Hamilton, thanks very much for the invitation to be here. Thanks for your, I think, 30-plus years of service in a hill not too far from here, and your service subsequently in a host of different endeavors, including leadership here at the Woodrow Wilson Center.

And thanks to all of you again for joining us.

This is, indeed, the second attempt that we tried to schedule this. The first one was delayed by what's been called "Snowmageddon," I understand, here in Washington.

But it is great to be with this organization again. We did have a wonderful event down there in Tampa and St. Petersburg late last year.

Now, what we want to do today is have what's called a conversation. And so I'll transition over there to a seat where we can have a conversation. And these are enjoyable, frankly, because they go where the moderator and then those in the audience want it to go.

As always, you know, you've heard the deal that it's every general officer's First Amendment right to use PowerPoint slides in exercising his freedom of expression. And so I do indeed have a deck of slides here. And then also the other tool in expressing our freedom of expression, and that is a PowerPoint -- or a laser pointer.

And so with that, I'd be happy to go over here. You can have the first question, I think, Ambassador.

MODERATOR: Thank you, General.

PETRAEUS: It's good to see this is my seat.

(LAUGHTER)

I'll take it anyway.

MODERATOR: Well, let me start, take the privilege of the first question. And the question is, how does the deadlock Arab-Israeli peace process affect the U.S. ability to advance its interests in the CENTCOM area of the conflict.

PETRAEUS: Well, let me -- let me -- thanks for asking that, actually, because it's something I've been trying to clarify, to get the proper characterization.

Unfortunately, I think there have been some incorrect reports, frankly. And then there have certainly been mischaracterizations of what was in the posture statement that we submitted -- that I submitted -- to Congress as part of the normal spring testimony that takes place by geographic combatant commanders.

First of all, the inaccuracies. And all of this hit in the blogosphere right about when the vice president was visiting Israel, or shortly thereafter. And so it all tended to snowball a bit, I think, and get aggregated in a way that probably was not quite right.

But it said in one of these blogs reports that got it all started that I had requested the addition of Israel and the Palestinian territories to the Central Command area of responsibility. It's just not correct.

We do submit every year, or about every year, a unified command plan recommendation as a geographic combatant commander. As, I think, every time the CENTCOM staff and commander have considered that particular document going in there was a discussion about whether we should add Israel and the Palestinian territories. As you know, they're a part of the European Command.

In fact, why don't I just show the CENTCOM area of responsibility. You mentioned -- but if you can put up -- I'm one of six geographic combatant commanders. We are the so-called war-fighting commanders. They're shown right here. The world is divided up into six areas of responsibility.

And you can see, the Central Command area right here. It's 20 countries, basically, from Egypt to Pakistan, from Kazakhstan down to Yemen. And, of course, we included the waters off Somalia so we could keep Johnny Depp and the pirates there, as well, in our area.

(LAUGHTER)

But if you can blow it up, if you can go to our particular area -- we have another slide that blows this up a bit -- I can show that, in fact, Israel and, of course, the Palestinian territories are carved out of that. It's a little bit hard to see, but there is our boundary right here.

And it also just -- this is basically what keeps us -- you know, people occasionally say, "Hey, what does the Central Command commander do, and, you know, what do you do for a living?"

And I say, "Well, you think of the guy in the circus that runs around and he puts a plate on a stick and gets it spinning, and then he goes to another stick and he puts that plate." And so we say we try to keep a lot of plates spinning.

And these are basically the various missions, if you will, the place, indeed, that we're trying to keep up on that stick and revolving, ideally, at a more rapid rate of speed.

Now, in fact, in the posture statement that I submitted -- and again, as I said, we did not ask for that addition in the formal response of our UCP; it was discussed, as it has been every time, I think, the CENTCOM commander and staff have approached this. And you

also look at other countries around the periphery just to ask, you know, should there be others that we might want to add to our area for some reason or other.

The other was that I'd sent something to the White House saying we've got to do this or that. Commanders don't send stuff directly to the White House, generally. Every now and then, the president has occasionally asked. During the Afghan process, in particular, he asked once or twice for something directly from me and I gave it to him directly; obviously, with info copies to those in the chain of command, the secretary of defense and then also to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs.

Now, what we did do is, in the posture statement -- again, this 56-page -- not in my opening statement. In fact, I never literally said this to Senate. But it was in the formal submission. We listed a number of factors that shape the strategic context within which Central Command operates in our area of responsibility. I think there were 11 different factors. I actually thought this question might come up, and so I have those factors here for you.

Militant Islamist movements. Proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Ungoverned, poorly governed, and alternatively governed spaces. Insufficient progress toward a comprehensive Middle East peace process -- I'll come to that -- or Middle East peace. Significant sources of terrorist financing and facilitation. Piracy. Ethnic, tribal and sectarian rivalries. Criminal activity, such as weapons, narcotics, and human trafficking. Uneven economic development. Lack of employment opportunities. And lack of regional and global economic integration.

Now, what folks, I think rightly, seized on was the inclusion of the comment about insignificant progress -- or insufficient progress -- toward a comprehensive Middle East peace process and the description that was then in that, which included reference to a perception of U.S. bias toward Israel and so forth. It did not say anything about settlements. It didn't say anything about putting our soldiers at risk or something like that.

But it does create an environment. It does contribute, if you will, to the overall environment within which we operate.

Now, I think it is fair to say, though -- and I subsequently, in a speech up in New Hampshire noted that, you know, I firmly agreed with what Secretary Clinton's speech shortly after that time stated. And I think it's fair to say you could have said, "General, nonetheless, Israel is -- has been, is and will be an important strategic ally of the United States."

