

TRANSCRIPT

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CG, II Marine Expeditionary Force

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Q: You've got 8,000 of your Marines, about half of them are already in Afghanistan and the other half on the way. I guess they are the leading edge of a surge in that country. I guess the best way to start here is to talk about what happened yesterday, with the change in the leadership structure in the war. How is that going to affect Marines now deploying?

A: Well thanks, and first of all, it's really great to be back here. I know some of you personally from a long time ago. So again, thanks for having me here. It's great to be back. I also said I never get any breakfast here. I always go away hungry.

Let's start out with the first question. The Marine Expeditionary Brigade, as you know, is flowing into Afghanistan as we speak. We're right around 3,900, 4,000 as of last night. There will be 8,000 that come from the Camp Lejeune area, some obviously from throughout the Marine Corps. Our total strength on the deck with the special purpose [mad cap] that's in there right now will be about 10,100, thereabouts. With the change in the command structure yesterday there will not be a mission change for us as of last night, because I asked about that. The brigade will go in there with the counter-insurgency operations working in southern Helmand, what we call RC South. A little bit in RC West. They will also partner with the Afghan National Forces, both military and police. So no change to our mission set as we see it right now.

Q: One thing that is different about this deployment, the Marines that were in western Iraq for so many years, there was a very well planned training cycle for them with the villages and the play acting and all that, to train them for what they were going to see over there.

Obviously that had to change for the troops deploying to Afghanistan, so how has that changed.

A: It's changed a couple of ways. If you think about it, when we first went into Iraq we didn't do any specialty training. All our desert training had been done out at 29 Palms, our combined arms exercises. Since then we've gotten away from that because the Marines were doing COIN and then ended up doing nation building in Iraq.

As we looked at Afghanistan, two of the things we changed. One was the culture, because the culture is totally different in Afghanistan. You're all aware of that. The tribals hold a lot more sway than they did in Iraq. Again, different culture.

Working on the Pashtun and Dari, that's the other thing we changed. Then we went to what we call, Mojave [Viper] was our certification exercise for the units flowing into Iraq. Then we went to an Enhanced Mojave [Viper]. We've got to have an acronym for everything.

Q: EMV.

A: The difference there is two-fold. One, it's more of a fire supporting maneuver integration. We're going back to that because we kind of got away from that. You took an artillery battalion and they were doing in lieu of missions in Iraq later on. They weren't firing artillery. They were doing convoys, security, stuff like that. So we're going back to supporting integrated arms. That's the two big changes.

The third one, as the units continue to flow, if we go above the 10,000, we will go back to working in Bridgeport, California. The Mountain Warfare Training Center. If you look at western Iraq you get more into the mountains. We do have a little bit of RC West right now. So those are the big changes.

Q: You mentioned altitude. You guys are going to be humping a lot of hills and then the problem of, the perpetual problem of the load you carry. Are you doing anything to lighten that load? How are you planning to operate, your guys, that have to climb the mountains in those areas and fight? Resupply so they don't have to carry stuff? What's your thinking on lightening the load?

A: When I first came in the Marine Corps about a thousand years ago we still had the haversack and the knapsack. In there you put a set of skivvies and boots and your C-Rats and you went. Then we went to the [Alice] pack, the rucksack, then the mountain pack. So the more capacity we had, we put more stuff in it and we did it to ourselves. We just got heavier and heavier and heavier.

Then you look at the protective plates that we wear now, the Sappy, extremely heavy. Then we went to the throat protector and the groin protector and the underarm

protector. All great stuff if you're -- For mobility, is Humvees or the MTRV or the MRAP. You're working that weight. But if you're working in Afghanistan, not so good.

So we're looking at lighter Sapper plates. We're leaving it more to the commander on the ground, depending on where he's operating in, what the enemy situation is. He might go down to no armor or lighter Sappy plates, so we're doing that. Until technology can catch up, Otto. Because you're right. We were mobile mounted for the most part, and then when we were doing our major combat in Iraq it was in a mount environment so there wasn't a lot of foot movement. That's not the case in Afghanistan.

Q: You talked about using the artillery more. The [inaudible] were doing patrols in Iraq most of the time. But your [mad caps] almost always relied on their air power as your mobile artillery. Air's been kind of getting a bad reputation in Afghanistan because of the collateral damage. How are your people going to play the choice between using artillery or air in an engagement to avoid that collateral damage?

A: The first thing is, the artillery is back with the brigade in Afghanistan. M777 which is a newer light weight artillery, it's got the same range as the old one, 9er8 does. Obviously a lot lighter piece of gear, so that's back. And we took also the EFSS, the 120mm mortar is in Afghanistan. So that's good. That's all good news. The artillery we've flown into Afghanistan, going back to doing artillery things. The reason we did that, Otto, especially with the mortar and the 777 was if you look at the way the forces are arrayed in Afghanistan right now, we're forward based in forward operating bases, in FOBs and COPs for company sized outfits. They have then instant fire support with the 120 and the 777. So that's one of the reasons we did that.

