

U.S. Special Operations 2020

Jane Harman:

Good afternoon. Is everyone seated? Good afternoon. I'm Jane Harman, president and CEO of the Wilson Center. And it has occurred to our speaker and me, and maybe some of you, that today is the second anniversary of "Zero Dark Thirty." It was on May 2nd at 12:30 a.m. that the takedown of Osama bin Laden occurred, and somebody to my left had a lot to do with that. More later.

A special welcome to the chairman of our board, Ambassador Joe Gildenhorn, and his wife, a member of our council, Alma Gildenhorn, and our panelists, Admiral Bill McRaven, Dan Feldman, and Linda Robinson, and Wilson Center Air Force fellow, Wolf Davidson, who is where? There. Well, you can sit down. Come on, come on, come on -- who is working on a project on the growing relevance of the high-end capabilities of Special Ops and is educating our board, scholars, and staff. Thank you, Wolf, for all that you do for us here.

It's also a pleasure to see Sue Eikenberry and her public policy class from Georgetown Day School. Where are they? There they are. For several reasons: Twenty-something years ago, Sue taught my son -- my oldest son, Brian. Coached him in debate and wrote his college recommendation. He got in. Just want you to know, Sue, that, though he now handles a large investment fund in New York, Brian still loves public policy and was a close advisor to him mom during my 17 years in Congress. You did a really job.

Today's event is part of a series the Wilson Center sponsors with NPR called The National Conversation. Our hope is that these forums will give the public new opportunities to engage in much-needed civil discourse free from spin. I'll repeat that in this town: free from spin in the safe political space that the Wilson Center provides. We have tried to raise difficult questions about our post-9/11 world. On the 10th anniversary of 9/11, for instance, we asked the question "9/11, the next 10 years?" to a group that included General Stan McChrystal, one of Bill McRaven's predecessors; Mike Rogers, who is chairman of the House Intelligence Committee and a former colleague of mine; and Mike Leiter, former director of the National Counterterrorism Center. On another occasion, John Brennan, when he was President Obama's chief

counterterrorism advisor, spoke here about the need for rules around our use of drones, an issue that is not yet fully resolved. And General Keith Alexander, the head of Cyber Command and the National Security Agency, came here to discuss how to get the public into the debate about cyber and other tough issues.

As the towers were falling and the Pentagon fire was burning on 9/11, I was a senior member of the House Intelligence Committee and headed to the Capitol Dome. That is where the Intelligence Committee rooms were then located, and it was the intended target, most believe, of the fourth airplane that went down in Pennsylvania. Looking back on my own role, I give myself mixed marks. But I'm most proud of my role as the principal author of the 2004 Intelligence Reform Law. In my travels to all of the garden spots, like Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Libya, and Yemen, I saw the courage and selflessness of our military and intelligence personnel. I saw up close the extraordinary things that Special Ops teams are capable of, and I believe that they are heroes. But as seductive and effective as these tactics are, there is a question about whether we have a strategy, a narrative, that explains our actions properly and convincingly to the rest of the world.

Stan McChrystal, whom I first met in Iraq, was interviewed recently in Foreign Affairs Magazine. "In Iraq," he said, his first question was, "Where is the enemy?" As things evolved, his question became, "Who is the enemy?" and then, "What's the enemy doing or trying to do?" and, finally, "Why are they the enemy?" I'm stuck on this last question, and I'm sure it will receive focus in today's discussion.

The format is that Bill McRaven will deliver keynote remarks, followed by a panel moderated by NPR's Tom Bowman, who is sitting right there in the checked shirt, looking quite dashing. As NPR's Pentagon reporter, Tom has traveled to Iraq and Afghanistan for month-long visits and embedded with U.S. Marines and soldiers. He previously spent nine years as a Pentagon reporter at The Baltimore Sun. And it's now my special to introduce my friend, Bill McRaven, a U.S. Navy admiral who has served as the commander of the U.S. Special Operations Command, U.S. SOCOMM, since August 2011, and previously served as commander of the Joint Special Operations Command, JSOC, and Special Operations Command Europe, SOCEUR. I got all the acronyms right. The mastermind, or a mastermind, with

an excellent team of the bin Laden raid, Admiral McRaven briefed President Obama during the operation in real time through a secure video from Jalalabad, Afghanistan. He was portrayed in the movie "Zero Dark Thirty," which he has never seen -- you know, he's going to tell you this, but which I have seen four times -- by the actor Christopher Stanley. All "Madmen" and "Argo" fans in the room should know who that is. There's an uncanny resemblance.

He doesn't speak publicly that often, which is probably appropriate, given his role, but I was there when he was interviewed by Wolf Blitzer last summer in Aspen, and when he spoke at the Newsweek Daily Beast Summit on heroes -- appropriately named -- last November. We are fortunate that he's making an appearance here and addressing Special Ops: the long game. Please join me in welcoming him now.

[applause]

William McRaven:

Well, thank you, Jane. And I'd like to thank the Wilson Center and NPR for giving me an opportunity to talk about Special Operations today. Now, I don't really have any prepared remarks, and I would hesitate to call this a keynote address, but what I did want to do is talk a little bit about Special Operations, give you a sense of who we are, kind of where we're going, and some of the challenges that I think we're going to face.

So let me start off with who we are. First, this is a force of about 66,000 folks, of which half of that force are what we would call, "badged operators," so Seals, Rangers, Special Operations Aviators, Green Berets, and the rest are kind of support personnel that are absolutely essential to our mission.

Special Operations Forces have been around for a long time; as long as there has been a U.S. military, there have been aspects of Special Operations Forces. But the U.S. Special Operations Command came into existence in 1987 as a result of the failed raid to rescue our hostages out of Tehran. And the Congress actually enacted law to bring U.S. Special Operations Command into play. We are very unique, the U.S. Special Operations Command. We have service-like responsibility. So I have the requirement to man, train, and equip a force. But I also have what we call "combatant commander" responsibilities, meaning that I have a

responsibility to build strategies and to employ those forces with the support and with the approval of the geographic combatant commanders.

These are very unique qualities for a command. So I have an acquisition executive. At lunch today, one of the gentlemen was asking me how I deal with having to get all my money from the services. The fact of the matter is, Congress was smart when they stood us up, and they gave us a budget. And that budget has been very helpful to making sure that our forces have the best equipment out there. So, with this force of about 66,000, recognizing that about half of those are tactical folks, we deploy about 11,000 folks around the world at any point in time in about 78 countries around the world.