And that is fair enough. And I think that that's something that we could and should have included in that, just to make sure that there was no missed perception about what we were implying by this.

But again, the fact is that I did, indeed, offer, during the transition to the new administration, our view that the lack of progress toward a comprehensive Middle East peace is, indeed, something that does very much shape the environment.

I mean, if you talk to the moderate leaders in the region, typically -- although Iran, I think, is now edging that issue out -- but typically they will state that their biggest concern is, indeed, the ramifications from not seeing progress toward that, because what it does is, it gives the radicals, the extremists, an argument that the only time that they've made progress on that issue is when there has been, say, an intifada or some violent response.

And that's what we were trying to get at with that. And again, I thank you for that opportunity to provide that amplification.

MODERATOR: All I can say is, you have a lot of plates spinning around at all times.

I'm going to take -- ask the next question, then I'll open it up to the audience.

Does the planned withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq remain on schedule, despite the spike in terrorist attacks both before and after the election, recent election?

PETRAEUS: It does, is the short answer. The fact is that, really, we've been working at this for some time, as you know. You know, when you draw down from the substantial number of forces, and substantial number of bases and items of equipment that we had, this is something that's been ongoing for quite some time.

Indeed, the first big step was probably moving out of the cities back last summer. And we have subsequently been on a -- on a track that includes transitioning bases and moving, again, tens of thousands of items of equipment out of Iraq either back to the United States or, in some cases, on to Afghanistan.

We're at about 96,000 troopers on the ground in Iraq right now, and we are on track to be down to 50,000 by the end of August.

Of equal importance, it's not just that reduction of forces, it is also that we will have a mission change at the end of August, as well. And that mission will include explicitly being advise-and- assist forces for our Iraqi partners, not conducting unilateral combat operations on our own.

Now the truth is, we've been moving to that for quite some time, as well. In fact, no operations are conducted at this point without arrest warrants being attached to them. We have really tried to support the rule of law, except in a case where there is an imminent threat. And you always -- obviously, you never remove the right to protect yourself.

And so in that case, there still is the opportunity to take action unilaterally, as required. And that is part of the strategic agreement that was reached with Iraq in late 2008.

Now, why don't I put this in context, as well. Because the level of violence actually -- you know, there's no question there were horrific attacks last week in Baghdad, but by and large the level of violence remains very substantially down from, say, the peak.

Let me just explain this slide. This is January 2004 right here. This is last Friday night in Iraq.

Each one of these lines represents a week's worth of actual attacks, and then attempted attacks; in other words, improvised explosive devices that were found and cleared rather than exploded.

Now, let me just tell you that what this equates to, at the height of the violence -- say, in the spring of 2007 when we launched the surge of forces into Iraq -- by the way, the big surge was a surge of ideas that enabled the employment of these forces in a manner that was different from what we'd been doing before.

But that surge of forces enabled us to employ the comprehensive counterinsurgency approach in a way that we'd not been able to do before. But as you go on the offensive, the enemy fights back.

So in any event, we had over 220 attacks, actual attacks, per day in Iraq at this time right here. And typically now, the average on a day is somewhere around 15 or so attacks. It's been a bit less than that -- you can see a period in here -- been a bit more than that at times.

There was a spike for the election, as Al Qaida did all that it could to keep the Iraqi people from going to the polls. And they did not succeed. Over 60 percent of the eligible Iraqi voters actually did cast a ballot. And for what it's worth, over 85 percent of those, according to a poll that we put a lot of stock in, said that they felt they were able to do that without any kind of intimidation or influence.

So, again, quite a credit to the Iraqi people and to the Iraqi security forces because they had the lead.

But even, again, with the sensational attacks that we saw last week, which were, indeed, horrific, the level of violence has remained generally at a relatively low level for Iraq, and at a level that does not prevent the continued construction and reconstruction that has taken place ever since the level of violence was reduced to a point that that was made possible in the wake of the surge.

So I think that gives you a sense of where we are.

Now, is there political drama in Iraq right now? Oh, absolutely. And again, we've occasionally talked about this as being Iraqracy (ph), not democracy, and it is.

But, you know, actually a test question for you. Twenty countries, you saw the area of responsibility. Touch wood, but is this perhaps the most democratic country in the 20 countries of the Central Command area of responsibility? And, you know, it's an arguably proposition. Certainly there are other countries where votes are cast.

But I think, again, if they can come out of this with a representative government -- in other words, one that represents all elements of the Iraqi population and is, therefore, reasonably responsive to all elements of the population -- you will have the benefits of what we know as democratic governance and that we have seen, in fact, as during the run-up to the election.

A big reason that various Iraqi leaders put attention to certain key concerns of the population was the fact that they knew they were going to face the electorate at the polls. And I know that Congressman Harman and others would know exactly what that is all about.

And it's great to see you here, as well.

MODERATOR: Thank you. General.

Let me open it up to the audience now.

Sam?

QUESTION: (OFF-MIKE)

MODERATOR: Please state your name and affiliation.

PETRAEUS: Yes, who is that guy?

(LAUGHTER)

QUESTION: Sam Donaldson.

PETRAEUS: Who is this guy down in the front row here? How did he get here?

QUESTION: Pull.

(LAUGHTER)

General, we're in Afghanistan for a limited time, whatever that time may be. Is it your view that when we leave there must be, in order to serve our security interests, some sort of functioning government -- central, I suppose -- that has enough support of the people, enough efficiency, enough will, all of those things in order to continue that security for themselves and us? Or is there some other way; working with regional power centers and our own ground forces that are engaged right now?

I guess I'm asking whether, at the end of the day, when people say, "Hamid Karzai is a corrupt mess," the answer would be, "It really doesn't matter."

