

TRANSCRIPT

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THIS IS A RUSH TRANSCRIPT AND MAY CONTAIN ERRORS. USERS ARE ADVISED TO CONSULT THEIR OWN TAPES OR NOTES OF THE SESSION IF ABSOLUTE VERIFICATION OF WORDING IS NEEDED.

Q: General, you wanted to take a few minutes and talk about your two favorite spots -- Iraq and Afghanistan. The floor is yours.

A: As an opening I'd essentially say that we've made a lot of progress in both Afghanistan and Iraq in military terms over the past six months. I wouldn't want anyone to assume that that means that victory is in sight in terms of World War II style victory parades, et cetera. There are a lot of hard things ahead, a lot of fighting ahead in both places. It's clear to me that we need to work hard to bring stability to both Iraq and Afghanistan and at the same time we've got to fight the broader context of the global war on terror.

There's a lot of misconception when people talk about this action against the terrorists that operate really in the heart of my area of operations. There's this notion that -- Thanks. I'm going to pass on that. I didn't know there was breakfast, too.

The global war on terror, it's always interesting to go back to what Bin Laden said. He said think globally, act locally. That gives you an idea that he operates in the franchise type of mode. He operates in cellular structures, in different places throughout the region and throughout the world, and he does it in a very decentralized fashion. It is not a problem that easily lends itself to a military solution.

The deeper issues associated with the causes of terror groups operating throughout the region certainly don't lend themselves easily to military solutions, so we're part of the solution to the problem but we're not the full part.

When we look at places like Pakistan and Saudi Arabia where they are fighting this battle it's essential that we help them help themselves to the extent that we can.

I think in the coming year you'll see our efforts shift in both Afghanistan and Iraq to building local capacity, building security capacity, building Afghan and Iraqi security capacity so that they can help themselves.

I remain absolutely committed to the nation that we must be successful in both Iraq and Afghanistan in achieving stability so that there is an opportunity for moderate governments to emerge there. I do believe that the struggle that is apparent in the middle of my area of operations is one between moderation and extremism, and it's up to us in the Central Command to do whatever we can militarily to assist the forces of moderation be victorious in the long run.

With that, I'm more than ready to talk about anything you want to talk about.

Q: General, I just noticed you used the words persisting in the coming year to build up security capacity. I'm wondering if that implies or means that you have turned the corner in Afghanistan against the Taliban, and likewise in Iraq against the insurgencies? How far would you go in saying that's been broken?

A: Bob, I don't want to use the term turn the corner, seeing the light at the end of the tunnel, or any of those types of terms. [Laughter] I'd say we've made good progress in our counter-insurgency operations in both Afghanistan and in Iraq.

Counter-insurgency operations are long, they take a lot of effort, they're done on a very small unit level, they are subject to peaks and valleys like any type of military operation. I think in general in Iraq, for example, we've been successful in broad terms against former regime elements. And in Afghanistan, despite an awful lot of reporting that's always talking about the resurgence of the Taliban, I believe that the Taliban is in deep trouble as a military organization and I think their political capital is waning as well. You see continued strength on the part of President Karzai. The most recent Loya Jurga showed that he emerged with I think a very enhanced ability to deal with the folks in the Pashtun areas in the south and in the east.

We've got a lot of reconstruction efforts going on. I think you're all familiar with the Provincial Reconstruction Teams that we're building throughout Afghanistan.

In very real terms, we will conduct limited military operations in and along the border areas to continue keeping the pressure on Taliban, al Qaeda, and various other anti-government groups. We'll build Afghan security capacity by making the Afghan National Army more effective, by converting some of the militias over to government militias that are more firmly under control of the central government. We'll also see the introduction of NATO command and control capacity to deal more directly with the reconstruction efforts. All of those things point to a stabilization of the situation in Afghanistan, not a worsening of it.

So I'm feeling pretty good about how things are going against the Taliban. But look,

yesterday for example, you have suicide bombers in Kabul against, we lost two soldiers associated with NATO and ISAF. I would expect that when they sense a place that they think is vulnerable or a group of international forces or non-governmental organizations, they'll attack them.

Q: You mentioned the limited military operations along the border with Pakistan. You're aware of the news reports that they're saying there's going to be a new phase in terms of what's happening inside Pakistan. Can you comment on whether you would consider operations inside the Pakistan border?

A: Of course I read the newspapers every day for obvious reasons. The terminologies that we tend to use of spring offensives, winter offensives, summer offensives, are World War II kind of analogies that really don't fit well in this type of military operation. So you read this article and it gives you the impression that you're going to be lined up on the border with bayonets fixed and you're going to blow a whistle and charge over there. That's certainly not what we have in mind.

We are currently conducting military operations inside Afghanistan that's pretty robust, called Operation Mountain Blizzard. There's all this reporting that we're hold up in Bagram at this giant Bonstle-like base there. That's not true. We've got a lot of battalions of capability that are out there moving about looking for the enemy at the small unit level. Remember, this is squad and platoon operational stuff. It's not big, large movements of forces.

With regard to Pakistan, I don't know how many times I have to say, Pakistan has done more for the United States in the direct fight against al Qaeda than any other country I know of. You all know this. You report it. You understand it. Our job is to work as cooperatively with the Pakistanis as we can. I regard President Musharraf as a firm ally in the war against terror. I talk to him frequently. I just visited him the other day. I saw him after one of the two assassination attempts. He knows that al Qaeda is trying to kill him and he absolutely, positively wants to get the problem under control. But there are difficulties that he has that are associated with working in the tribal areas that he has to work through on his own.