As far as air support, when it comes to post air support I still think it's the best in the world. You get a Marine grunt out there and he's JTAC qualified, he's going to call an F-16, an F/A-18, a Harrier, whatever it happens to be. With the precision systems, actually we're operating, right now we don't foresee a problem. So we'll go with both.

We've got the Cobra in Afghanistan now which is another great move. I'm an infantry officer and the greatest sound in the world, the Cobra coming down the valley or whatever, so the Cobra's back in there.

Q: General, what's your sense of the plan in southern Afghanistan for integrating, for the hold and build part of what you're going to be doing? Because as I'm sure you know, that's sort the [inaudible] down there. Is there a way of, a new way of integrating civilian power? Are you going to leave Marines behind to do more nation building? How is that going to work?

A: Thanks, Dave. The first part first.

If you look at southern Afghanistan, especially Helmand, there are very few ANA down there. Again, I was out at Delaram and there's supposed to be a battalion out there. And

truth in lending, there's probably a company minus there of ANA. They were working with 3rd Battalion 8th Marines, and MARSOC was also out there. So they were working with them.

So the first thing is, you have to get more Afghan forces down there. General Conway had been working that very hard with General McKiernan, so we think that's going to improve in the future.

The brigade commander, Larry Nicholson, is a brigadier, and when we were assigned this mission back in December, we started looking at the mission set, I think Larry's got it exactly right. He said clear, hold, build, and transition. The hard part really is the transition part. And he knows that. Especially if you have a lack of military forces down there, ANA or police, obviously they go hand in hand. So he knows that's his number one issue. He's going to do everything, you've heard this before, by, through and with. But I think Larry's got it right. He's going to go back to the old Korean model. Most of us at least can remember that.

What happened then, for every Marine you had in a foxhole, in a fighting hole, you had a Korean in there. He's going to do the same thing. Once he gets the forces down there to operate with. And that really is the issue, Dave.

As far as working with the locals in the area, especially in RC South, there's very little local government. Everything again is run by the elders. There's very little trust in the central government. Some of them actually don't think there is a central government. That's going to be difficult.

There is one OMLT there which is, it's basically a civil affairs/nation building team. One from Italy and one from the Army, from the US Army. That's the only two teams that are out there right now that are working civil affairs type issues, if you will.

Q: So you need more of that stuff?

A: I think eventually we will. Absolutely.

One of the things we're looking real hard at in the Marine Corps is when we looked at artillery we gave them a civil affairs mission. Again, because of in lieu of type stuff. So we have at least a little bit of training in civil affairs. I think we need more of that, absolutely.

Q: Just to follow up on your response to Dave -- clear, hold and build, and then transition. It seems like it would be a big difference in transitioning in Iraq because of the nature of the enemy being primarily disbursed and not organized I fighting units for the large part. And Afghanistan, where you're fighting the Taliban which for 20 years has been organized in at least a quasi-military form.

How does that affect the way you would transition out?

A: First of all, frankly, fighting in formations is easier for us. If you want to fight us head on head, fine. Bring it on, we'll take you on, and you're going to lose in the end state.

Q: I'm talking about the transition. Once the Marines are gone.

A: I'm getting there. First of all, you've got to be able to clear it, then you've got to be able to hold it. And they will do some of that. The transition, again, is the hard part. And frankly, at this point, I really don't know. That's going to be extremely difficult.

That's a national problem. It definitely is a national problem. There's a paucity of police down there. Ninety-three percent of the poppy in the world comes from southern Helmand. If you look at the poppy eradication force, right now that's all Afghan. Again, that's a national problem.

In order to go back to some type of local government, society there, I think one, you have to get rid of the drug problem, and to do that you have to give them a way to make a living. Right now, frankly, there's more money raising poppy than there is wheat. So that's going to be an issue.

Q: General Hejlik, you mentioned briefly Marine Special Operations. Of course you were the head of that, the standup of that. Now you're on the other side of the table.

A: Christian, it's not the dark side and the light side. [Laughter].

Q: Maybe that's a good analogy. But now you look at those kinds of enablers in your operations for regular Marines. You need to [inaudible] because the Marines in Afghanistan are in British Royal Marine AO, need a lot of the trainers and all that sort of stuff.

So now that you're on the other side of the table, are you finding it difficult to fill those jobs because those personnel have been siphoned away to MARSOC? If not, how are you getting that capability?

A: I think early on you definitely saw that. The high demand/low density skill sets, [AngleCo]. Intel, [inaudible], signal, all those guys. High demand/low density. They were all going over to MARSOC as was the artillery because, again, they weren't doing artillery type missions.