PETRAEUS: Well, first of all, I think what you have characterized is in a general sense of how do you get to where we want to be when, ultimately, we can begin that process of drawdown and so forth, I think that's generally right.

In other words, to achieve our vital national security interest, as the president has announced it, of ensuring that this does not once again become a sanctuary or safe haven for Al Qaida or other transnational extremists -- because there are a couple of affiliates there that also carry out transnational extremist activities -- to do that, as was articulated in the president's policy, you've got to have a certain amount of central governance that certainly can employ traditional local forms of governance, traditional social structures, traditional dispute resolution. But there obviously has to be enough control that, again, there cannot be sanctuaries or safe havens for Al Qaida.

And we believe that the approach that is being taken, on which we have embarked, is the right way to try to get to that.

Are there challenges to that? Without question. And again, as I mentioned, we just came from a very comprehensive review-of-concept drill there in Iraq, as I said, that Ambassador Holbrooke and I co-chaired with all of the leadership of ISAF and the international community, the Afghan government and so forth, and then culminated with us essentially back-briefing President Karzai, who also joined us on day one of that review-of-concept drill.

And then after -- at the end of day two we went and saw him and had a very -- very good, very productive and constructive two-hour meeting with him that covered the waterfront in terms of what's coming up for Afghanistan with the peace jirga, the Kabul conference, elections, President Karzai's visit to the United States, and all the rest of that.

I might want to put Afghanistan in context for you, if I could, too, and just sort of tell you what we've tried to do over the course of the last year, before we go on to the next question.

If you can maybe use the -- we sometimes use a puzzle slide because it is sometimes that that's probably appropriate.

What we've tried to do over the course of the last year is this right here: to get the inputs right, to get the components in place for the conduct of a comprehensive civil military campaign plan.

Those included these four elements right here. We started by looking at the organizational structure. And I can tell you that, having done this for a living in Iraq, a comprehensive civil military counterinsurgency campaign, I looked at the organizational

structures and recognized that there were some that were missing, frankly, or that were certainly not resourced adequately.

There was not, for example, what is now called the Joint Command. That's a three star-level operational command. Commander wasn't dual hatted as the U.S. forces commander. Believe it or not, there were forces that reported directly to me from within Afghanistan, bypassing the NATO commander who was a U.S. Army four-star general. And, again, a host of these other elements right here.

All of these are essential to the conduct of what it is we're trying to do. But, frankly, we did not have those within that 30,000- strong structure that was in place in early January 2009.

Then, obviously, you want to get the best folks you can in charge of those organizations, and during the course of rotations and everything else, and then standing up new units. We sought to do that.

By the way, Staffan de Mistura, some of you will recall, was the special representative to the secretary general in Baghdad. It's not entirely coincidental that his great job there resulted in him -- his reward, as he gets to go to Kabul. And I had a great chat...

(LAUGHTER)

... great chat with him while I was there over the weekend. He also participated in this review-of-concept drill with us.

By the way, the NATO senior civilian representative, an extremely talented U.K. diplomat, has partnered very, very effectively with General McChrystal in the ISAF, again, side of things and done a great job there, as well.

Then you have to get the big ideas right. So again, get the campaign plan, tweak that, get reintegration guidance. You know, again, you don't kill or capture your way out of an industrial- strength insurgency. You have to take as many of them out -- off the field, by trying to convince them to be part of the solution instead of a continuing part of the problem by some form of reintegration, is the term of art in Afghanistan. It was reconciliation in Iraq.

That means -- that particular term means the very high-level discussions with Taliban leadership in Afghanistan. There may come a time when that will be productive. In the near term, it is more likely that reintegration -- the lower and mid-level Taliban reconciliation -- is more effective.

And then a tactical directive to try to reduce the loss of innocent civilian life. You cannot achieve your strategic goals, your strategic objectives, if tactical activities result in the loss of innocent civilian life. It undermines all that you're trying to do.

And then to get the resources to enable you to carry out these concepts, these big ideas, under the leadership of these folks leading these structures. And, of course, very substantial increase.

In the course of 2009, from decisions that were residual from President Bush, then President Obama, some within Central Command in the secretary of defense's authorities, additional 38,000 troopers from the United States, some additional NATO troopers. Now the policy announced by President Obama at West Point in early December, 30,000 additional U.S. forces. There's more non -- NATO, non-U.S. forces going, triple the number of civilians, additional funding to enable the Afghan national security force growth, as well.

So that's what we've tried to do over the course of the last year. We generally are at the point where the inputs are reasonably right. Certainly, the deployment of the additional forces is still ongoing. We're almost at 14,000 of the 30,000 being deployed. The commitment that I made that the president was to have them all on the ground by the end of August, with the exception of one unit that's not required by then.

And we are on track to do that despite, by the way, having to divert some of the flow because of what's happened in Kyrgyzstan in the recent week.

Now you're just seeing the first of the output. The central Helmand operation was the initial operation of an 18-month campaign plan. That was the Marjah, Nadi Ali (ph). Clearing of that generally complete, although, again, the enemy will fight back. There will be very tough challenges there.

Getting the kind of inclusive governance is crucially important. And I think it's been very significant what President Karzai has done when he went, for example, to Kandahar and conducted a shura council of some 1,500 Afghan leaders.

And this was not a shura council that was picked by him or by his relatives. This was a shura council that included -- as you saw, presumably, on television -- individuals willing to stand up and to criticize the activities of the Afghan government and even, in some cases, of President Karzai. And he said personally, "The finger should now be pointed at me."

Inclusivity and transparency are the key qualities to what needs to take place. And we discussed that with President Karzai yesterday, and he absolutely agreed with that.