We'll help him where he wants help. We have shared interests. We have a lot of cooperation that is going on between us and the Pakistanis in terms of our liaison officers that are exchanged, frequent visits, liaison folks that are in Islamabad. But the idea that we would work uncooperatively with the Pakistanis is not one that I'm entertaining.

Q: Is there any evidence that more sophisticated weaponry is showing up on the battlefield anywhere? I was interviewing some of the pilots, and particularly Army helicopter pilots who said they were being told that they were facing at least a smattering of SA-16s and 18s now.

A: I think that we're pretty sure that we've seen SA-16s used. I think the manpad of choice remains the SA-7.

It's unclear to me, although it's possible that an SA-18 has been used, it's unclear to me that one has been used. But the manpad arsenal that was stockpiled in Iraq was very substantial. We've got programs to take care of the manpads in a number of ways. Nevertheless, there are obvious places in Iraq in certain areas that we've had difficulties with various groups, that the manpad threat remains and we've got to do everything we can to work against it.

The most important thing we can do is find the manpads, get them off the streets, and get them under control.

Q: Can you clear the air about whether it was indeed missiles that hit the C-5, C-17?

A: I haven't seen the final reports. I suspect the evidence points to the fact that some sort of a missile hit the C-5. The C-17, I still don't know.

Q: Good morning, General. Where are you right now with the negotiations to craft a new military relationship with the incoming sovereign Iraqi government? Can you describe what your goals are? Have you presented a formal proposal yet? How will that process move forward?

A: We haven't presented any formal proposal yet. I think it will be an evolution of the current track that we are on. As you can imagine, we're as interested in the political activity that's going on between Ambassador Bremer, the Governing Council and the various other players in the political dynamic of Iraq as anyone, but it's apparent to all of us that Iraqi security institutions will not be mature enough by July to continue or to be able to control the situation throughout the nation without the help of coalition forces.

It remains to be seen what type of entity will emerge. Clearly we hope that we can quickly build a Ministry of National Defense, that we can build an Iraqi staff of some sort of military officers. You know that we have built an awful lot of capacity at the lower levels, so there are small units of Iraqi Civil Defense Corps that's operating as, it's going to be up to 36 battalions here which is a pretty substantial force. We're pretty happy with the way the force is operated.

We're building brigade-sized command and control nodes for those units.

The police forces are much improved over what they were, but there's still a lot of work to go with the police forces. There are other security entities like border police, et cetera, that are all maturing.

But I think the key between say now and September is to connect those Iraqi security institutions with higher level chains of command which don't currently exist. Of course

that will require a lot of work and effort on our part and we intend to work hard at doing that.

As you build these chains of command you have to work with whatever the new Iraqi sovereign entity is going to be to make sure that you build the Ministry of Defense or you assist in the building of a Ministry of Defense in a way that fits in with their concept of their own security.

We will move to what we call a strategic set of local security control to the Iraqis, and we're starting to do that now. I know many of you have traveled out there. You know in certain parts of the country the coalition presence is much lighter, the number of patrols are lower, et cetera. It will be our effort between now and June to turn over as much of the local policing as we can to the local entities.

Certainly after June we'd look to conduct military operations in conjunction with Iraqi entities and it's also important to know that in many areas we are standing by while Iraqi police and ICDC units conduct the major operations.

So the good news is that the security institutions are maturing. There's a lot of work that needs to be done to connect them with chains of command so that they're responsive.

I think you'll probably see an evolution where the Iraqi Minister of Defense at some point or other becomes the equivalent of the Title 10 holder and a coalition commander of some sort will control operational activity which will include Iraqi units operating with certain requirements for making sure that Iraqi police are present, et cetera. And then you'll ultimately see us moving to more of regional control where we're guaranteeing the territorial integrity of Iraq and then eventually we leave.

Q: But there may not be a SOFA by July 1st, is that correct?

A: There may not be. A SOFA on the European, NATO-style model is just, it may be too difficult to come to grips with. I think it's very clear to me in most places I go throughout Iraq that people understand there will be a need for a coalition force of some sort.

I'd just like to add that we're going to restructure our command in the April/May time where we follow the Afghan model that we've had. I think you know that we used to command and control everything from Bagram, in JTF 180, then we built Combined Forces Command Afghanistan that worked on the pol/mil work and really concentrated heavily on building Afghan security institutions, working closely with Ambassador [Khalizad].

We intend to apply that same model to Iraq when we build a combined forces command for Iraq, that the 3rd Corps would essentially be the tactical command headquarters of the units in the field. And we have yet to work out the details but it seems to make sense, especially if we're going to go to an embassy model in Iraq after July.

To be honest with you, I'm not sure that I know what things are going to look like from the embassy side, whether it's going to be a super embassy, some sort of a cooperative coalition of the willing working in a CPA type environment. I just don't know what it's going to look like.

Q: What's your reaction to David Kay's comments yesterday that we [inaudible] in terms of concluding that there's WMD there. Do you think there's still WMD?

A: I certainly went into the war, I think many of you know I was the Deputy Commander during the war, I certainly went into the war with a firm appreciation that we would find WMD there. As a matter of fact I thought they would use it against us, and I thought they would use it against us when we crossed certain red lines that we had pretty good intelligence on, et cetera. When that didn't happen, I still thought we would uncover it somewhere.