Now that I'm on the other side I look at MARSOC, and that is a great asset. Highly skilled, highly trained, equipped with all the best equipment from throughout SOCOM. So working with them really right now in Delaram, 3rd Battalion, 8th Marines, they partner together. I think you're going to have to do more and more of that. If you don't, I think it's foolish.

We do have a problem with high demand/low density MOSes. For instance, if you want to go into counter-intelligence in the Marine Corps, first of all you have to be a sergeant. You're not coming in there out of recruit training because the training is so intense, we want to get some bang for the buck back from that young sergeant. The other one that's extremely difficult is explosive ordnance disposal, EOD. Same thing there. You have to be a sergeant. If you're a real hard-charging corporal, maybe we'll take you. The same thing now. Those are two that are high demand.

Radio battalion, intel battalion, you train those young guys and the first thing DIA does, rightfully so, is they look at and go, hey, highly skilled Marine, trained sergeant, E5, E6, they're offering him a lot more money than we pay him on his salary. And the young Marine thinks he's not going to deploy as much. Not necessarily true. But that's really a challenge for us, especially those skill sets.

Q: So how are you filling those needs?

A: We just continue the school through-put. The interesting thing is, and I talked to Brigadier General Dick Lake who's our Director of Intelligence for the Marine Corps. I asked him how are we keeping the sergeants and the staff sergeants and the young lieutenants and captains in the Marine Corps with those skill sets? He goes, right now it's not a problem. A lot of them are on their third, fourth, fifth deployment. Right now it's not an issue at all.

You probably know, the Marine Corps has for the most part done away with selective reenlistment bonuses. We just have. Obviously if you're SIGINT, intel, they're still out there because you've got to keep those guys. School through-put, I think the right guy or gal and getting them trained, yeah, it's an issue. So if you're an intel sergeant, you spend six months or seven months in Iraq, you're home for seven months, you're probably going to Afghanistan.

Q: Mark, you're up next.

Q: Yesterday when Secretary Gates talked about the need for new thinking and fresh eyes, I immediately thought that a Marine would be appointed to these jobs. There was a three star and a four star appointed, they both were Army officers. Here's a low-hanging softball. How come they weren't Marines?

A: [Laughter].

Q: In your field, is this just perfectly normal and acceptable? There are a lot of Marines over there now.

A: Normal, acceptable, I guess that's all relative. I know General McKiernan, I think the world of him, he's a great soldier. I don't think you could ask for a better commander

over there, he just did a great job. I know General McCrystal from SOCOM days. The guy's a super star. He does have a different way of thinking. General Rodriguez, I know him a little bit. So the selection of those two, really, I don't think you could get any better if you're going to replace the top commander, which Secretary Gates did.

You could have put, in my opinion, you could have put a Marine general in there with fresh thinking and you would have had the same results. I'm not the Secretary of Defense.

Q: You said General McCrystal has a different way of thinking?

A: I think he does.

Q: What do you mean?

A: I think he has really more of a SOF mindset, obviously because of his background. And the way he thinks, this is my opinion only. The way he thinks is he really does understand that you're not going to win the war by killing all the enemy. That's just not going to work. He understands that. We all do. He did it in Iraq for five years, when you think about it. He understands the value of high value targets when necessary. He also understands the value of having the small unit on the ground, the OD8 type force, the 13 man force that's in there with the locals, living with them, eating with them, sleeping with them, training with them. He understands that.

General McKiernan did also. Stan McCrystal I think, just because of his five years experience in Iraq and his time at SOCOM has it down cold.

Q: [Inaudible] Afghanistan, are you seeing a change in [inaudible]? [Inaudible]. I don't know if that's [inaudible].

A: Grace, you're very soft spoken, by the way. You talked about more ISR in Afghanistan like what we have in Iraq?

Q: Right.

A: If you look at the theater, CENTCOM's theater, the majority of ISR is still in Iraq. That's slowly shifting to Afghanistan. Global Hawk, Predator, all those things. You ask any Marine or soldier what he needs first, the staff NCO officer, he's going to tell you ISR. More, quicker, faster, cheaper, on the deck, with them all the time. The brigade is going out there with Scan Eagle which is a great system for the Marine Corps. We'll transition to the Shadow. Then I know General Nicholson through ISAF will ask for more cycles, if you will, orbits, with the ISR that's in theater. There will be a shift as you get more and more involved in combat operations.

Q: You were also talking about the [inaudible] earlier. I wonder if you have similar

[inaudible] for arms, whether [inaudible] weapons are a little bit too heavy, or whether they're all right.

A: I think they're fine. I think they're more than fine. I think they're great. You look at the 240, the saw, the 556 light squat assault weapon; the M4. The M4 is really turning into the M14 of 35, 40 years ago. It's a very reliable, dependable weapon. SOCOM I think you know is probably going to a new weapon system probably called the Star they're looking at. But the M4 has really done well for us. And of course the M16, A4, the long rifle.