Most recently, he was up in Kunduz on Sunday with General McChrystal and Ambassador Sedwell. And there are a number of others of these.

The peace jirga that is conducted, very, very important to the way ahead for reintegration and reconciliation, because it will, touch wood, produce the kind of national consensus that is essential to empowering the Afghan government, indeed, to carry out meaningful reintegration of lower- and mid-level Taliban leaders over time.

So, I mean, that will give you some sense of that and of what it is that we're trying to do, and how we're trying to proceed.

QUESTION: (OFF-MIKE)

PETRAEUS: I don't know that we allow follow-ups here, do we?

(LAUGHTER)

I mean, this is not the White House anymore, Sam. I'm sorry.

MODERATOR: Sam -- you got to let Sam follow up. Otherwise you never hear the end of it.

PETRAEUS: You'll give him one follow-up?

MODERATOR: One follow-up.

(CROSSTALK)

PETRAEUS: Well, again, look...

(CROSSTALK)

PETRAEUS: Well, what -- I mean, do you think -- do you think that they do politics in Kabul, Sam?

Wait, this can't be coming -- this conversation here. Get that microphone out of his hand.

(LAUGHTER)

I mean, this can't be -- again, I mean, surprise, surprise, they actually do politics in Kabul, I mean, or that people occasionally will nod in the direction of domestic politics.

I had mentioned to somebody when I did my recent Senate Armed Services committee hearings and other committee hearings that, gosh, they still do politics on Capitol Hill even though there's been an election and so forth.

No, I think it's true. Would you agree, Congresswoman Harman?

OK, let it be noted she nodded her head.

(LAUGHTER)

But, yes, there's certainly. But, look, there's also something here about sovereignty. There is something about an individual who has been elected. You can say what you want about the elections, but he was elected. The Afghan people recognize him as their leader.

He is the commander in chief, and we need to keep that in mind, as well, as we move forward and endeavor to make this a partnership against extremism and against illegal narcotics industry bosses and all the other challenges that Afghanistan has. This has to be a cooperative endeavor and that's, indeed, what we're striving to make it.

QUESTION: Timothy Towell (ph), a former private in the U.S. Army Reserve. Never made Pfc., General.

(LAUGHTER)

PETRAEUS: We could fix that, probably.

(LAUGHTER)

QUESTION: I'm an Irish-American and I like Brits. But I like them when they're playing polo and drinking single malt whiskey, and not in Ireland.

What is your policy thinking -- forward-looking thinking -- about people who generally don't like outsiders in their homes, in their villages, in their valleys, in their mountains, in their provinces? What is your view on that?

PETRAEUS: Well, my view is that if you stay too long you come to be seen as occupiers, without question. I mean, I was asked that repeatedly when I was preparing to go back over to take command in Iraq.

The truth is, though, that I used to use the phrase that when you conduct an endeavor like Iraq or Afghanistan -- when you launch an operation like that -- you have to recognize that there's a half-life. And there's a half-life of how long it is that they really are happy to see you.

And they were happy to see us in Iraq. Again, I -- again -- and it didn't matter. Shia, Sunni, Kurds were all delighted to have us there. No one loved Saddam, and seeing him gone was great.

But then what you do, how you act, how you carry out your mission has a great deal to do with how long that half-life lasts.

And there will be, by the way, individual half-lives; different half-lives in different parts of the country, depending on how the individual units and leaders and all the rest of that carry out their tasks.

You can actually put time back on the half-life. I would argue that that half-life had run out in certain areas of the country -- long since, actually, when we launched the surge -- and that we were able to actually get back to the point where the Iraqis were happy to have us because we now helped them get rid of Al Qaida, whom they'd begun to associate with three real millstones that we also tried to help hang around Al Qaida in Iraq's neck.

And that was indiscriminate violence, of which Al Qaida was guilty repeatedly; oppressive practices, you know, the social activities they carried out were horrific; and then also extremist ideology which, again, the Iraqis did not embrace once they saw it laid out plain and simple.

But again, it's always what have you done for me lately. And again, this is not unlike politics, I think. Again, you have a constituency if you are a commander of a foreign force in a country, and you have to be seen to be serving the people and helping your host nation counterparts to do the same.

There are often inflated expectations. I remember the question constantly in Iraq used to be, "You know, General, you could put a man on the moon. Why can't you just turn on the electricity in Mosul?"

And, you know, they never quite understood why we had this great technological capability, but couldn't do something as seemingly simple as that to them.

So, I mean, what's the situation in Afghanistan? What you're really getting at, because you're talking about valleys, which we didn't have in Iraq, but clearly, again, it depends what we do, how we do it, and whether they see this -- whether the people see this -- as offering a brighter future for them and for their families or not. And if we can convince them of that, then they will tolerate.

By the way, they will never truly applaud. No one, no country, I don't think, ever truly welcomes foreign forces on their soil. Although, again, over time there are factors that can mitigate that. The strategic agreement reached with Iraq was of enormous importance because it recognized their sovereignty.

And then, by the way, we have carried out every step of that, including, as I mentioned earlier, withdrawing our forces from their cities; going to where they're in the lead rather than us in the lead; arrest warrant-driven operations rather than intelligence-driven operations; and on and on; and, of course, drawing down in accordance with what we said we would. All of which has been hugely important. It's undercut that argument that Al Qaida in Iraq used to use that, "The Americans are here. You know, they want to occupy us, they want to steal our oil."

I pointed out to a couple of Iraqi leaders at various times that for the price of one year of our operations in Iraq we could have bought all of Iraq's oil for the next 10 years and we wouldn't have had to go in there and do what we did.