I think David Kay's done good work in trying to understand the WMD program. And I read somewhere where it was characterized that he's got about 85 percent of the look where he thinks he understands it to the 85 percent level. I would just caution everybody that we really need to know what the answer is, so continuing work on WMD is I think a good thing.

I also believe that we sometimes are unfair to our intelligence services. If we did get the WMD wrong, okay, I understand that, but I can tell you there are certain things we got extremely right which allowed us to conduct a campaign that was pretty quick and pretty decisive in a very short period of time. The tactical and the operational levels of intelligence were better than any I've ever seen before.

Q: We'd like to know from the war, of course, [inaudible] WMD. The rationale [inaudible]. Do you feel the commander [inaudible]?

A: The interesting thing about being a soldier is that when the President of the United States says cross a border, we cross a border. That's your answer to that.

Q: Last November you estimated the size of the insurgency of Iraq about 5,000 strong. You said there had been numerous reports of insurgents captured or killed. You said this morning that you think U.S. forces are making good progress. So how many insurgents now would you say are present in Iraq?

A: I'll never forget the one press conference, I went up and said there's 5,000 and the next day it was 5,000 and I know everybody's got charts and they're counting them.
[Laughter]

Q: We wouldn't do that.

A: Yes, you would. [Laughter]

I think, let me characterize the enemy for you as opposed to giving you a number.

Q: Why won't you give us a number? You gave us a number in November. You've reported progress since. Why not try to quantify it? We heard the descriptions of the enemy.

A: I think that the lack of precision of being able to add up all the various groups that are operating against the coalition, some of whom are criminal groups, can create a picture when you start making numbers. That's unhelpful.

I think my estimate at the time was about right and we've made progress since then. We have definitely unraveled an awful lot of the cellular structure of the Ba'ath party and the former regime elements, but on the other hand we see al Qaeda and the Zakawi network, Ansar al Islam, et cetera, increasing their activity inside Iraq and numbers doesn't matter in terms of our forces in this war in a very real sense, and it doesn't matter in terms of their forces. It's a matter of effects.

So you have to be careful in trying to judge victory or defeat on strictly statistical, World War II types of accounting structures. What matters is whether or not the groups that are aligned against you can produce results of important proportions that would hurt you both militarily and in the greater battle of perception. In that regard groups like al Qaeda, Ansar al Islam, and Zakawi operating in Iraq should concern us because they have professional capability to do a lot of damage.

I think on the other hand you all know that we picked up [Hasan Gul] the other day in Iraq. That's a clear indication that al Qaeda is operating there. It's also a clear indication that our intelligence system was good enough to have put him under our control. There are other al Qaeda, lower-level numbers that we're rolling up over there too.

So I am optimistic that as these terrorist groups try to get established in Iraq it actually will have a pretty interesting effect against them, and we have learned things from many of the al Qaeda folks that we've taken in Iraq that leads us to understand the situation in the Afghan/Pakistan border area, Saudi Arabia and elsewhere.

So did I significantly enough not answer your question? [Laughter]

No number.

Q: I'd like to take another stab at Kay and WMD. Indeed when the President orders you to cross the border you have to cross the border, but the logic of the war did hinge on WMD and its imminence.

Does the fact that there seems to not have been WMD affect the warfighter, affect your

troops? Does it have any bearing on morale, or is it just another day in paradise for these guys?

A: Our soldiers are professionals. They are professionals unlike any other force that's been assembled by the United States of America in its history. We understand what our job is and if you go over there, and I think you've been over there, and I think many of you have been over there, you talk to our combat formations and there's a real sense of them having a lot of pride in doing their job. The political ramifications of various debates that go on inside of Washington do not necessarily percolate down to the squad level when it's a matter of life and death on how you perform your mission.

So we are where we are. I will not look back as a commander. I know the mission that must be accomplished there, our soldiers know their mission that must be accomplished there. What's important to them is not whether or not we were right or wrong about WMD but whether or not the people of the United States support what they're doing and the conflict in which they are engaged.

There's no doubt that the support of the President, of the Secretary of Defense, of the larger group of the people of the United States is crucial to the prosecution of this war. I believe we have it, they believe we have it, and until such time as they think they don't, we'll continue to not worry about it.

Q: The lack of WMD does not make your job any tougher?

A: The lack of, or not --

Q: Apparent lack.

A: Because there's no lack of terrorists and there's no lack of other people that are fighting us. Our job is to stabilize Iraq. A lot of people seem to think that we are trying to impose our will upon the greater Iraqi body politic. We are trying to enable Iraqis to help themselves to emerge from this in a way that they control their own future. We've gone from essentially no Iraqi security forces to nearly 200,000 folks that are operating alongside of our soldiers and independently of our soldiers day after day. If you look at the casualty rates, their casualty rates have increased substantially, and there will come a time where it becomes readily apparent that they are fighting a fight every bit as important as the one we're fighting.

Q: A question about the statement Paul Bremer made the other day that may complicate the U.S. mission over there. [Inaudible] PKK, a separatist group up there in the north, terrorists, and the U.S. goal now would be to drag them out of northern Iraq so that the Turkish general [inaudible]. How does that complicate your role as commander, and what's the U.S. prepared to do at this point by way of a military action to push them from northern Iraq?

A: I really wouldn't want to talk about any military plans that have to deal with any particular group inside of Iraq other than to say there's an awful lot of military activity that will take place in Iraq that will be the lead of Iraqis, the lead of Americans, et cetera between now and September, October, November timeframe. How these things are approached diplomatically, politically, and militarily, I do not know. Do we have the capacity to deal with the PKK should those orders be given? The answer is yes.