And now let's talk about the average SOF operator, because I think there's this belief that SOF operators are all very young, steely-eyed killers, you know, that have no respect for -- pick something. The reality of the matter is the average officer out there is about 34 years old. The average enlisted man is about 28. They are married, with two kids, on average. And that's important. That's important because you have a sense of your responsibility by the time you're 28. You had some life experience by the time you're 28. If you have kids, then you know how to run an organization and you know how to deal with tough problems. So that is not a small point when you compare us to some of the other forces.

Also, what we found, we took a survey of about 900 Special Operations folks. And not surprisingly, just about all of them played some sort of sport. What was surprising was the intersection of a sport and the game of chess, the preponderance of the folks that we interviewed played chess. And, of course, this is exactly the kind of guy or gal we're looking for: somebody who is the athlete and the thinker. And that is kind of been consistent as we have built our SOF community.

One of the other things that people think about when they think of Special Operations, and, as Jane said, "Zero Dark Thirty" or they had read books or they've seen some other movie, but the reality of the matter is the counterterrorism piece, the direct action piece of what we do, is a very small part of our portfolio. And, in fact, what I think is the more important part of what we do is

building partner capacity, is our day-to-day interaction with our allies and partners around the globe. And so that kind of leads me into where we're going.

So I talked about the fact that the law, back in 1987, enacted SOCOMM, and it told me, as a Special Operation commander, and all my predecessors, to build a strategy and to put that strategy in place. But you have to have a foundation from which to develop that strategy. And that foundation for us was the Secretary of Defense's Defense Strategic Guidance. This was signed out by former Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta in January of 2012. So that became the foundation for which I'm trying to develop the Special Operations vision.

And in that strategy, the Secretary said, in addition to the pivot to Asia, he talked about the fact that we are going to need forces that are light, that are agile, that are responsive, that are networked, that are partnered. These sorts of things, of course, are core competencies of our U.S. Special Operations command. So, in that light, what I am trying to do is enhance -- and the word is "enhance" -- the global SOF network. We have had Special Operations operators out around the globe for decades, but now we have the ability through communications technology to be able to kind of knit this capability together.

So I'm going to walk you through kind of piece by piece how this enhancement is going to work. So, within the military construct, the way we command and control forces is through the geographic combatant commanders. So I think all of you know -- we'll take Central Command as a point of departure. So Central Command, currently commanded by General Lloyd Austin, one of the great officers in the United States Army and the United States military -- so he has responsibility for Iraq, Afghanistan, and those areas within the Central Command. And every commander has a geographic responsibility. So you have Central Command, you have Pacific Command, European Command, Southern Command, Africa Command, Northern Command, et cetera.

Each of those geographic combatant commanders have theater Special Operations Commands. So each one of them have a subordinate command that is responsible for the Special Operations piece. And that's very important to me. Now, historically the U.S. Special Operations Command has had no relationship -- no institutional relationship -- with those

theater Special Operations Commands. So while they were SOF folks, at the end of the day we really didn't provide them much money, we didn't provide them really any guidance, we didn't really equip them. At the end of the day, they were kind of on their own to be able to support the geographic combatant commander.

Now, my predecessor twice removed, Doug Brown -- General Doug Brown began to put a little bit of effort and a little bit of money into the theater Special Operations Commands. As Jane said, when I was the SOCEUR commander, the commander of the Special Operations forces in Europe, I was a beneficiary of that money. It was great to have some support coming to the SOC. The guy right before me, Admiral Eric Olson, kind of ramped that up. So this really becomes kind of a natural extension, which is now, as of several months ago, Secretary Panetta and, before he departed, signed out a document that put those Theater Special Operations Commands under my combatant command, still reporting to the geographic combatant commander.

Now the reason I'm kind of giving you Military 101 is because this framework is very important to understand because, as I've said, I don't command and control anything from U.S. Special Operations Command. My mission is to provide the right talent, the right capability to those theater Special Operations commands so that they, in fact, can support the geographic combatant commanders.

Now, as the U.S. Special Operations Command, I have a functional responsibility which is global. So now by having those TSOCs, as we call them, to plug into I can take a look at what's happening in Central Command and see the relationships between Central Command and Africa Command, and Africa Command and Southern Command, and Southern Command and Pacific Command, and the relationship to Northern Command. I can begin to push the -- put these pieces together because now I have an institutional relationship with those theater Special Operations Commands.

So each one of those TSOCs that I said work for the geographic combatant commander. They also have subordinate commands. So in your mind, as you're thinking through this, you have to think about a network. And you can think of it as any sort of network you've ever worked with. You have nodes, and from those nodes you have branches. So the

GCC -- the geographic combatant commander -- has the TSOC. The TSOC has some subordinate commands. The TSOC also has Special Operations liaison officers. Case in point, Special Operations Command Europe has a Special Forces, an Army Green Beret colonel, who is in Turkey. He is married to a Turkish woman. He speaks the language fluently, and his ability to get our message across to the Turks, and, vice versa, for the Turks to be able to engage with us, to build that trust factor is absolutely crucial.

You know, we were talking at lunch about the value of trust. And as I said, what I am trying to do as part of this vision is to change the narrative about who we are as Special Operations forces. Everybody has seen the movie, and that's important, but at the end of the day it's about building partner capacity so that nations can deal with their own problems, so that we can help them deal with their own problems. But you can't get there unless you can begin to build the trust factor. So as we put people out in these various countries -- and I talk about us being in 78 countries around the world -- we have people that speak the language, that are culturally attuned. It is a very small footprint, so you don't have a large force that is imposing itself upon the country. We work hand in hand -- hand in hand -- with the U.S. mission, the embassy there. And I will state this for the record as many times as I can. We do not do anything -- nothing -- that doesn't have the approval of the chief of mission, of the ambassador that's there. We don't do anything that doesn't have the approval of the geographic combatant commander.

So these are two important concepts. So as we go forward to build partner capacity, to build the trust, to build the network, it is all done in concert with the country team and the embassy.

So you begin to see how the network builds. Theater Special Operations commands -- they have subordinate commands. There are liaison officers kind of -- that come out from that that are in various places. We also have a great relationship with our partners. And I'd like to give you one vignette.