So again, I think we're sensitive to that. We're working very hard to try to operationalize that concept. That's one of the big ideas, if you will, that, again, General McChrystal has very forcefully brought in. But it's tough to do in a very challenging and volatile and violent endeavor, as well.

MODERATOR: Bruce?

QUESTION: General, one of the hallmarks of your successful counterinsurgency campaign in Iraq was information operations, and you're very keen on being first with the truth and getting to the media.

PETRAEUS: Yes. Yes.

QUESTION: Could you assess how successful we and our allies have been in both Afghanistan and Pakistan in this critical area?

PETRAEUS: Well, in Afghanistan -- can you go back to the puzzle slide? Because I think I should point out what we did not have at all was an information operations task force. And again, we had a tremendous admiral leading the effort in Iraq, Rear Admiral Smith, Greg Smith, and his reward was, first, he got to come to CENTCOM when I left Iraq. And so we all migrated down to CENTCOM. And then as the focus increased on Afghanistan, needless to say, he has now helped establish the information operations task force in Kabul.

And we've finally got a structure now. In fact, one of the biggest areas of improvement that both Ambassador Holbrooke and I agreed on was, in fact, the development of the communications. It's really strategic communications, what have you.

Certainly, the admonition that guides you is being first with the truth. You're trying to beat the bad guys to the headline, but you got to do it with the facts as you know them. Because Sam Donaldson will be all over you if you put lipstick on a pig or in any way try to be expedient with that.

And in Afghanistan, we finally, I think, have a good apparatus. But, of course, you also have to have actions on the ground. And again, if you have a case in which innocent civilians are killed in the course of an operation, that can obviously undermine not just your communications strategy, but it will also undermine your overall effort to achieve your strategic goals and objectives.

Pakistan is another matter entirely. You have narratives there. Again, domestic politics very much influences what is said, in many cases; surprise, surprise.

You have a press that is, again, quite interesting in how it operates. And you have this -- it's very puzzling to us, but you really have to, as you well know -- I mean, I'm telling you -- that you really have to understand the local context and so forth because you have

a situation in which Congress approves a substantial amount of money, the Kerry-Lugar-Berman bill, \$7.5 billion over the course of five years, I think it is.

And then, well, Congress did have this language in there that some folks over there took the wrong way. It was meant to be helpful, I'm sure. But, I mean, it almost got to the point where I think some folks went over there and said, "Hey, if you don't want the money we can give it somewhere else."

I mean, it was intended to be a very, very important contribution to this effort. But that's the kind of dynamic within which you're operating.

And again, I think there the key is, with Pakistan, being seen to make a sustained, substantial commitment, because this -- we have a history here. We have several times left Pakistan -- most significantly, of course, in the wake of Charlie Wilson's war, you know, right after the Mujahedeen, who we stood up and some of whom we're now fighting, of course, took down the Soviets and forced their withdrawal. We were out of there and basically left Pakistan holding the bag and trying to figure out how they were going to move on from there.

There's a memory of that. There's a memory of the period of the Pressler Amendment, where no Pakistanis came to U.S. what's called international military education and training. I mean, the fact that you have a generation that doesn't have graduates from Fort Leavenworth and the National War College, it changes the context within which you're operating. We're trying to make up for that.

But over time, this is really going to be judged, as always, on our actions. And are we going to be a true partner who is truly committed to helping them with the enormous challenges that they have, or are we going to do what we did in the past?

And obviously, what we're trying to do is to demonstrate that we are very much supportive of what they're trying to do.

And by the way, what they have done over the course of the last 10 months, as you well know, again, is very, very significant.

How about the slide that shows the map of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas?

You know, what's taken place in Pakistan is of enormous importance. You'll recall about a year ago, up in the North West Frontier Province, in Swat Valley -- you can just barely see the river right here, this very picturesque river surrounded by peaks of well over 10,000 feet. I was just there, by the way, a month-and-a-half or two months ago, in both lower and upper Swat.

In the greater Malakand division the Pakistani Taliban -- the TTP, Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistani (ph) -- basically took the place over. They did play on grievances, the lack of speedy justice, inequities in wealth distribution, and so forth. But they -- and they began

immediately carrying out extremist activities, oppressive practices, and demonstrated their extremist ideology.

So the people got understandably and rightly very worried about that. They were literally all the way down to here. Islamabad is only 60 miles away or so. And in the meantime, of course, there were various extremist groups operating in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas.

The people recognized that treat as being the most pressing threat to their country's very existence, their writ of governance as they put it. And that, together with the political leadership's recognition -- including the major opposition figures' and the clerics' support -- enabled the -- gave the support for the Pakistani army and Frontier Corps to conduct very impressive counterinsurgency operations in this extraordinary terrain here to clear the area of the Pakistani Taliban and all their infrastructure -- they had enormous bases up in these mountains right up in here, for example -- and then to hold it.

And they have held it. They have conducted, again, impressive counterinsurgency operations. Meanwhile, they also went into Bajur. There's been operations in Mohmand (ph). They're down in Orakzai (ph) right now conducting very good operations; some of the extremists going up into a valley in Khyber.

They've conducted very good operations in eastern South Waziristan against the former Baitullah Mehsud's organization, which was responsible for the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, blowing up thousands of innocent Pakistani civilians and members of their security forces, and so on.

And they have, by the way, conducted operations in North Waziristan, even though the army spokesman famously said, on the day that Secretary Gates was on short final to land in the airfield outside Islamabad, that they would not ever do that.

They have, in fact, and those have continued. But they're not going to do a steamroller-type operation. They will be selective in those.