Q: He put out a cable, a press release the other day that says, I'm just going to ask you conceptually how would you approach that given all the other demands in the country, the force is stretched, and you're going to try to] stabilize the country in general?

A: I believe that the PKK issue is one that will be handled first diplomatically and politically before militarily. There will be a broad range of options that will be available to the United States and our allies and the Iraqis that deal with the problem. I'm not really prepared to talk about any sort of military activity against them.

Q: A factual question. Roughly how many PKK are up there?

Q: Five thousand? [Laughter]

Q: I'll give a number. [Laughter]

A: I think all of us have to be careful about the characterization of PKK, KDEK, a lot of different names that are going on, who's armed, who's not armed, et cetera.

I think as everybody knows there are about 1500 Turkish troops already in northern Iraq in the areas where they believe that there are PKK concentrations. The PKK has morphed into different political entities in different ways, in so many different ways I can't keep track of it.

The question of the number of armed people that are ready to stand and fight up there is, I don't even want to venture a number but it's not in the tens of thousands, I can tell you that.

There's also a component here that I think you all understand of our very good relations with the PUK and the KDP that will have an impact on this.

So the idea that there is a simplistic military solution where you move the 1st Infantry Division from its area that they'll be operating in and around Tikrit and march them up into the mountains of northern Iraq and take out the PKK is certainly not what we have in mind. There's a broad range of things that can be done. We'll let the national leaders figure out what they want to do.

Q: General, there's consideration right now of how to deal with the Sistani command for an election. And an option that is being looked at extremely closely is, depending on

what the U.N. finds, it's actually holding some kind of election. That would come in the middle of an unprecedented troop rotation by the United States. How will a decision to hold an election before May 30th in Iraq, complicate your troop rotation? What would it do?

A: The troop rotation will largely be done by mid April. We're in a pretty heavy swing right now.

The troop rotation issue is one that a lot of people say you're going to have green troops on the ground and green troops on the ground will have more time getting ready and a more difficult time, but the green troops have been well trained and many of the green troops have served in Afghanistan. Many of the green troops have served in Iraq before. A large proportion of the Marine division that's coming over is already Iraqi veterans.

Our Army and our Marine Corps is probably the most operationally experienced tactical Army and Marine Corps that we've had since World War II. These are professionals that know what they're doing. So their ability to handle the situation should elections be ordered or organized, I think we can handle them from a security point of view provided that we have an awful lot of Iraqi help from police, ICDC units, et cetera.

But to me, I think that the problem as I understand it is not one of whether or not we can get our way through elections in a very short period of time, but whether or not you can be organized in terms of understanding who's going to vote, whether they can get registered, et cetera, et cetera. This is really not my problem. Whether we have elections or not, what kind of compromise comes out with Sistani, if any, will be one that we can deal with.

The clear thing that I understand as a military commander is whether we have elections or not elections, as we move towards an Iraqi sovereign authority we're going to have increased levels of violence. There are an awful lot of people that don't want an Iraqi sovereign entity that has any legitimacy or power to emerge. There are still plenty of Ba'athists that believe the Ba'ath party can regain its place in Iraq and there's terrorist groups that would hope to make the situation more stable so that their ideological philosophy can emerge victorious in Iraq.

There is no doubt that there will be difficulties as we move toward this, but I'm confident that our forces plus the Iraqi forces, given the right series of political moves, will be able to handle whatever situation they face.

Q: Surely the holding of elections would further strain -- irrespective of whether there's a turnover going on, a rotation going on or not, it would be a fairly major additional burden on top of your people there, wouldn't it?

A: There's plenty of work to do out there. The question is, and again it's a political question that I can't predict. The question is can you move towards elections with the

broad general support of most Iraqis? And if the answer to that is yes then it doesn't necessarily present a greater burden on us. If the answer to that is no, that moving toward elections in its own right causes greater political instability and violence, then of course it will create a burden.

But it's also clear to me that people misunderstand the degree to which Iraqi security institutions are becoming available to deal with a lot of the local things that are happening.

Q: I have a related question. General Sanchez recently has talked about the emergence of a possible nationalistic threat rather than specifically Ba'athist. With this impasse on the political front, how to move towards sovereignty, are you entering a period where there's a greater risk of civil war?

A: Yeah. It's a very interesting question. I think that given a long series of, or let's just say a bad series of events that pit communities against one another, it would be possible to move towards a civil war but I think it's unlikely.

A lot of people regard the Sunni Kurds, the Sunni Arabs and the Shia in the south as somehow or other being monolithic ethnic blocks that live, think and act together in a very very clear way. And in many ways they try to equate the Muslim-Croat-Serb model that we saw in Bosnia, but that was a model that developed along very very hard ethnic lines because they'd already moved into civil war.

But you go into the Shia community, there are very many Shia secular politicians and many Shia professionals that are very interested in joining secular political parties.

So I think it's a simplistic notion to see the world as Sunni versus Shia versus Kurd. The Sunni community in many respects is becoming more and more politicized in a way that allows them to participate in the future. In other words there's political activity of a moderate nature that's starting to emerge in the Sunni community that I think has been enabled to a certain extent by the capture of Saddam Hussein.

So I am hopeful that as we move toward a sovereign authority that the forces of good will actually hold the country together and move it toward a better future. I mean everyone, those of you who travel to Iraq, if you think back to where we were last April and you think to where we are now, it's a remarkable change in economic activity and political activity, et cetera, et cetera.