The NATO SOF headquarters -- the NATO Special Operations headquarters -- which was established as the NATO SOF coordination center back in late 2006 -- and we really began to build this capability in early 2007. And at the

time there were 18 people in the NATO SOF coordination center. There were 17 Americans and 1 Norwegian. And, frankly, obviously not very effective, there were 300 SOF operators down range in Afghanistan at the time. So this was early 2007. Today there are 220 folks in a NATO SOF headquarters. There are 2,200 NATO SOF operators down range conducting arguably one of the most important missions in Afghanistan, and that's building the provincial response companies.

So it was a way of linking into our allies. We had a common standard for planning, for training, for operations. Those allies, then, of their own accord, their own volition, and in support of us went forward to Afghanistan and did a mission that then we didn't have to do. So part of tapping into our allies is to understand what their capabilities are, helping to build their capabilities. But, again, as former Secretary Clinton once said, it's about kind of smart power. And the ability to have smart power down range is to be able to leverage the great work of your allies and partners.

And speaking of partners -- so as you begin to look at this, again, the TSOCs, the LNOs, the allies, and our partners, for us, are the interagency. So as the U.S. Special Operations command, I have folks in every agency here in Washington, D.C. -- from the CIA, to the FBI, to the National Security Agency, to the National Geospatial Agency, to the Defense Intelligence Agency. If there are three letters, and in some cases four, I have a person there. And they have had a reciprocal agreement with us. I have somebody in my headquarters at Tampa. And, again, why is that important? It's because you have to be able to translate sometimes the language of a particular culture within the agency, and you've got to be able to have those liaisons be representative of you and of the head of those organizations.

So when I have an issue, I am able to reach into my liaison officer at State Department or at CIA or at DIA or at NGA, and they can help, you know, work out problems that might have occurred as a result of something we're trying to do around the world. That is incredibly important to us. That liaison network, as all of us that has spent time in the military knows, is vital to your success. But we also have liaison officers with industry and with academia. Colonel Wolf Davidson was mentioned here earlier. He's



here at the Wilson Center. We put some of our best and brightest in some of the academic institutions so we can understand what academia is thinking about. We recognize right up front that not all the great ideas about the military come from inside the military. We're trying to reach out to see what young minds and older minds think about what we're doing and how we can take that advice and then incorporate it back into our business.

To put all this together, we have a very robust communications architecture. So, many years ago we recognized that for us to be able to do business we had to be able to video teleconference. Now that sounds pretty routine today, but I can tell you when -- and Jane was referring to Stan McChrystal. I tell you, when Stan McChrystal came to the Joint Special Operations Command, we would conduct video teleconferences, and maybe 50 percent of them worked. And, frankly, most people didn't want to do video teleconferences. They just kind of wanted to get on email and not be bothered by having to do face-to-face discussions. And Stan very quickly said, "Look, you are either going to be a zealot or you're going to be a martyr, but we are going to do video teleconferences." And so we began to build the infrastructure, and of course it cost a fair amount to build that communications infrastructure. But what it allowed us to do at the Joint Special Operations Command was then, from General McChrystal down to the youngest operator, he could pass commander's intent, and he could hear what that young operator was thinking and was doing, and, oh, by the way, then we passed it across the entire network.

So understanding how that network functioned, to be able to have a -- you know, communications across the length and breadth of the network, to have business rules in place so that everybody understood what their roles and responsibilities were, that was crucial, and frankly that's how that organization that Stan McChrystal built was so effective.

So now what we're trying to do is kind of enhance the Special Operations network by doing the same thing. How do I push communications down to every liaison officer I have at a U.S. embassy? Every liaison officer or every operator I have down in the field? And we are doing that.

So let me talk now about our challenges. Probably the biggest challenge I have are supporting our soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, and their families. So these servicemen and women have been in this fight for 12 years. And, really, in my organization, everybody who wears a Special Forces badge or a Seal badge, some sort of operator has been in hard combat sometime in the last 12 years. Most of those young men and women, multiple times down range. And that has taken a toll on them. It has taken a toll on their families. And I came in right after the Vietnam War. And, candidly, we as a nation didn't do a great job of taking care of our Vietnam vets and their family. We are not going to make that mistake this time around. So I am absolutely committed to making sure we are taking care of the mind, the body, and the spirit of our soldiers and their families.

My predecessor, Admiral Eric Olson, put together what he called the POTFTF, which was the Pressure on the Force Task Force. And he sent chaplains and a number of subject matter experts out for 10 months, and they interviewed about 7,000 service members, 1,000 wives. They had 440 different meetings. And 10 months later they came back, and that report landed on my desk about the day I took command. And I think Eric had appropriately characterized the force at the time; he said, "The force is frayed." We weren't falling apart at the seams, but we were frayed.

Well, I can tell you in the last 20 months since I've had command, the fraying has accelerated. And so we are working hard to get ahead of that. And some of this is building up physical fitness capabilities so that the guys before they go overseas, while they're overseas, and when they come back are physically prepared to do the job for them and for their families. And, again, it is the full range of support to the members and their families.

The second challenge, as you might imagine, would be the fiscal environment we're in. I can tell you that nobody in my organization believes that -- as we go forward that the U.S. Special Operations Command will not also have to participate and potentially be taxed as a result of the sequestration and the need to move forward on the budget. We are working with the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Staff to articulate what we give them, what their return on the investment is. And I think we can make a good argument. But make no mistake about it, the budget

will affect us either directly, or as it affects the services it will affect us.

So we don't do anything that doesn't have a service component to it. And this is, again, something that's frequently misunderstood. But one of our principle -- or one of our principles within Special Operations is that we don't do anything without the service support. So I will have an Air Force ISR platform flying, or it will be an Air Force C17 that will move us from Point A to Point B, or it will be a Navy submarine off the coast that is helping launch the Seals, or it will be an Army brigade that's providing route clearance packages. We don't do anything that we don't get support from the services, and frankly the interagency. So as those cuts become -- come through the services, that will either directly or indirectly affect U.S. Special Operations Command.

And finally let me just address what I think are some misperceptions out there about what makes Special Operations Forces good. Again, you tend to read the books and you see the movies, and I think there's a belief out there sometimes that we as SOF operators are kind of cavalier in the way we approach things, that there is a certain swagger to a SOF operation, and that swagger extends into how we do business.

I will tell you that is about as far from the truth as it comes. We follow rules. And the reason we follow rules is because most of those rules have been written in blood. So what you learn is if you want to be good, you better be disciplined. You better follow the rules. You better be trustworthy, because the first time you violate that trust with one of your counterparts -- whether it's an ally, whether it's a partner, whether it's a general-purpose force -- the first time you violate that trust will be the last time they'll work with you. Trust is vitally important to us. We are competent, and we are held to a high standard. And we make mistakes. Just like anybody else, we are human, but we are establishing as high a standard as possible for our SOF operators.