This is very impressive work. You can say, "Well, but they've only gone after the Pakistani Taliban, the TNSM, and the other affiliated movements." Well, true, but those movements all have symbiotic relationships with Al Qaida and the other extremist elements that cause our forces in eastern Afghanistan enormous problems.

And the fact is, they have continued to go after those. They have taken significant losses in the course of this campaign. The enemy does fight back, and typically targets soft targets, civilians. They went after our consulate the other day.

But they have done this. And I think, again, it is very impressive. And they are continuing it, and they are staying resolute in their operations.

And again, this is something I believe, they deserve our support. We had very good strategic dialogue, discussions with the foreign minister, defense minister, General Kayani, the army chief, about two or three weeks ago, including hosting him down in Tampa, the army chief. And we've got to continue to build this partnership over the future.

I hope that aligns with your thinking on this, too, as the -- about the most informed observer in Washington on it.

MODERATOR: Let me call on Congresswoman Jane Harman.

QUESTION: Thank you, Joe. Thank you for including me. And I want to thank the Wilson Center for honoring my husband, Sidney, and me a few years ago. And tell Lee Hamilton that we miss him in Congress. I know he's happier here, but I would be happier if he were still in Congress.

MODERATOR: Here, here.

QUESTION: General, I outsourced my Afghanistan question to Sam Donaldson, so let me ask you about something else.

Your area includes 20 countries, as you have pointed out. One of them is Afghanistan, another one is Pakistan. We really haven't discussed the broader geography.

But this is what I want to ask. Your puzzle-piece chart on Afghanistan, which I have on my desk, is very impressive, and it shows how you have integrated operations in Afghanistan. But obviously, the puzzle-piece chart for your command has got to be a lot bigger.

PETRAEUS: Right.

HARMAN: And my question is this. The countries that most directly threaten U.S. security interests right now, I would argue, are Pakistan, which you just addressed; Yemen, where Awlaki and others have directly tried to incite violence against America in America -- against Americans in America; possibly Somalia; and a couple of other countries in the north and east of Africa.

And are there enough brain cells, and is there enough -- are there enough resources against those problems, as compared with Afghanistan?

In Afghanistan, we are spending over \$100 billion a year. We will have 100,000 troops soon; 20,000 more kids going into harm's way -- I understand very well-led and, hopefully, very well-protected. But nonetheless, we don't have financial commitments anything like that in other countries. We're not welcome in terms of boots on the ground in many of those countries.

But have we got our thinking right? Will we look back in five years and say, "Oops, we focused on Afghanistan and we failed to pay enough attention to these other places," as was said when we focused a lot on Iraq and, in past years, failed to pay enough attention to Afghanistan?

PETRAEUS: Well, I mean, first off, you're asking a general officer whether he has enough funding, resources, authorities and allies. I mean, the answer should be fairly clear. We'll always take more of what you provide us, and we'll try to put it to good use for the U.S. government.

Actually, the real question I think is about -- and rightly about -- sort of the balance of resources and all the rest of that. And can you, again, keep other plates spinning while you're really focused on one or two or three of those plates.

And with respect, you didn't mention Iran, which is yet another -- I mean, that would -- people ask me constantly, you know, what keeps you awake at night. And when you get in at 3:00 in the morning from Afghanistan, not much.

(LAUGHTER)

But on other nights, when you've had a chance to do what we call fighter management, then it often can be Iran as much as it can be some of these other challenges that we have. It does actually depend on the day.

We have tried to take a comprehensive approach. In fact, the biggest of the big ideas that came out of the strategic assessment that we conducted when I took command of Central Command -- and we brought in literally 250 or so civilian as well as military analysts and experts and practitioners to help us with this for all the different areas, sub-regions, and functional tasks -- the biggest of the big ideas is that to counter terrorism you have to use more than counterterrorist forces, and, in fact, that the more appropriate intellectual approach is that of a comprehensive, whole-of-governments counterinsurgency campaign. Because that tends to get you thinking very comprehensively.

Again, civil military, but governments with an "s" on the end.

And so that, for example, I mean, you are right that we had not focused enough on Yemen until very recently. To be candid, I felt that way when I was still in Iraq.

When I was the commander in Iraq and we were looking at Al Qaida -- in fact, why don't we -- let's -- let me just show you the Al Qaida network, as an example, if you can show the star slide to show that particular network.

This is how we see Al Qaida. And again, it is a network. And for what it's worth, it takes a network to confront a network, to deal with a network.

But let's start right here. This is Al Qaida senior leadership. That's the acronym right here. That's in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of western Pakistan, the mountainous areas between Pakistan and Afghanistan. And you can see, there's that network that's very worrisome that you talked about; Al Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula, which has been franchised this year, the past year, to be AQAP by Al Qaida senior leadership in Yemen.

And rightly, there's Somalia. Big concerns there. You have, all the way over, Al Qaida in the Maghreb. Obviously, there are Al Qaida elements in Europe. Certainly, there's still Al Qaida in Iraq. It's much diminished. There's still Al Qaida in Saudi Arabia, very much diminished because they have conducted a very impressive campaign. There's Al Qaida out in the Far East and Al Qaida in the United States.

And again, this is the network, if you will. And when I was sitting in Iraq we tracked this network, because the way you have to contend with more extremists inside one are is they come from somewhere else. And we were watching very carefully the ability of Al Qaida to move extremists through Damascus and into Iraq across the porous western border.

That's been dramatically reduced, by the way. It used to be about 110, 120 a month, down to well under 10 per month now.

But we saw the roots going down in Yemen. That was the place. Saudi Arabia, very good pressure on them after being really challenged four or five years ago. The Gulf states, by and large, doing well against that. But we were watching this very carefully.