Q: Last year General Conway was talking about wanting to shift more Marines from Iraq to Afghanistan and his point as I understood it was the fight here in Iraq is kinetic. That's what we're really good at. So put us into where there's a fight still going on in Afghanistan. It raised the question in my mind, are you on the exact same page with the Army on COIN doctrine? Should we look at the Marines somewhat differently from an Army unit? Are they more sort of nation building like and you are more tip of the spear? Give me your take, that suggested to me there was some difference but I'm not sure I understand exactly what it is.

A: No, I don't think there is. As far as mission sets for COIN. I think if you look at a Marine battalion and an Army battalion, they're a different size, obviously. But if you look at them as far as COIN, they're a mirror image. We work extremely well together. General Conway, obviously kinetics is what we do best. Forcible entry, if you will. Then let the big army, the land army come in and take over.

As far as nation building, that's kind of been on the job, adventure learning as we call it. It definitely has been. And when you look at it, probably the last time we did nation building was World War II in Japan, if you will. So the Army really after that didn't do nation building. They certainly didn't do it in Korea and Vietnam and so on and so forth. Neither did the Marine Corps.

General Conway obviously has got it exactly right. Put us in where the kinetics are, let us train up the local police and military if you will, and then when it comes time for real nation building get us out and put us into the next fight.

Q: I was in Afghanistan last year and ran into a Marine group outside of Gansur, and they had done a really classic COIN operation -- clear, hold and build. And to try to transition. But we got the sense that the transition wasn't going so well. I'm curious whether like the Army does with its lessons learned and after action reports, whether you engage with those guys to talk about how that went and where was the next step and where it fell apart. I think it fell apart, as you said, that transition part seemed to be, there weren't a whole lot of people to transition to. Give me your lessons learned from the Marines, what you're hearing from the guys coming back.

A: I think you're probably talking about 2nd Battalion 7th Marines and the 24th MEU.

Q: That sounds right.

A: I was out there with both of them. You're right. Garmsur, Nawzad, then you run on down south into the fish hook, a lot of talent. Musakila. They're all still there. Fara. They're all there. So when it came to the transition part of that, again, who do you transition to? That's a paucity down there. So that probably, not probably, that's General Nicholson's number one effort. Once he's on the deck, once he goes into COIN operations, again, to partner with and train the ANA. You've got to get them down there first.

Q: Have you had any assurances that this time no BS, the guys will be Afghan security forces to fall in behind you?

A: No assurances, BS -- that's pretty tough -- [Laughter].

Q: Any reason to hope it will work better?

A: Absolutely. Because the ANA is supposed to build on there. I said supposed to. That's the goal.

Q: Lawmakers on Capital Hill in key positions really want results within a year on Afghanistan. They want to see [inaudible]. So what are the [inaudible] that will happen within a year? What do you expect to see?

A: First of all, you've got to know how to measure your success. How do you do that? How do you know how successful you are? It's certainly not body count. It isn't. So you measure success, in talking again with General Nicholson, how many ANA have you trained? How many police have you trained? How effective are they? That really is a lesson from Iraq. We kind of learned that the hard way as we went along. I hadn't heard a year. I heard two years. But regardless, you still have to measure how effective you are and that's going to be one of the most difficult things.

First of all, the people you work with -- again, ANA and ANP; and then how well are they trained and how effective are they? When you do clear an area of Taliban, does it return back to a normal lifestyle? Normal for the Afghans? That's going to be tough.

Q: Key lawmakers are also saying they're not convinced that they can trust Pakistani intelligence. They say that Pakistanis [inaudible] government are still [aiding] the Taliban. After meeting with Zardari they're still not convinced. Do you share similar concerns? How do you react to the lawmakers' concerns?

A: First of all, that's been out there for years, and we all know that. I know General Conway met with General [Kenya] I guess back in the December timeframe, and he was very encouraged by what he saw and what he heard from the Pakistani military. I think

it's very good. As far as the intelligence side of that, I really don't know. I've read the same thing, listened to the same things you have. We don't intend, obviously, we will stay in Afghanistan so as far as how they partner with the Taliban, again, if we go back in history and you look at the Central Asian states in Iran and Afghanistan and Pakistan, that's always been an issue there.

I don't know what the impact will be there. I just really can't answer that as far as how it will impact on us down south. We're obviously more concerned down in the southern area, the border with Iran and so on and so forth.

Q: I wanted to reflect a little bit more on the appointment of General McCrystal and how, it's not that common for a special operations Army officer to have that kind of a job. What special perspective do you think he'll bring to things like integrating SOF and conventional forces together in Afghanistan? And the if you could provide any anecdotes on why you think [inaudible].