I was in Mosul the other day and just thinking back in the early days of the 101st there to what has happened there recently, shows an awful lot of good activity.

I mean people know that Balkanizing Iraq will not be to their advantage and I believe that there will be more people fighting to keep Iraq together than to break it apart and that will require compromises as in any society, and it will require maneuver.

To get back to this question on elections, I don't know what solution Ambassador Bremer, the Governing Council, and others that are associated with the political future of Iraq are going to come up with, but I think that it's going to be very difficult between now and July to put elections together in a way that would be on a national scale.

There are logistics problems associated that are actually greater than the security problems. So it's possible. We'll do whatever we're told to do and work our way through it, but I think that there will be a gradual compromise of the way ahead that probably looks a lot like the direction that Ambassador Bremer wants to go now.

Q: Sir, I'd like to take you out of Iraq for just a moment --

A: Me, too. [Laughter]

Q: -- and ask you about this global [inaudible] concept that's being talked about in the Pentagon, of perhaps reducing [inaudible] that dictates how the forces are apportioned [inaudible].

I'm curious how you would like to see that shape up. And as a combatant commander, how would it work for you and how would you be able to draw forces and equipment?

A: That's a great question. My view is that we probably have applied lessons from Bosnia and Kosovo that were more stability operations from the beginning and less counter-insurgency operations, and tried to apply them against Iraq and Afghanistan in ways that are not necessarily valid there.

With both Afghanistan and Iraq, I would prefer rather than to send troops there always on a one-year tour of duty, that you must complete your one-year tour of duty, 365 days boots on the ground, you might do that with a base of the force but you should feel free to go to the Secretary of Defense and say look, we're going to need a brigade here for probably 60 days for a certain operation. So you have this notion of using surge forces to deal with specific military problems either in reaction to emerging problems or by applying military force against a specific problem that you have to deal with.

So I think this concept of a combination of base force in the region plus surge forces to use things as you need them and for all of the combatant commanders to have less ownership is pretty important.

We just had a combatant commanders conference and clearly an awful lot of the force is involved in my part of the world, but on the other hand I can't get the job done without very very close cooperation with Tom Fargo in the Pacific and Jim Jones in EUCOM and the combatant commanders, especially TRANSCOM, back in the States.

So the notion that a portion, that the force is not capable of moving up and down in any

particular area is one that I think we all need to get comfortable with. And you people of the press, I would ask you to get comfortable with that notion too. Because whenever we throw in extra forces it's oh, my God, the sky is falling; and whenever we take out forces, it's oh, my God, they're leaving too soon and the place is going to fall apart.

The security equation is a very complicated equation. It's U.S. forces, it's Iraqi forces, it's coalition forces, it's the political dynamic that exists on the ground, it's whatever big issues are percolating in the political atmosphere of Iraq, et cetera, or Afghanistan, whatever the case may be.

The other thing we want to do is we want to have forces that are available to go out and engage in my region in particular with nations that need some help.

Ultimately we will win the global war on terrorism not by going in and finding all the terrorists ourselves and killing and capturing them by invading other places. It's going to be by enabling local governments to enhance their security ability to go out and get these guys themselves. That's what it's all about for President Musharraf. That's what it's all about for President Karzai. And President somebody or other in Iraq, eventually that's what it will be about for him too.

Q: In terms of the strike forces, the quick reaction defense forces, would they be identified as [inaudible]? [Inaudible] or would they be owned by like the SecDef?

A: The SecDef owns all forces. And what's key is that within the combatant command I have the authority to move forces, and that we should all feel comfortable with the fact that forces will move from Afghanistan to Iraq or Iraq to Afghanistan or our air forces will move from the Persian Gulf region to Afghanistan to deal with the military situation as it may emerge. So I think the Secretary has always thought flexibly on those terms, and he certainly is thinking flexibly on how we use the forces available to deal with the various military things that take place in the combatant commands.

So I don't think what I'm saying is any change to good, sound military principles. It's just a greater willingness to shift forces for specific missions.

For example. Let's say we want to conduct a search operation in the Afghan-Pakistan border area around Kandahar and that our forces have been in the field for the past six or seven weeks. It makes sense for me to go to our coalition allies and say how would you like to send one of your parachute units into Afghanistan to operate for 60 days or so in a search and sweep operation in the Kandahar area? That notion of surging to meet a particular mission I think would help everybody quite a bit. It also keeps the force pretty sharp.

Q: Can you tell us what decisions have been made on placing a four star general in Iraq as the top U.S. officer there? And what are the advantages of going in this particular model? Are there any names being circulated?

A: No decisions been made on whether or not the commander of the force that we're discussing will be a three or a four star. We plan for the transitional period for General Sanchez to stay in command. He's doing a great job out there. We're very confident. Whether or not we switch General Sanchez out will have to be seen. It's hard for me to answer the question right now because I don't know what the security arrangement is going to be for the new multinational force, coalition force. But it's clear that as we transition to a more sovereign Iraqi authority that we'll also have to transition the way we think about our military force headquarters.

As I said, one of the most important ways we'll think about it is giving it greater and greater responsibility for helping the Iraqis build their own security establishment and connecting their chains of command.

There are a lot of people that could do this job. Whether or not it's going to be four star or not, that remains to be seen. Whether or not there are going to be senior coalition officers assigned to it remains to be seen, although I'm pretty sure that will be. I mean we'll look to build a robust coalition headquarters that deals with building Iraqi security capacity as its primary role and then coordinates other military activity as well.