So anybody that thinks that you can be cavalier and unprofessional and get this job done is just patently wrong. It is all about our ability to follow rules, to be professional, to hold our operators to a high standard, and to support the policy of the United States. So with that,

I will stop, Jane, and turn it back over to you and the forum. Thank you.

[applause]

Tom Bowman:

Okay. Now, do I do introductions of our friends here, as well? Okay. Everyone or -- you guys need no introduction.

Female Speaker:

[inaudible] forget Grandma and forget [inaudible] --

Tom Bowman:

Right. Then we will introduce Linda Robinson, an old friend. Linda Robinson is a senior policy analyst at RAND, and she's also a senior adjunct fellow, Council on Foreign Relations, also a public policy scholar here at the Wilson Center. And the Council on Foreign Relations just published her special report, "The Future of Special Operations Forces," which is something we can hear today, and her book on Special Operations Force, "One Hundred Victories: Special Operations Forces and the Future of American Warfare," will be published in the fall. She has written numerous books and, like me, a former ink-stained wretch in the print press.

And we also have Dan Feldman. He's one of two deputies to the special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan. He previously served as a partner in the law firm of Foley Hoag. His previous government experience includes serving on the National Security Council with the Clinton administration. He also served on the U.S. Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee. So, now we can start the panel discussion. I can't tell you how happy I am that I don't have to raise my hand and have someone call on me, that I can actually start out here. Okay. So Admiral McRaven, word is that you want to create an empire --

[laughter]

-- that you want to do more with training, with intelligence gathering, with liaison work; that you want to get around the normal Pentagon deployment cycles, which has led to complaints from Congress, from your fellow military services, and also from the State Department.

William McRaven:

Oh, you're going to start off with any easy one, aren't you?

[laughter]

Tom Bowman:

And, also, this is more for the entire panel, as well, but I'm just wondering, in all of what you're trying to do, and in all of this what we heard today -- are we over militarizing foreign policy? I was up at the Army War College, and that was one of the issues that came up. It was a forum much like we have here. Or do you think the military -- and especially the aggressive and talented Special Operations Command -- is able to do this? Because the State Department too often sits inside the embassy and doesn't get out in the field to deal with locals.

William McRaven:

Well, let me take your first point last, because actually that's not the case. The State Department is out and about all over the place. And, you know, when we -- Jane talked about the Hero Summit that we had not too long ago, and one of the points I raised, I said, "Let me tell you about who my heroes are." You know, the Ryan Crockers of this world, the Anne Pattersons, the Jerry Firesteins, the Jim Jeffreys; guys and gals that have spent their life serving this nation as ambassadors and every day -- and people don't -- I don't think people fully appreciate this. So when you're the ambassador in Pakistan or Iraq or Afghanistan, as soon as you step foot outside that embassy, you know, frankly your life is a little bit at risk. So as you're moving from point A to point B in a helicopter or whether you're in a convoy or whether you're getting -- and outreaching with the people, you are at risk. And these great Americans have been doing this their whole career. So any belief that the State Department is sheltered inside their embassy is just not the case at all, certainly not with my experience. I have been blessed to work with some magnificent State Department folks, from the ambassadors down to the -- again, the foot soldiers on the ground, if you will.

Now, as far as militarizing foreign policy, again, I would take some umbrage with that in that, I mean, what we do is we support foreign policy. Unfortunately, what happens is sometimes we're about the only tool that's available, and

so if it's the only tool you have in your tool chest, you reach for it, you're going to get a certain result. But at the end of the day, as I said earlier in my comments, we do what the U.S. ambassador and what the policy makers want us to do, and I'm happy with that.

In terms of building an empire, as I said at lunch, part of what I'm trying to do is provide capability forward. So as somebody once asked, you know, "Why are you doing this?" You know, "What is the value of the U.S. Special Operations Command?" Well, the value to the U.S. Special Operations Command is that I am putting the world's finest Special Operations forces out with the geographic combatant commanders. And if they perform well and there is a demand signal, then frankly the requirement for Special Operations forces I think is better understood, it is easier to defend my budget, in all honesty, and they do great work for the American people. So if that's empire-building, then I'm guilty as charged.

Tom Bowman:

And so what is it that members of Congress, military services, and the State Department don't understand?

William McRaven:

Well, I don't -- the military services I don't think have a problem with us. And we've -- you know, when we started this -- you know, enhancing the global SOF network, you know, 20 months ago, there was some -- probably misunderstandings with some of the geographic combatant commanders. Once they understood that it was absolutely not my intent to kind of move their forces around, and they talked to other combatant commanders who had had the advantage of having Special Operations forces in their areas, like General Jim Mattis, who was at CENTCOM at the time; General Carter Ham was an Africom. They very quickly said, "Hey, this is a great deal, and you ought to, you know, support it." They did, and frankly we kind of quickly got over that. So the services, I don't think, have a problem at all. And, as I said, we're very, very dependent on the services.

Tom Bowman:

And State Department and Congress?

William McRaven:

Well, you know --

Tom Bowman:  
What don't they understand?

William McRaven:  
Well, the State Department -- this is part of -- what I've got to do is to be able to articulate appropriately to my state counterparts what we are attempting to provide them, and to get over some of the misperceptions -- and there are some misperceptions, and there are some, again, I think some mischaracterizations of who we are. And the point I always raise is we don't do anything, nothing, that doesn't have the approval of the chief of mission. So, you know, and some people are -- their opinions are formed by movies and books, and they believe that that's the way we operate, and, in fact, as I said, it's just the opposite.

For me to do anything requires us to go up through the Joint Staff, to get the approvals of the Joint Staff or OSD. When we move down range, the country team and the chief of mission have to approve that, as well. So there's a very well delineated process that puts us in a position to help the embassy.

Tom Bowman:  
And Congresswoman Harman, what about your fellow colleagues -- your former colleagues on the Hill? Did they misperceive this or -- there were some reports that they thought that Admiral McRaven was moving too fast to, you know, get around deployment orders -- normal deployment orders at the Pentagon. What happened out there, do you think?