A: Again, I know him personally. First of all, you say it's not unusual, but the Chief of Staff of the Army before General Casey, please help me --

Q: Schoomaker.

A: Thank you. Head of SOCOM. So there's a precedence there. That's not that unusual.

General McCrystal started out as a Ranger. A Ranger obviously with light infantry. Always been very closely connected to the Marine Corps and the way we do business.

What I personally like about General McCrystal is he's very much into SOF/conventional forces integration. I think he understands that extremely well, and he'll use the best capabilities of both.

Why I think he's a super star, again, just on a personal note, I watched him operate in Iraq when I was there in '04 and '05. Here's an example. Every Thursday night Stan McCrystal or his deputy, a guy named Dave Scott, an Air Force two star, every Thursday night they flew down from Balad and they had dinner with Lieutenant General [inaudible]. We sat there and we looked at last week's ops, the next week's ops, if you will, how we could integrate SOF and the conventional forces, who's going to have the responsibility for fires, who had responsibility for the QRF, those kind of things. So he's very very familiar with SOF/conventional integration. And I really personally like that and it's one of the reasons I think he's a super star.

Q: How do you see him and how SOF might change to fight into [inaudible] in Afghanistan? What specifically, it's sort of been a work in progress. Afghanistan started out with [inaudible]. [Inaudible]. Are they going to go more whole hog into just working with the local security forces, or [inaudible]?

A: That's a great question, I guess we'll have to see how that develops. My experience, again, in Afghanistan, is more down in RC South, in southern Helmand where there's been good integration with the ODA and the local populace if you will, and MARSOC did the same thing, how obviously with conventional forces.

I think in the near term, I don't think you'll see any change in the way SOF operates, but I think General McCrystal, like he's done in the past, he'll take a good hard look on what the situation is, where he sees the forces going overall in Afghanistan. Then there may or may not be a shift. Obviously that's up to him.

Q: General, obviously the main focus right now for yourself and your command is Afghanistan land warfare. The Commandant continues to talk about the future and continues to talk about amphibious ships and a return to the Naval Expeditionary Group to the fore. How do you fit that into an already full plate? Are you already working to incorporate more types of training as your dwell ratio improves, the service grows? How are you working to incorporate amphibious operations?

A: It's good to see you again, Zack, and I'll never forgive you for that crappy article you wrote on me about two years ago. [Laughter]. I'm kidding. Zack knows that.

That's a great question because there is a concern and we've gotten away from expeditionary amphibious operations from the sea. We've gotten away from that because we have been on the land since 2003 except for the Marine Expeditionary Units which continue obviously to flow out of both East and West Coasts and Okinawa.

What we've done, because the Commandant and all of us are concerned, if you went to a Marine captain who's got five or six years in the Marine Corps, and that's generally where they're at. They came in as second lieutenants when the war started and now they're captains and staff sergeants. If you walked up to them and you said tell me what a landing plan is, he would just look at you. Tell me what an assault table is. Again, he would just look at you. So if you haven't been on a Marine Expeditionary Unit, you're away from it. That obviously is not a good thing.

I think the Commandant made the comment not too long ago that you hear an awful lot about Army/Marine Corps, Army/Marine Corps. But you don't hear enough about Navy/Marine Corps, Navy/Marine Corps. So what we've done at Camp Lejeune with the 2nd MEF, and Vice Admiral Mel Willans got 2nd Fleet. Him and I work hand in hand together. Great, great American. In amphibious operations we started last October with a working group, with 2nd Fleet and 2nd MEF, trying to get back to the MEF/ESG roots. Admiral Willens and I attend every back brief from the working groups. We just did one last week. They just finished up a mission analysis. Then the end state is there, we will do what we call a simulated exercise, SIMEX based on amphibious ships in Norfolk doing an amphibious exercise. Then early in 2011 or late 2010, depending on the time, we'll actually do an amphibious exercise, a MEF sized amphibious exercise.

Q: I wanted to ask you about the Expeditionary Fighting Vehicle which has become very controversial. It has everything to do with what you just were talking about. What if that program goes down?

A: Well, first of all we hope that it doesn't because it gives you that capability to do 30 knots from over the horizon to bring a Marine to shore. The EFV and the Osprey and the LCAC are your three over the horizon capabilities, if you will. The EFV, the program, they had some issues with it early on. The program's in a lot better shape now. Depending on what the QDR does. The terms of reference and how we're looking at things. Some of the bigger programs might be in jeopardy. I don't know if that one will be.

If you look at a strategic asset that gives you your capability, forcible entry from the sea, it's the EFV. The AEV's a great vehicle but you're not going to put Marines out there 25 kilometers from over the horizon in an AEV. You're just not going to do that. First of all they'd all be sick before they got there and it's just extremely slow. So the EFV really is that vehicle of the future, and it gives you the capability on shore, too. So we hope the program's not in trouble. We'll just have to see what the QDR does.