And when I took command of CENTCOM, among a couple of areas that I said I thought we were not devoting enough attention to was Yemen, right there.

We had enough attention on Iraq. We were going to devote more attention to Afghanistan and Pakistan. We needed to do more in Lebanon, by the way. We've tried to do some more there, and the election there was modestly encouraging last year.

So we have devoted more. In fact, April of 2009 we had an action plan, we coordinated it with the State Department, the embassy there, obviously with our intelligence partners, the Joint Staff in the Pentagon, OSD.

And then, after a visit with President Salih last July, where we finally -- we had a very constructive meeting. It was somewhat different from the first meeting that we had back in December of 2008. And from that point, we started working.

That culminated in a number of different operations against Al Qaida that you may recall, somewhere around the 15th of December, and then 24th of December, and some others, that resulted in the destruction of two training camps, the killing of several senior leaders, and, in fact, interdicted four suicide bombers with their vests on that were on their way into Sanaa that really kicked all this off.

That was the proximate threat that the Yemenis recognized. Three of those were killed, one was captured by Yemeni special operations forces.

Unfortunately, the would-be Detroit bomber, Abdulmutallab, had already left Yemen after spending a couple of months there. He did meet with Anwar Awlaki, we're pretty certain. That's where he was trained on use of the explosive device that was fitted to him. Went to a country in Africa, another country, the U.K., and then got on the flight to Detroit.

But -- so, I mean, you are right. That's the example of a country where you have to keep pressure everywhere. And you do have to be, again, very much a multitasker, a multi-ball juggler, to keep all the different plates spinning.

I think the one, probably, that we're spending a great deal of time -- quietly, I think -- to support our partners in the region to do prudent defensive preparations, prudent planning and so forth, of course, also has to do, needless to say, with Iran.

The past year, the diplomatic track has been pursued. The open hand was extended; it was not taken. Iran was given every opportunity, directly, bilaterally, through the IAEA, through other multilateral organizations to resolve the differences, the disputes, the enormous concerns of the international community about their nuclear programs. They did not take advantage of that opportunity. They rebuffed the world.

And that has now led to the transition of the world's leaders to the pressure track. And, in fact, you saw some stories today, of course, about some of the discussions on the margins of the summit today -- which is very significant, by the way, because if you think about the nuclear threats, I don't think the big concern now is the strategic exchanges on which we used to focus in the days of the Cold War. Now it is much more the possibility of a, quote, "loose nuke," or a nuclear material, somehow making its way to extremists who might be willing to use it. And that is obviously the focus of the summit today, and it is a very important subject indeed.

So again, I think we have a reasonably balanced approach. We are trying, wherever possible, to work with partners rather than to do it ourselves.

Most of the countries, needless to say, prefer it that way. We've worked hard to quietly engage other countries to assist the states that are under real challenge, such as in the case of Yemen, where President Salih is indeed, and has indeed, been going after Al Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula with his forces.

But, I mean, that's something that we're trying -- you know, you can't get stuck in the mode of your nose against the glass focused on one country or one area, sub-region, and lose sight of the broader regional picture.

MODERATOR: General, let me suggest taking two or three questions, and then coming to a close.

From the press back there? Yes, all the way in the back.

And then...

QUESTION: (OFF-MIKE)

PETRAEUS: I'm sorry, I think the mike is back there. Why don't we ask him, and then we'll give it to you, if we could.

QUESTION: My name Amin Mahmoud (ph). I'm with the Alliance of Egyptian-American.

You mentioned moderate states, mean like Egyptian probably include that. And in my opinion, they are a dictator countries, and supporting dictators, plus supporting Israel. Continue the same policy of 60 years, supporting only government. And you increase extremist in these countries.

And Egypt might surprise you in the next two years. We don't know what will happen in Egypt. I wish you have that in consideration.

PETRAEUS: First of all, I'm not sure I completely understand it. But if you're asking about our policy toward the political process in Egypt or something like that, I will defer that to the -- to our policymakers and try to stay in the military lane, if I could...

(CROSSTALK)

QUESTION: Of course. But you (inaudible) extremist, and supporting dictators and support Israeli policy in the area will increase that. That's related to you...

(CROSSTALK)

MODERATOR: There's a lady who was about ready to ask a question. And then (inaudible) have your concluding question.

QUESTION: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, Mr. General, and Ambassador. Thank you very much for this presentation.

My name is Rosemary Segero (ph). I'm the president of Hope for Tomorrow. We focus on violence against women in conflict.

And my question is, how are you working with the African governments, the presidents and the civil society, the communities to fight terrorism, Al Qaida and extremists?

Because Africa, I know, is not a very rich country. But looking at it, there are people coming out of some countries going to Africa to get and recruit young people to become Al Qaida like the one from Nigeria.

So there should be a way because, you know, we don't want extremists, terrorists in Africa like the Kenya bombing in Nairobi and Tanzania. If the U.S. had looked on that, that's how the terrorists started.

So they should look into it, not just assume maybe there's nothing that may happen. They are going there. Maybe they may come again.

So look into that so much as the senator said, looking into that funding. Training the communities, trying to work with the civil society and the African leaders to fight terrorism. I think we can work with you on that as not only you struggling on this.

Because they are all over. They are everywhere. Somebody's funding them, somebody's giving them money.

So look into that...

(CROSSTALK)

MODERATOR: Thanks you.

And Sander (ph), ask your last question. And then we'll wind up.

QUESTION: General, thank you for your leadership; especially for protecting us. And I know that your sleepless nights are so that we can be protected.

You mentioned the Iranian...

(APPLAUSE)

Thank you for your sleepless nights.