Jane Harman:  
Well, I don't serve there anymore, and I'm not exactly sure who may have complained, but I'm guessing that the complaints echo something they've heard from the Pentagon, and turf protection is a great motivator in the Pentagon and on Capitol Hill. So it may have more to do with that -  
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Tom Bowman:  
Rice bowls, as they say.

Jane Harman:

-- than what is actually -- yes, the rice bowl syndrome and the -- we even have that at the Wilson Center, and we're trying to break down --

[laughter]

-- the silos and have us -- have a horizontal structure, which, by the way, is what Goldwater-Nichols did.

William McRaven:  
Absolutely:

Jane Harman:  
That's what General McRaven -- Admiral McRaven is referring to in the 80s that created his command and combined and leveraged all the services. And that's what intelligence reform in 2004 was intended to do, too -- the law, the new law, which I had some role in. And none of this works perfectly, but it's working better.

I just -- in response to your question, though, Tom, I mean, at least as I see it, and I'm the one who raised Stan McChrystal's questions: Why is he the enemy? I think we need to do a much better job of explaining what we do, not just domestically, although I think that matters, but internationally. And the goal is to persuade that kid in the boonies of Yemen not to strap on a suicide vest. He has to see some better options. And we have to project our values better, especially the rule of law. And this putting drone policy under strict law is still a work in progress. There is this issue of closing Gitmo, which I strongly favor, and that will take some work with the Congress. But I think Special Operations has a major role to play, the use of kinetics, in a strategy that also includes -- and I'm sure we're going to hear this from the other panelists -- a surge in diplomacy and development. Those are part of our power that can maybe win more hearts and minds than Bill McRaven's teams in the middle of the night.

Tom Bowman:  
But that's what I was getting to, that there's a sense of over-militarization of foreign policy, that you folks in the military have more people in military bands than in the entire foreign service, and that USAID has become a contracting agency over the past number of years. USIA -- I don't think many people in this room, particularly younger



people, would even know what it is. That's long gone. Talk a little bit about that, Dan.

Daniel Feldman:

Sure. I think rather than focus on any potential differences there may be, I think the real story here is the really unprecedented manner in which development and diplomats -- development experts and diplomats have worked alongside -- side by side -- the military and in support of a common vision and in support of our policies. And working collectively as civilian military partners, we help to ensure that we bring to bear all the instruments of U.S. power and that we do so in a very coordinated manner. And to your initial question about, you know, what we managed to do in a place like Afghanistan. That has meant, in the last few years, quadrupling the number of civilians that we had in the field from just over 300 to around 1,200. We're starting to come down from that at this point, but that was across the government, a real, true whole government effort where it was nine or 10 different agencies. We quadrupled the number of agriculture experts, the rule of law experts, a whole range of others, but they were also doing it not just from the safety of the embassy, but increasingly in the field. And at its height we had diplomats and development professionals operating at 84 platforms throughout Afghanistan. And, indeed, I came here directly from the memorial service for Anne Smedinghoff, who was recently killed very tragically.

But we are very much out in the fray, and I think in the course of doing so have had truly impactful results, again, in partnership with the military on the educational front, on life expectancy, on the capacity of the Afghan government, on rule of law issues. On any number of issues we work together to make sure that we --

Tom Bowman:

But I got to tell you, along those lines, my time in Afghanistan -- I sat down a couple of years ago with a Marine colonel in Helmand province and he told me, "Hey, Tom, if this had been a civilian surge in this country, I haven't seen it." There weren't enough state department people in the field helping him, and there were some really intrepid folks like Carter Malkasian and Kael Weston out there, but they were saying there just weren't enough, and if you read Rajiv's book, "Little America," he talks about the bungles of USAID in Afghanistan, the waste of money.

Dan Feldman:

I think that's an outdated story. I mean, I think of -- look, diplomats and development workers operate on different timelines than our military partners, our standard operating procedures are different, the tools that we have to deploy are different, but at the end of the day we were there in complete partnership. I think you'll hear that increasingly from people that you speak with throughout the country and with real results.

And you're operating in a conflict -- you know, a significant conflict territory. And so are you going to have continuing, recurring issues on capacity, on corruption, on any range of things that mean that not every dollar is as well spent as you -- as one would want it? Absolutely. And we have -- you know, we're before Congress on a weekly basis talking about our oversight mechanisms and everything else, that we try to make sure that it's utilized as best as possible, but that doesn't mean that we're not out there without -- and having accomplished some real goals.

Tom Bowman:

Right. And let's bring in Linda Robinson now. Do you want to address some of these issues?

Linda Robison:

I would just --

Tom Bowman:

Particularly, do we have an emperor sitting next to us here or do we have an admiral?

Linda Robinson:

If I might just first make two quick points on this broader topic, because I think it's very important that Congress support the budgets for state and aid so that you have capable partners out there on the ground. And I spent much of the last two years out in Afghanistan following this Special Operations initiative called Village Stability Operations, and I witnessed some very valiant young civilians, and some not so young, but out there on the ground level -- Office of Transition Initiatives I would point out, particularly from USAID. Those are very expeditionary-minded, fearless people. But the embassy regional security officer often restricts their movements.

And that I know is a forced protection issue meant for their safety, but it can really impede this one team on the ground. So I do think there are issues, and plus they're stovepipes still between state aid and the military that I think people have to address.

As far as the issue about whether Special Operations forces writ large, I'd like to just step back for a minute and say I think the big change coming is a shift away from the emphasis on counter-terrorism of the last decade -- meaning strike, unilateral raiding operations -- to building partner capacity. As the admiral says, the question is getting better at it. And I think that was the focus of the report that I wrote for the Council and I think that is certainly what the admiral is looking at doing. And I would just highlight that there are some very important personnel development initiatives because it's all about having sophisticated SOF leaders who can knit together those interagency teams and craft those strategies --

Tom Bowman:

And walk us through, you know --

Linda Robinson:

Yes.

Tom Bowman:

-- bullet points about how you would create a better SOF --

Linda Robinson:

Right. Well, the key recommendation, I don't believe it is on the menu for SOCOM. I want to emphasize: this is an independent report. But a number of the interview subjects stressed that, because SOCOM does not have control of its personnel, they belong to the services, that it would be beneficial for Congress to consider changing the legislation and granting co-management of personnel so that those individuals can be developed throughout their career in partnership with what the SOF leadership thinks they need to do. So that's really the key recommendation there. And I think the other -- we'll talk more about TSOCs probably as we get into this, but the other issue I'd like to raise is there's been tremendous growth at SOCOM, but the policy shop at the Pentagon has remained the same in terms of size. And it also has often been given responsibilities that have nothing to do with special operations, and I think that because everyone recognizes

special operations are a much bigger part of all national security issues today -- virtually all -- that that needs to be looked at, as well.