Q: Is the concept that there would be a three star officer handling the actual anti-insurgency operations while a four star general handles the broad umbrella of responsibility for Iraq?

A: We haven't made a decision on whether or not the overall commander will be a three or a four star. We know from the way we were organized in the war where General McKiernan was the CFLIC commander and he had several three star generals under him, that the principle of command is we say you're in command and the other guys follow those orders. It doesn't necessarily mean it has to be a four star.

But if you look at the notion of how Korea and PACOM work, it's not impossible to think that something along those lines could emerge in Iraq providing that the Iraqi sovereign authority, the United States, and our coalition partners agree to it. But the Secretary hasn't decided. He's looking at a broad range of options. He will have to go to Congress, obviously, if there is a desire on his part to create a four star command.

A: My question General is why didn't your command put your command post in Baghdad and impose martial law when the main shooting started, rather than let Iraqis stiff their country's infrastructure? I've been told by high-ranking people that we didn't have enough troops, that it came as a surprise. General Maddox, I stood beside him while it was going on and he thought it was just a bit of [inaudible], he wasn't going to go so far. I've been told that you wanted to avoid casualties.

What was the reason you did not do that? Why didn't you impose martial law?

A: Well, hindsight is always a wonderful thing. When you're in the middle of something you don't readily see it as easily as when you're a Monday morning quarterback and you look back there and say gee, we wish we had done something differently.

But with regard to the looting that took place, it was unfortunate that there was so much looting that took place. I think the troops that were available to deal with it tried to deal with it to the extent they could without causing an awful lot of civilian casualties.

The infrastructure, looting in particularly on power lines, et cetera, definitely made it more difficult to get the reconstruction effort moving forward. On the other hand there were things that we expected to happen that didn't happen. We expected the oil fields, for example, to completely be looted and vandalized, and there was a certain portion of the force that was over there guarding them and looking after them. They might have been able to have been used somewhere else had we realized it.

But the truth of the matter is you can't be everywhere and you can't guard everything. That's just the way it happens to be.

The other thing I'd say is the headquarters arrangements for Iraq made sense in the immediate aftermath of the war as far as I'm concerned. The fact that we've built a headquarters, CJTF-7 as quickly as we did, along with ORHA in those days also made sense.

The resourcing of those headquarters and allowing them to get to work quickly, you can always look back at it and say gee, you know, I wish we'd done it faster. But on the other hand, we have not even been in Iraq for a year. If I look at how things are in Iraq compared to any place else post-war in the modern era, I think we've actually moved faster, further and more efficiently than any comparable post-war environment to include Germany and Japan.

Q: I was just focusing on a narrow point of whether there was a reason you didn't put your command post in Baghdad when the shooting stopped, and I've been given --

A: You mean the CENTCOM command post?

Q: Yeah, or an occupying authority to assert its flag in Baghdad. As far as I know, General Franks never got any further than the airport. Why wasn't there authority imposed in Baghdad? Was it shortage of troops? Was it a surprise that there was this resistance?

A: First of all General Franks at the time was the theater commander, just like I'm the theater commander now. If you think that you're only going to concentrate in this theater on Iraq, you will lose sight of the broader strategic problems of the theater.

If I were to tell you that the two most immediate problems that we have to deal with

right now are stability in Iraq and Afghanistan, I'd also tell you the two broadest strategic problems that we have to deal with, that must be dealt with in a broad range, happen to be Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. So it was never an issue of getting the CENTCOM headquarters into the tactical fight. You do that at great peril to the broader mission.

There was a tactical headquarters in Baghdad. It was the 3rd Infantry Division. A divisional headquarters was there. As a matter of fact there were two headquarters in Baghdad. One of them was the 3rd Infantry Division and one was the Marine division. Then ultimately General McKiernan's headquarters went up there. Were we fast enough? Were we quick enough? I understand the implications of being too fast, too slow. Did we anticipate this? Did we anticipate that? It's a good question for others to answer. But I am not dissatisfied with the "what if's." I believe that we have fought a credible counter-insurgency campaign in Iraq. I believe that we have rebuilt Iraq to the degree that we have and enabled its institutions to the degree that we have in a way that's been pretty good. I'm very positive about how it's going.

Q: I understand there's a briefing floating around the Pentagon right now, I'm sure you've seen it, that describes the extent of al Qaeda's involvement in Iraq. I was wondering if you could sketch that out for us and relate that to the foreign fighters that you've captured. Because it's my understanding that they're not all al Qaeda. A lot of them are freelancers and [inaudible] strategic problems with [inaudible].

Q: Let him answer, please.

A: No doubt al Qaeda is operating in Iraq. No doubt Ansar al Islam is operating there. The Zakawi network. And there are foreign fighters, some of whom believe in al Qaeda's philosophy, but many of whom believe that for their own ideological reasons they need to go into Iraq to fight the Americans. Or to fight the Iraqis that are moving towards a more moderate form of government.

The foreign fighter flow is almost always over-estimated. There are foreign fighters in Iraq. The number of foreign fighters that we've taken prisoner, though, or have killed in combat is what would call low. It's in the 100s. And many of them were people that we captured during the war.

So there are people ideologically disposed to come in and confront the coalition in Iraq, and they have a lot of loose groups and there's also some evidence of cooperation even between the nationalist Ba'athist and the salafists who want to bring the Caliphate back.