You mentioned Iran, and I think you meant the nuclear program. But how -- can you comment on how Iran projects its power into the other areas of your AOR, and what steps you're taking to counter that, please.

PETRAEUS: Yes. Actually, to be frank, I really think of it in a much broader way. And I'll show you that just in a moment. We'll pull up, in a second, the Iran slide that shows what they're doing, but not just -- let me answer just the first question.

With respect, when you asked what's CENTCOM doing about -- to help African governments, in truth, we're not because African Command was created about a year-and-a-half ago. In fact, Central Command handed off to African Command the Horn of

Africa at that time, in 1 October, 2008, when the U.S. Africa Command was established under the leadership of General Kip Ward.

And what you describe, though, is precisely the approach that African Command -- and really, again, the greater U.S. government -- is trying to take in the case of Africa. That's not a command with 215,000 soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines and Coast Guardsmen on the ground the way that Central Command has. It is much more a force -- in fact, there is a diplomat as the deputy commander of African Command, in recognition of the importance of the diplomatic component of the overall effort that the United States takes in Africa.

If you remember the slide that I just showed on the Al Qaida network, though, you saw that we clearly recognize the challenges, particularly in Somalia and the Horn of Africa and the Sudan, and then over in Al Qaida in the Maghreb. So just to point out to you again.

And we conduct, for example, what we call global secure video teleconferences about every six weeks or so, where we focus on the global networks. And typically, we're looking at the Al Qaida networks.

There are other networks, though. And, in fact, Iran is the other one on which we can typically conduct these kinds of secure video teleconferences.

And Al Qaida is obviously not just limited to the Central Command area of responsibility. It includes African Command, European Command, Pacific Command, Northern Command among others.

And so all of them are engaged in that, together with, needless to say, all of the elements of the intelligence community, diplomatic community, typically a number of the different embassies in the region will be on those, as well as, obviously, the State Department, C.T. coordinator at the White House, Pentagon, and all the others.

So we are very aware of the threat that you're talking about. And, in fact, I think if General Ward were sitting here -- and I recommend that you get him in here because he's a great commander and a great soldier -- you would hear him describe an approach that is very similar to what you just suggested that we should employ.

With respect to Iran, Sander (ph), and thanks for that question because, again, it does help me to elaborate, I didn't mean to imply, in fact, that our only concern with Iran is the nuclear concern. It's not at all. This slide right here shows what it is that Iran does.

And if you'd go ahead and put that up.

Here's Iran, of course. Here are the Gulf states -- Iraq, Levant, and so forth. And by the way, here you see -- this is the top recruiting officer for the U.S. Central Command, that's President Ahmadinejad.

Each time he steps up to the podium, when he denies the existence of the Holocaust, I might add -- and by the way, I'm speaking at the Holocaust remembrance ceremony at the Capitol later this week -- when he announces a new centrifuge design, whatever it is, it sends ripples through the rest of the region, through the Arab world, in particular, and has generally prompted them to embrace Central Command in ways that were not typical in recent decades, frankly.

And prudent defensive measures have resulted. The regional security architecture has gotten a great boost, frankly, from those concerns.

And there's a reason that a small country in that particular area buys \$18 billion worth of items, defense items just from the United States, just in a single year. Needless to say, we now have a major general as the attache there instead of a colonel as we had before.

Now, here's what else Iran does, though. It provides, still, arms, trains, funds, equips, and directs proxy extremist elements, in southern Iraq in particular, does extend a little bit north of Baghdad in some cases. They are much diminished since Prime Minister Maliki ordered the Charge of the Knights operations, as it was called, to go into Basra and deal with the militia extremists there. It also resulted in a big fight in Sadr City in eastern Baghdad and elsewhere, which the Iraqi forces, with substantial coalition support, defeated the militia at that time.

But there are residual elements. There's always additional training, equipping, funding, arming, and directing going on. And there's a huge effort, needless to say, to exert influence in Iraq. And it was not coincidental that Iraqi leaders were invited to Tehran right after the election inside Iraq -- something that the Iraqi people very much rejected. They want a government that is devoted to their interests, their national interests and their people first and foremost, and not influenced by countries outside the region.

There is still -- there is certainly the provision of arms funding, training to Lebanese Hezbollah in southern Lebanon and to Hamas in the Gaza Strip. There's been interception of various weaponry and other forms of assistance, trying to get to both of those locations, I might add. And, of course, this is Hamas elements.

And, of course, of considerable concern to Israel has been the provision of increasingly long-range missiles and rockets that get larger and larger in terms of their payload.

Also of concern, the missile program, needless to say. That has continued to progress. Yes, they might have failed tests periodically; in fact, more often than not. But then there has been progress with that.

There are a number asymmetric threats. These are, I think, suicide speedboats or some form of, again, small craft that are going to challenge our forces in the maritime region if there ever were to be conflict.

And then again you have President Ahmadinejad in, I think, that's the Natanz nuclear refining plant where they produce low-enriched uranium and now, I think, have retooled to do some limited, more highly-enriched uranium.

So all of this, again, adds up to considerable concern for our partners in the region, the Arab world and our partner in Israel, needless to say. And so it is much, much more than just the nuclear program, about which there are, again, that grabs the headlines.

And it is of enormous concern, given, again, the history of activities and just the sheer rhetoric of the leader of Iran. And I hope that, then, provides that a little bit more broadly to you.

MODERATOR: Thank you, General, for your enlightened remarks.

PETRAEUS: Thank you. It's been a pleasure to be with you. Thank you.

(APPLAUSE)

MODERATOR: Please wait until the general leaves, and thank you all for coming.

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