Tom Bowman:

And in speaking of policy shop [spelled phonetically], I've talked to people who say that staff has grown enormously over the years and may be too bloated as we speak now.

Linda Robinson:

But many for counter -- for other activities that don't necessarily optimize the SOF forces, especially since they have to not only pivot to a new -- I think a new focus, but they also have to get much better at it. And I think getting better at it includes addressing these concerns and the trust deficit issue that people don't understand. They're not about coming in the middle of the night, dropping out of a helicopter, and killing a bunch of people.

Tom Bowman:

And you raise a good point, too. Go ahead --

William McRaven:

Sorry, Tom.

Tom Bowman:

Yeah.

William McRaven:

If I can address a couple things, because Linda raised some great points here. First, let me start with the policy shop, because Mike Sheehan, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and low intensity conflict, is -- has been a fantastic partner in dealing with me and U.S. special operations command. And, frankly, having his focus on the key issues that I've had to deal with has been invaluable to me. It's not only a professional relationship, it's a great personal relationship, but I would agree with you, Linda, it has been -- we have not grown that shop to the appropriate level where it needs to be able to handle a number of the issues that are starting to come up.

The other piece, on the working of the talent management, if you will, and having control of our personnel. Again, that report is exactly right. I don't control the

promotions for our Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps officers. The good news is I've got a great dialogue with the service chiefs and it does get back. We talked about the trust factor earlier. I will tell you, with all of the service chiefs, and some of them like Ray Odierno, who I've spent more time with than my wife over here in the last 12 years, we've got a great relationship. He has been very supportive of Special Operations, as has the commandant and the CNO and the Chief of Staff of the Air Force. So these are great relationships that, again, allow me some maneuver space in bringing the SOF issues forward. So as we look at how we're going to promote guys and how we're going to build the capability of our enlisted and NCO ranks, we are working kind of shoulder-to-shoulder with them.

But one other thing I want to address, Tom, before you move on here is I want to make sure I set the record straight on Capitol Hill, because frankly we get fabulous support from Capitol Hill. There are elements of it that kind of question some of the things we do, and I'm okay with that. I mean, that is absolutely their responsibility and they need to do that, and if I can't appropriately articulate what we're trying to do, then maybe it's not the right thing to do. I mean, I trust their experience and I trust them as lawmakers. But I will tell you from the -- particularly the two committees, the House Armed Services Committee and the Senate Armed Services Committee that deal with us directly, we have had incredible support as well as with the HAC-D and the SAC-D. So, there are always going to be elements in any organization that -- you know, that don't fully support us, and, again, I think that's okay. So I have an obligation, my staff has an obligation, to engage with them early and often and keep them abreast of what we're doing and answer their questions. And, you know, I'm happy to do that. But we get great support from Capitol Hill.

Tom Bowman:

Would you like to control promotions?

William McRaven:

No. I mean, I'm comfortable with we are. I mean, we've had -- our promotion rates are higher than the average rate for the services. I'm not sure at this point in time -- I don't disagree with Linda. I want to make sure that's clear. I don't disagree with her finding. I'm not sure I'm prepared to do that right now because, as Linda well

knows, it would require another investment -- large investment in staff to be able to manage and promote all of our officers and enlisted within the Special Operations community. So right now I don't have the capability to do that, and partnering with the services, as it stands right now, is probably a better approach to take. You know, maybe in the future, if that opportunity presents itself, we'll re-look that.

Tom Bowman:

And Congressman, do you want to address that issue, too? Would you recommend any changes here?

Jane Harman:

No, I --

Tom Bowman:

In special operations command, that --

Jane Harman:

I really wouldn't. I've learned up close and personal how hard it is to change structures. I had a role in creating the Department of Homeland Security, also. And, no, I think having a good leader with demonstrated results works -- build trust relationships with other people without upsetting rice bowls is a better way to go.

I just wanted to make one other point, though, on this building partner capacity piece, which seems to me a very good forward plan. Adam Smith -- Congressman Adam Smith from Washington state, who is the ranking Democrat on the House Armed Services Committee, came here a couple weeks ago talking about this. He's been around the world with Special Operations folks, observing what we do, and his point was that building partner capacity -- and maybe this is what you mean, but it's just not clear enough to me what you mean -- was not only about building partner capacity inside our government, having a whole-of-government approach and featuring smart power over hard power, but building partner capacity with other governments. And he was talking about Africa in particular, and that where we do that, where we build trust with other governments, which I would say is at least a question mark to me about how we're doing in Afghanistan, but where we really build trust with other governments we have a better chance of succeeding. And I just wanted to ask if that's what you meant --

William McRaven:

Well, I'll tell you, you know, I will give tremendous kudos to Linda because she has been raising this issue for many, many years. And, frankly, folks within the Special Operations community listen to Linda Robinson. And when they listen to her, I listen to them, and I listen to her. And her focus on why building partner capacity is important, why security force assistance is important, how we have to build up our special forces capability, all the work she has done, I will tell you, is why I'm moving this initiative forward, is because when you listen to what she has to say and the power of her arguments it's hard to argue it. So, Linda, first thanks for the great work you've done.

Linda Robinson:

Thank you.

Tom Bowman:

I want to talk a little bit more about Special Operations Forces in the way ahead, out to 2020. And one of the problems over the past number of years has been how do you train forces in countries that may be -- their leadership -- or their military may be somewhat unsavory? This has come up over the past in Indonesia. In Mali, of course, you were prevented by law from training troops there because the government was overthrown. El Salvador is another example where you had a lot of criticism back in the '80s for doing this. Walk me through how you move ahead on this issue. I know you, of course, have civilian masters and they would help you on this as well --

William McRaven:

Sure.

Tom Bowman:

-- as State Department. Talk a little bit about that, and also, you know, the argument could be made that it's good for us to be in a country like Mali or Salvador or Indonesia because you do build those relationships, those personal relationships. The current leader, the current general running the show might not -- might be an unsavory character, but we get to know who else is in there, as well, and it's beneficial not only to that country, but the United States, as well.