That level of cooperation is visible to us in a broader sense and I think we have a pretty good view of the various groups that are operating against us.

So militarily on any given day there's probably a battalion or two worth of combat power that's actually engaged in combat operations. Most of the work in Iraq is patrols,

presence, civil affairs, building Iraqi security capacity, et cetera.

I'm confident that there's no flood of foreign fighters coming in that you can read about on the Jihadist web sites. The same has to do with Afghanistan. The propaganda never quite gains realization on the ground.

Q: I was wondering if you have any views on the lessons learned process that Joint Forces Command has in place for the lessons from the war. With [reporters] being embedded with forces, at the same time [as they're fighting a war]. Do you think that's helpful to do that at the same time they're fighting a war, or does that simply get in the way?

A: Actually I'm a big fan of embedding all sorts of groups that are looking at what's going on out there to try to help us get better. Embedding lessons learned people in the battle during the war was a good idea. Not only are they almost always smart people, but they actually helped us fix some things on the run.

We're always having to fix our intelligence system because we always face different circumstances. In war things change all the time. We've gone from a high intensity war to a low intensity war and the lessons are different. So having the experts there on the battlefield looking at it is a good thing. I've gotten a lot out of the joint forces command effort.

I also got a lot out of having you all, many of you all, even though you picked on me with regard to certain specific things, having you there standing next to General Madison is better than having you not there. And you came to your conclusions about what we've done right, what we've done wrong. We're not afraid of fixing the things. But I think the greater visibility we give them to what we're doing, the better it is. I always try to take folks with me when I go out there so we can look and see.

Looking and being there and trying to assess it and make it better is important. It becomes harder during a political year because everything takes on a political ramification that might not necessarily have been the case otherwise.

Q: Do you [inaudible]?

A: Yeah. And almost never do I say you can't write that. We look at it very professionally. I think those of you that have been out there when it comes to military operations we do pretty good work on after action reviews. We actually have a good system of self-critique that helps us get better.

Q: General we get a lot of reports about the increase in the numbers of local forces who are replacing, Iraqi forces, security forces that are replacing American and other troops. So clearly the strategy is to transfer that authority eventually over to the Iraqis entirely. You talked about when that might end, it's probably not by June. But if the attacks

continue at this level and you've turned over authority to a new Iraqi government, at what point do you declare it a success? If you've still got the same level of attacks going on, how does that affect the decision of when to pull out?

A: It's not a matter in my mind of declaring it a success, it's a matter of achieving success. It's a matter of allowing a moderate Iraqi government to emerge that has a long-term chance of survival. It will be a political calculation when we've arrived at that point.

We are handing over sovereignty in real terms and I think that's extremely important for people to understand come July. We have to work out very quickly what that means in terms of the security equation.

But I think it's important for us to give this the best effort that we can and understand that there's more casualties ahead, there's more fighting ahead, but there's nothing out there that I see militarily that we can't handle. So we should be able to continue the operation as long as our political leadership believes it's necessary to stay at it.

Q: General, in the week or so after you caught Saddam Hussein both you and your commanders seemed very confident you were getting a handle on [inaudible] insurgency, how it was being financed both internally and externally. I'm wondering whether you think there's still significant amounts of money coming in from outside Iraq, and if so, where is it coming in from and how's it coming in?

A: There's the financing for different groups and it's different, as you might imagine. For example, the financial capability of the Ba'ath party was enabled by moving money around into various different locations and banks throughout the world and also burying it. We found an awful lot of buried money all over the place, like we found Saddam buried. It was very interesting that for some reason or other toward the end of the war there was an order that went out to the Iraqi army to bury their equipment. There were tanks and planes and all sorts of things buried all over. It's a metaphor for what happened to Iraq, that they buried everything to include their President. Well, they did that with money too. [Laughter]

On the other hand, there are external conduits that are still active. There are senior Ba'ath party folks in other countries not in the top 55 or maybe some of the top 55 that have access to funds that fund groups through various channels, and then there's the terrorist funding. And the terrorist funding is a much harder thing to get our hands around, but it's very clear that we need to regard people that openly fund Osama bin Laden, Zakawi, et cetera, as being every bit as much of a combatant as the guy that pulls the trigger.

So it is very important for all of us to make sure that folks understand that when you contribute to people that are killing Americans and undermining the stability of the region and trying to prevent moderation from taking hold, that they have put

themselves into the fight.

Q: These are separate channels you see? The Ba'athists getting money from outside as opposed to terrorists --

A: Yeah. There are separate channels. As you can imagine, the web of money and how it flows, the [pawala] system that exists, the banking system, the international banking system, couriers, et cetera, I mean there's a lot of money that flows around. We frequently find people carrying an awful lot of cash and when we find people carrying an awful lot of cash we know it's not to invest in a hotel. It's very important that we figure out how to interdict it.

I'll stay as long as you get to these guys. It's my long-windedness in an attempt to evade your questions that's hampering you. [Laughter]

Q: Okay, --

A: Money for U.S. troops. I know that American troops don't do what they're doing for the money but combat pay is a way to compensate them for some of their losses. There was a concern last summer when there was a Pentagon shift to try to reduce some of the combat pay. Is that something you hear push-back on? Also there is a current pay on the books that hasn't been implemented to give up to \$600 a month to folks like these Marines who have served there twice. But nobody at the DoD level is ready to -- Is that something you folks talk about?