Q: Does it surprise you that on a program of such central importance to the Marine Corps that it would be in question?

A: Sure. The Osprey was in question. The Osprey was out there a long, long time before it became a program of record, then we ended up with the buy.

Every new system like that has always been in question. F-18 was in question for a long time. So that part doesn't surprise me. Professionally I just hope that the EFV stays. We probably won't get it in the numbers that we require or request, but hope it stays.

Q: I'm new on this gig so I haven't had a chance to write a crappy article about you. [Laughter].

I wanted to follow up on the question from a bit ago on congressional expectations. What is your view of congressional benchmarks? Would a set of targets like those that were developed for Iraq be appropriate in Afghanistan? And would you want that?

A: As far as benchmarks from Iraq, they're totally different. I just don't see that. The benchmarks in Afghanistan, first of all, I think have to be pretty basic to start with. First of all, clear the area of Taliban. Again, I'm just talking about RC South. And then you've got to hold it. The way that the brigade will be arrayed, we will be able to hold it. Instead of having 2100 Marines in the area, you're going to have 10,100. That makes a huge difference. You have to hold and clear Ring Road. Ring Road obviously is the one major highway in Afghanistan, so those to me are two benchmarks early on. Again, they're pretty basic, but you have to have those.

From there another benchmark is how many ANA do you have? What capability are they trained to? And one, can they operate with you? Then two, can they operate independently? Same with the police. So those are I think the four benchmarks that you have to have.

When it comes to nation building, I think that's a little bit down the road and obviously something that we would prefer not to do.

Q: General, there's been a lot of talk in Washington about MRAPs and the new all terrain MRAP. Can you talk about your experience with MRAPs, either directly, or feedback you've received from troops? And also, do you see the Marine Corps needing this new all terrain MRAP? MATV from Afghanistan has questioned whether the service will want those or not.

A: The MRAP, obviously Emily you don't remember that my name was on the original funds that came out of Iraq. Otto does.

Back in those days, if you asked someone what an MRAP was, we didn't know. We knew it was technology that would help defeat an IED or protect the individuals inside the vehicle, and we knew tht it was some kind of V-shaped technology that came out of South Africa, frankly, to start with.

So when you look at the MATV, we are looking very very hard at that. I asked this morning from General Flynn down at MCSIDIC if we do go with the MATV, with the [Juans], that we do some of the test and evaluation in southern Helmand with the 2nd Brigade. He's going to take a hard look at that.

You have to be careful with that, obviously, but it's always better to try and test it in a combat situation than any place else. So the MATV, I'm not that familiar with it. It's kind of like the Joint Light Tactical Vehicle that's out there.

The other thing we've done with the MRAP, and I know you're aware of this, we call it the MRAP-IS, improved suspension. So what we've basically done is we've taken the cooler, the smaller MRAP and changed the suspension on it. The vehicle of choice for mobility in Afghanistan right now is the MTVR which is a huge vehicle, but the thing is so durable. The Humvee is great for reliability but again, it's got great mobility off-road to a certain point. MRAP is very heavy, some of them. It doesn't have great mobility off-road. It's great on the roads for convoys and things like that.

I can see the Marine Corps in the future using the MRAP more for road clearing, obstacle clearing, EOD, engineer type. But there's got to be a stable of vehicles that you can work towards. I don't think it does us much good to have all real heavy MRAPs or all the Joint Light Tactical Vehicle or MATV. You've got to be able to pick and choose as you go into whatever the geographics are and the situation on the ground.

Q: It's early in the morning. I forgot that your name was on the [unsair]. Do you know about [inaudible] for more MRAPs with MATVs? More urgent requests? Recently, in recent months?

A: Not from the Marine side, no. I do not.

Q: General, correct me if I'm wrong, but Faral Province is in the area that the Marines are [inaudible], right?

A: That's correct.

Q: There was recently an incident that the Afghans claim there was 130 civilians killed in a raid. About a year ago I think a similar raid was conducted with Marine Special Operations and Afghan Special Operations where there were claims and counter-claims of high civilian casualties in that same AO.

I understand the Marines were not responsible for that, or that they were, but I'm curious to know how you view those incidents and how you sort of have directed your commanders on the ground there to maybe change the way they operate. Afghans have been asking for less bombing and more specialized teams to go into those villages. Are you guys reaching a middle ground here? Are you reevaluating how you're going to do these kinds of operations?

A: Christian, I think the first thing is, are you thinking of MSOC in February of '07?

Q: No.

A: Then I'm not that familiar with that.

Q: But you are familiar with the one that just occurred?

A: Yes, I am familiar with that one.