William McRaven:

Yeah. Thanks, Tom. I think what we've found in the military over the years, and certainly folks that have worked in the diplomatic corps recognize the same thing, you know, if you engage with people and build that trust factor up they're less likely to do nefarious things or act badly. So, from our standpoint, if we work with a unit that is of -- you know, is a little bit questionable, we can show them what right looks like. We can talk about civilian control of the military. We can talk about good order and discipline. We can talk about human rights. And so this is part of our engagement. We don't just teach them to kind of shoot, move, and communicate, as we talk about in kind of infantry terms. We teach them about what we think are universal values; not western values, not American values, but universal values. And that is a very important part of our engagement. We do this, again, in full concert with the country team in the embassy.

So, when we propose that we're going to work with a particular Special Forces unit, we'll work with the embassy, they will tell us whether or not that's a good unit to work with. Most of the times we have to go through what's called the Leahy vetting if it's a training piece. And, again, there has been some I think mischaracterization of my position on the Leahy vetting. I'm all about the Leahy law. I mean, the last thing we want to do is to be operating and training with folks that have committed gross human rights violations, which is the letter of the Leahy law. My only issue has been we -- both in the Office of the Secretary of Defense and Joint Staff and State Department and others, we've got to improve the process because sometimes the process is a little slow. But it's not about the law. I am perfectly comfortable with the law and we're working to work through that process.

So, as we identify units we want to work with, we go through the Leahy vetting, and once that is determined to be appropriate then we move forward and we start kind of basics with kind of -- again, kind of crawl, walk, run approach. But those relationships are very, very important because if the country starts to fall, you have insights into what's happening and potentially you can affect them.

Tom Bowman:

Dan or Linda, do you want to weigh in on that?



Linda Robinson:

I would like to say I think it's very important that people don't misinterpret at least my argument that SOF is a panacea, that it can be used everywhere and cure all problems. But I do think that -- and I'm -- I was out there in El Salvador and I saw -- and it was state and aid and USIA intel all working out there together in the field. But I think Congress played a very important role also in capping the advisors, at 55 I believe was the number. So there was a clear -- because there were a lot of human rights concerns in that case, some very serious problems, but the U.S. stuck with it over the long-term and you wound up with a partner that was out there in Iraq helping as part of the coalition. Kind of an extraordinary evolution, but it took a long time.

Tom Bowman:

You raise an interesting point about capping the advisors. I've talked to Special Forces guys over the years, the retired guys, who said it actually worked in our favor. It was almost under the radar. We had just a small number. We didn't have huge bases like Kandahar or Bagram. We were in there training these guys and it actually worked out better in the end.

Jane Harman:

I almost think there's an inverse relationship between the size of our footprint and the size of our effectiveness.

Linda Robinson:

And in many cases it's more sustainable from a political -- from that country's perspective, and I think Colombia is the other case where I've been out there and I've seen it. It was a decade-long-plus where it's worked. But I think that it would be a mistake -- and there are a lot of people who are very skeptical about it. If the government is too -- or the military too deformed, too severe, you know, I think skepticism is warranted and careful assessments have to be made by the military, but obviously also the policymakers. And in some cases -- and some may argue, "Well, Afghanistan was that case." I guess I'd rather reserve judgment on that. And I've also watched the development of the Afghan Special Operation Forces, which has been another one of those under-the-radar missions that SOF has been carrying out in Afghanistan. I think there is a danger there of becoming almost more ambitious, especially if forces are going to go away. I think the --

but the small-footprint approach, meaning partnered small footprint, is really the wave of the future.

Tom Bowman:

And do you have anything to weigh in on this, particularly with, you know, training some maybe unsavory characters or countries that some would argue maybe we shouldn't be involved there? Is there a tension between you and the military about the approach there?

Daniel Feldman:

Again, I mean, I'm not trying to gloss over differences, but I come from a human rights background and actually did training in -- with securities forces in places like Indonesia and elsewhere. And I think that the processes can always be made better, and you can always try to expedite them or accelerate them. There's always going to be some differences, but the fact that they exist, and we're trying to do exactly that, and that there is a jointness of vision about what we seek to do I think is exactly where we've been and I think there's very good agreement.

I think -- I would just caution -- I would almost always come to it that engagement within the constraints and within -- respecting not only the letter of Leahy but the spirit of Leahy, which I think sometimes gets lost in it, but within those constraints that engagement is always going to pay dividends down the road. And you see it in our IMET training programs and kind of the lost generation that we have in Pakistan from the Pressler amendment. I mean, and you see it in any sorts of other types of engagement, but that we also have to keep expectations realistic and that these time horizons are very, very long. And that is sometimes a hard case to make to those who fund us, because if you look at -- the two best examples I think being Colombia and Indonesia -- and this was a decade-or-more-long process. And if you're trying to build capacity or rule of law institutions, it's not going to happen overnight. And so I do think that a smaller-footprint approach, where you can start that process and stay engaged over a long time expanse is your greatest source of success.

Tom Bowman:

And maybe a small footprint in Afghanistan would have made more sense than what we see now?

Jane Harman:

I think so. I've thought that for a long time. I always thought that the COIN strategy did not fit Afghanistan. While I had some arguments with my very good friend Dave Petraeus about this when he was there, I thought that Afghanistan much more resembled Vietnam than it did Iraq. And intelligent people tried to make the best decisions and surely the stuff that JSOC did there was impressive, but when it all nets out, what are -- what will we leave behind? And it makes a point that's really not about our capability, but their capability. You have to have a willing partner. And I think there is a question mark there about whether the partner -- our partner in Afghanistan has always been willing to do the things that would lead Afghanistan to become a stable, unified country. And we don't have to go into that now, but I think we've had an uphill battle and the U.S. has made a -- and our NATO allies -- a mighty effort in Afghanistan. And all of those who have been involved should be given our robust thanks, and especially the families of those who lost their lives.

Tom Bowman:

Admiral, any thoughts on that? Would the Salvador model have been a better fit in Afghanistan in hindsight as opposed to what we have? Or, as Kael Weston of the State Department said, "We should have gone in low and long"?

William McRaven:

Well, again, I think time will tell, and I'm reluctant to make that assessment at this point in time. I think we're going to need a little while to determine whether or not the strategy that was put in place was successful, but I will tell you I think it's moving in absolutely the right direction. We've got some great leaders over there with Joe Dunford and all the previous folks that were there, so, again, I'm reluctant to make that assessment right now.

Tom Bowman:

He's my college classmate, by the way. St. Michael's College in Vermont.