A: I haven't talked specifically about compensation because it belongs in the Title 10 lane with the services, but clearly the Secretary has been very clear that we will compensate our troops in the way that they deserve to be compensated and in accordance with the law. He's been very very forward in making sure that the troops get their entitlements. That's important to all of us.

Every one and then there are misperceptions about various forms of compensation that emerge in the field and we sometimes have different things that emerge from the reserve component that you see in the active component, and it's important to get the word out to the troops through service channels and make sure that people get compensated the way that they need to be.

This is tough business and we don't do it for the pay, I can assure you, and you all know that.

Q: Going back to [inaudible], one of the things you said was that a lot of documentation [inaudible] some of the related programs were missing and ultimately [inaudible]. Given your [inaudible], what was the thinking behind not securing buildings, U.S. [inaudible]? Or did you not have the information in hand?

A: The question assumes that we have perfect knowledge of everything in Iraq and we didn't. It's obvious we didn't have perfect knowledge of everything in Iraq. It's also clear that we don't have perfect knowledge of what's going to happen. I mean the society under pressure when the Ba'ath party is removed and the apparatus of repression is removed, the degree to which looting takes place, et cetera, you can always ask the question, and rightfully so, whether we should have anticipated it better.

What happened with regard to documents, it's almost like finding the enemy in a movement to contact. You were out there, you're not everywhere. A force as big as the force that we had in Iraq doesn't cover every corner of it and it doesn't know where everything is.

We had a pretty good plan on searching the areas that we thought WMD were located and going to places where we thought we would find documents. But one of the things you also have to understand is that in war the enemy takes actions. One of the actions that the enemy took was moving documents around. And by the way, we found many documents buried. And we found documents moved from Ministries that were bombed, and a lot of them were moved before they were bombed. It was a group of soldiers that inadvertently walked into this huge underground warehouse filled with documents that we didn't have any knowledge about. I mean we just found it. When we found them we evacuated them, then we had to triage them and look at them. As you can imagine, the system for doing that sort of thing requires an awful lot of Arabic speakers and it's just not the average run of the mill Arabic speaker that looks at a document, but somebody that has technical enough knowledge to look at it and say hey, this is pretty important.

But a nation like Iraq which was very fascist in its outlook kept a lot of records, probably more so than any other Arab country I know. Getting through those records and finding important things, the work is not done yet and it will take some time.

It's very possible that before this is all over we will learn more and more about a whole series of things, especially with regard to the intelligence services and the links to terrorist organizations around the world.

But it's hard work, it's slow work, and there's other work that takes priority. The most important priority you have is conducting the military operations day to day against the insurgents, finding the cellular organizations, breaking them down, interrogating them, and you triage this huge amount of information you have and you do the best you can to try to get the right information to the right place.

It's undoubtedly true that at some time or other we will have documents in our hand that are probably in some storage box somewhere that contain some very important information that we haven't found yet.

Q: Do you want to describe the strategic problem with Pakistan?

Q: The strategic problem areas you included Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. [Inaudible] leave it hanging out there.

A: Both Pakistan and Saudi Arabia are involved in their own fight against extremists. That is crucial to the ability of their nations to maintain control over the internal situation and develop in a way that is in consonance with the way that people want them to develop.

Pakistan in particular we've talked about. Two assassination attempts against President Musharraf, extremists operating in areas that have not had a lot of presence of the Pakistani government in the federally administered territories.

It's clear that Musharraf has a strategy to move Pakistan towards a more representational government. I've talked to him personally about moderation developing in his country. He is working against the madrassa system that, when I say the madrassa system -- it means school in Arabic. We shouldn't come to the conclusion that all madrassas are bad because they're not. But he is moving against those that he knows are extremist. It's a battle of ideas as much as it is a military battle and he's engaged in that and we've got to help him fight that battle.

In Saudi Arabia, the same thing is taking place and you see day after day an increase in military operations and terrorist operations in Saudi Arabia. The Saudi Arabian government is working very hard to defeat the terrorist threat and at the same time they're engaging their people in a way to have a dialogue that discusses those things that can be done to reform the society.

When you have a problem the most important thing to do is recognize that you have a problem and then take action to try to solve it. I think that that has happened in both Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. There are going to be tough fights in both places. They're not the type of fight that you're going to send the 82nd Airborne Division to go fight. It's the type of fight that you need to send the full support and weight of diplomatic, political, and social help that makes sense for those countries to get at the bigger problems. And it's not the kind of fight that will be won tomorrow.

Part of the problem that we have in this war that is being waged throughout my area of operations is patience. Culturally speaking, our patience quotient is not high. Culturally speaking, the patience quotient of our enemies is very high. We think in terms of sound bytes of 15 seconds, they think in terms of hundreds of years. And this is not a new phenomenon, by the way, that has just come out of nowhere. It is a phenomenon that has arisen from time to time in the Arab Middle East and elsewhere where very very conservative and very extremist forms of Islam vie for control. And it's important that we, like I said at the beginning, we help those people that are striving for moderation to be effective.

So Saudi Arabia needs our help, but like I say, it's not the kind of help that the 82nd

Airborne Division brings to the plate. It's supporting people, helping them help themselves, sharing intelligence with them where possible, and dealing internationally with the problem.

In Tampa we've got about 81 different nations that had military representatives at our headquarters there. We have all of them there for the same reason, and that's to increase our level of cooperation and coordination in a fight that requires both interagency and international coordination and support.

I believe we're making good progress.

Q: Thanks, General. We're out of time.

A: Thanks everybody.

END TEXT