The way we're doing business in Afghanistan right now, again 3/8ths in there, is working out of combat outposts, platoon size. It's pretty amazing. You go out there and look at a second lieutenant who's out there with his 35 to 40 Marines and he's out there operating by himself. But they're operating next to the village areas, if you will. So the interaction with the local area there, it's got to be there. That's the way they're operating.

When you look at, obviously any people are going to call for less bombing. The issue there really is precision weapon strike. Obviously we do that. All the people with General Nicholson, the air controllers, our JTACs, the Joint Tactical Air Controllers, then [AngleCo], and I forgot to mention that. [AngleCo] is flowing now, the platoon. They're flowing out of Camp Lejeune now. So [AngleCo] would also be in there. Of course they've got the NATO standard.

No, we haven't changed the way we're doing business. I do not tell General Nicholson to change the way he's going to do business.

Q: Were Marines involved in that incident?

A: I don't think so.

Q: MARSOF was the first unit to respond, but they had --

A: Yeah.

Q: General, when you look at a map of southern Helmand the first thing it points out is Qetta is right across the border, and that's where the shuras are directing the Taliban in southern Oman, and they've got a great little sanctuary there and you can't touch them. I'm just curious what that does to your operations, your expectations of what you can accomplish. Knowing those guys are going to have a sanctuary to run back home and regroup on. Can you talk a little bit about what the sanctuary, the safe environment means for you?

A: Obviously that's an issue. You can go right back to Vietnam and Cambodia. You can do the same thing, go all the way back there. But we'll worry about our side of the border. I think, again, you have to be able to clear first and then hold.

If you can work with the Afghan citizen and one, get him away from poppy; and two, get him away from the Taliban; and three, trust the US forces that are in there, and it really is all about trust and credibility. Then I think we'll get back a little bit more to what we saw in Iraq. Again, different culture and a different situation. Al-Qaida, especially in the west, in Anbar, Iraqis frankly got tired of it. The Afghans have been living with the Taliban for 20 years? At least. So we'll worry about our side of the border and work with the Afghans and hopefully get down to hey, there's Taliban in this area; hey, there's IEDs here; hey, there's a cache here. We hope that part in Iraq and Afghanistan will become the same

Q: Isn't the Laos and Cambodia example, it doesn't hold a lot of promise here.
[Laughter].

A: That probably wasn't a really good example.

Q: The United States never really successfully dealt with that.

A: No, we didn't. We used some airstrikes, obviously, as you well remember. I'm not using that as a positive example, I'm using it that this is not new as far as sanctuary in different countries and operating across the border.

Q: General, you mentioned the Osprey, a checkered past. They're finally deployed and one of them is going to go forward. An amphib, coming your way. Do you have any assurance, have you asked, you're going to let them deploy into Afghanistan while you're over there?

A: The Osprey?

Q: Osprey.

A: The Commandant's taking a real hard look at that. I would say that yes, you will see the Osprey in Afghanistan. The issue there is going to be the timing.

When we put the Osprey into Iraq, lessons learned obviously is everything, Otto, and little things like a slip ring that deteriorate quickly, more quickly in the dust. A lot of lessons learned with that. When you look at the spare parts, if you will, for the Osprey, a lot of lessons learned out of Iraq there. Afghanistan's actually a little bit worse because the dust is more fine. So the other thing that General Nicholson is doing is, I wish you could all get to Camp Leatherneck and Bastion. When you look at that place, when I was back there in September of last year with the Brits, there was nothing there other than an airstrip. The Brits have a great hospital there. And then their own compound. We've built Leatherneck from the ground up, to include expanding the runway. So the infrastructure, a little ways to go before we get the Osprey in there. But the Osprey I think will be in there.

Q: But they're coming in on an ARG. The ARG is heading over there, so they're going to be shipped --

A: Oh, you're thinking about the 22nd MEU that's getting ready to deploy.

Q: Yeah.

A: I can't see that. Unless the combatant commander, General Patraeus has always got that call to take them off and move them where he sees fit, chop in theater. But I'm thinking about later this year.

Q: The Commandant says maybe the next deployment of an Osprey squadron should go to Afghanistan, but I was just wondering whether you were going to get a chance to use them when they're operating off the MEU. You don't think --

A: Distance wise you'd have a hard time doing that, obviously. Again, I'm not General Patraeus. I think when the MEU deploys here this coming week, I think the Osprey will stay with that ARG. Again, General Patraeus, it's his call.

Q: It's got to do something.

A: There's plenty to do out there.

Q: General, I was down in Camp Lejeune a couple of weeks ago with Secretary Gates, and on our tour, USAID was down there. [Inaudible] do more of the nation building work than they've been asked to do. I've heard the concerns from the AID community about the militarization of AID and all that [inaudible]. Do you have any or have you heard any concerns [inaudible] in the military about this idea of Marines are supposed to be kinetic fighters, being asked more and more to do [inaudible] AID work?

A: I'm glad you bring that up. When General Nicholson was training the brigade we had everyone down there, not just USAID. From across the agencies, they were down there. Or General Nicholson was up here with his staff. So that paid him obviously huge dividends.

If you can't fight joint combined coalition interagency, you're not very effective on the battlefield, and we fully understand that.

I have not heard any concerns from General Nicholson before he left or since he's been in country which is only now I guess ten days or so. But the way he's trained up the brigade to work across the board, I don't see there's a problem. I really don't.

Q: Are you having any sort of increase of communications with the AID groups about their concerns? Either creating pools or ways to work with them, groups that [inaudible] militarization? I asked, there was a letter [inaudible] several international humanitarian groups [inaudible]. [Inaudible].

A: No, I have not heard that. I really haven't.

Q: General, on the Osprey. Do you think it would be a good combat search and rescue helicopter for our forces?

A: As you know, all services have responsibility for their own SR capability.

Q: But there's talk of making it more joint.

A: Obviously because of the speed and distance, yeah, it would be a good SAR aircraft. Is that a good use of the helicopter? I guess it depends upon the, I mean the airplane. I guess that depends upon the situation. I think it would make a great SAR platform, again, because of the speed and the range. The thing operates at 14,000 feet with a ceiling at 28,000 feet, and it is quick. When you look at the CH-46, by the way they're all gone from the East Coast. I was up at Aberdeen with Sieburf yesterday and HMX flew me out of Andrews. It was a CH-46. And I kind of smiled to myself. When I first came into the Marine Corps we still had a little bit of, the 34 was still around. And the 46 had only been in the inventory for two years and now it's gone. So obviously the UH-60's a great SAR platform, the Blackhawk. Because again, it's very quick. And the Osprey also

would be.

Q: Are you concerned about the Osprey as a search and rescue platform? The noise issues and --

A: It's actually quieter. You don't hear the Osprey until it's almost too late. In the airplane mode it's extremely quiet. Then when you do hear it, like I said, you actually then see it and it's too late.

The great thing about the Osprey is its speed and its distance, it's range.

Q: General, I wanted to go back to, I think it was Christians' question about civilian casualties in Afghanistan. I also spent a lot of time with 2/4 MEU and the battalion out there. I take your point about [AngleCo] and the JTACs and those guys are great and really know what they're doing. But I always felt they didn't really know, I mean they could bring stuff right in on the target, but I wasn't really convinced they knew what the target was.

My question is about intelligence in that part of Afghanistan. How good is it? Are you comfortable that your forces out there can really tell who's a villager, who's a sort of part time IED implanter, hanging around with the Taliban, who's hard core, and how do we sort all that out?

A: The short answer is heck, no. I mean that is a short answer.

Did you spend time with Pete Petranzio out there, the MEU Commander?

Q: Yes, I did.

A: You saw the way they were doing their intel gathering.

Q: I sat in on all their stuff.

A: I thought that was pretty amazing. They built that from ground zero. Then they passed it on to the Special Purpose MAGTAF and obviously to 3/8. So my assumption is they pepped tat up. That's going to be extremely [difficult]. Just like it was in Iraq early on. So the short answer is heck no.

Q: Most of the problems it seems like are the troops in contact kinds of air attacks. How do you deal with the problem of what some people have called the Taliban Air Defense system, which is putting a lot of civilians around wherever they are. That's just, your intelligence can't deal with that. No matter how precise you are if you're going to get the bad guy with a weapon you're going to kill some civilians. What do you do? Do you do without the attack, or what?

A: You're all familiar with Karzai's 12. When it comes to troops in contact it's going to be the commander on the ground, his call.

I would tell you that the way our young lieutenants think now, and the captains, if it's troops in contact and it's really a danger to the force he will call in a precision guided weapon system if it comes to that. If he can withdraw his force and he's not sure of the target set and there's civilians intermixed with Taliban, because they do use that. It's their greatest suppression of air defense. He'll withdraw. When it comes to that, he'll withdraw.

Q: It's clearcut, that's the decision.

A: I really think it is. That's the way General Nicholson talked to his people. I was in on all of his briefs. It's got to be that way. Again, if it comes to his force or the Taliban, then it's going to be the Taliban. If it comes to where he can withdraw his force, he's going to withdraw his force and fight another day.

Q: If you know, and maybe you don't know, but is that also true of Army?

A: I can't answer that. I think yes, but I can't answer that affirmatively.

Q: I think we're out of time. Thank you very much.

A: Thanks very much. Come on down to Camp Lejeune, you're all welcome down there. It's a great place to be. It's my fourth tour down there. Please come on down. I promise you you'll get to eat breakfast. [Laughter].

END TEXT