Admiral William McRaven:

Good man. Very good man.

Tom Bowman:

And now we turn to Dan for the whole of government role here. And I'd like for you to also address what we were talking about here, that, you know, former secretary -- Defense Secretary Bob Gates, Hillary Clinton talked about fully funding the State Department and that hasn't been done. We talked about the size of the military compared to the State Department. And as General Mattis recently said, "If you don't fully fund the State Department, buy me more ammunition."

Daniel Feldman:

Well, I'll always support a pitch to more fully fund the State Department and USAID, so I absolutely concur with that. I actually do -- I only want to say -- take a few minutes, but I was struck in the admiral's opening remarks at how similarly we have tried on the diplomatic and development front to mirror many of the things which you've laid out on the military front, in fact talk about it similarly in terms of an enhanced civilian power. So, absolutely the number one thing, if you go back to our QDDR process which Secretary Clinton initiated, the very first thing was the chief of mission authority piece of that and working very much under chief of mission authority.

Certainly the engagement with partners and something that we have tried to do from the very outset of our office, which -- when Richard Holbrook first helmed it under Mark Grossman -- was leading a diplomatic campaign to bolster the military's efforts, and through a very kind of dogged diplomatic effort, once Ambassador Holbrook was named as special representative, 50 other countries or so also named similar ones. And we have continued to convene them, but with a real emphasis not only on traditional NATO ISAF partners, but now a third of those members are from OIC, Muslim-majority countries, and that has been very, very important in the kind of communications messaging in Afghanistan; that this is not some clash of civilizations, but something that the Muslim world has joined us on, and has been very, very helpful in terms of continuing to build the sustainability of what we will seek to do after 2014. And so to use this network last year to mobilize \$4.1 billion annually in international support for the ANSF through 2017 and also the international commitment of \$16 billion of development assistance to Afghanistan through 2015. So very, very significant sums, which were -- you know, came out of our effort to match and partner on the military effort with the diplomatic one.

Expanding regional diplomatic efforts, as well. We -- there have been several significant conferences over the last few years, one of which was the Istanbul Process, which was the region -- it's the neighbors and the near-neighbors taking ownership for what will happen in Afghanistan over the long-term, which -- when it was first held 18 months ago, we weren't sure that it would be held again. It's now met twice more, including last week in Almaty. Deputy Secretary represented us there. And next year China will host it, which is very, very significant.

And obviously what we have sought to do in terms of the integrated surges that we've always talked about, not only in the military surge and the civilian surge but the diplomatic surge in trying to move forward on a reconciliation process in Afghanistan as the best chance of long term sustainability. And all this while we've been negotiating the Strategic Partnership Agreement, now the Bilateral Security Agreement. And so as you talked about the -- kind of the partnership in the interagency and the partnership on the international stage, and then how you've tried to best source that, including in our office when it was created, it was seen as a template for this new, more fluid, more nimble approach to diplomacy. And so to have representatives -- senior representatives representing the Secretary and the Chairman and others at DOD sit in our office at the State Department reporting up through our special representative and with reach-back authority to their agencies, along with academics and others, just as you said, is a very, very similar approach and one that we've derived great benefit from.

So -- and just as you suggested the kind of benefits of this model, the continued obstacles we'll face on the budgetary front and on the communications front, you know, we are very in sync on this and I think it represents a new way of thinking about our approaches to 21st century problems and -- both on a military and certainly on the diplomatic statecraft front.

Tom Bowman:

But clearly you have a challenge ahead of you because it's, you know, funding foreign aid, funding assistance to Afghanistan, the people have -- you know, it's fallen off the map in this country. It's going to be probably more of challenge than what the admiral's facing.

Daniel Feldman:

I would happily take your committees at some point than ours in terms of where they currently stand. But there's -- they represent their constituencies, there's a -- obviously there's an exhaustion with Afghanistan, there's a concern about domestic priorities. We've worked very, very closely with our two authorizing committees and our appropriating committees. To date, they've -- you know, we've been able to work very, very well with them. It's a hard argument to make, but one that they're willing to listen to. And I hope, especially as we enter into this last critical kind of 18 months through the end of next year, through the end of 2014, and in the very first year or so of the post-transition transformation decade, we'll continue to bring them along.

Jane Harman:

John Kerry's three decades of experience on the Hill, most likely as the senior Democrat on that Senate Foreign Relations Committee, helps a lot. And he's enormously popular and respected on both sides of the aisle. It is true that the public I think gives foreign policy a 3 percent rating on the list of things they care about. And speaking from, you know, my experience, a huge number of people in both parties think the foreign aid budget is already half of our federal budget.

Daniel Feldman:

What it's 1 percent.

Jane Harman:

When it's --

Daniel Feldman:

Yeah, exactly.

Jane Harman:

-- .01 percent. "Oh, facts? Why facts?" But, at any rate -- so there is this sort of built-in bias against paying attention, but I think John Kerry has been a magnificent Secretary of State so far and really can get Congress' attention in a way that will be very helpful.

Daniel Feldman:

Absolutely.

Tom Bowman:

Okay, I think it's time for questions now. We have, I guess, a mic over here. Two mics. So fire away. Throw some real hard balls up here.

Jane Harman:

And people should identify themselves.

Tom Bowman:

Yeah, identify yourself and, you know, where you're from, as well. Right over here.

Tara Kangarlou:

Hi. My name is Tara Kangarlou, CNN. And I have a question from all panelists. It's in regards to Syria. And with the new allegations of chemical weaponry use, how do you see the future of Special Operations in the potential intervention of U.S. and its allies in Syria? And if you can perhaps loop back into the smaller-footprint approach and if that's a potential plan in dealing with Syria. Thank you.

William McRaven:

I'm sorry, what was the second part of that question?

Tara Kangarlou:

The smaller-footprint approach that you discussed, that would have been a better plan dealing with Afghanistan, and how is that viable with Syria, if at all? Thank you.

William McRaven:

Okay. Well, I guess I'll start with that --

Tom Bowman:

Right down the line.

William McRaven:

Sure. Well, first, Syria, again, is -- you know, is in the Central Command's area of operation. So my responsibility is to provide Special Operations Forces to General Austin as he kind of builds the military plan and contingencies that he will provide to the Secretary and the President. But, as everybody knows, Syria is a very complex problem. You know, it isn't Libya. It's not as easy as it might appear, and I will tell you that the great planners at the Central Command, on the Joint Staff, and OSD and others within the military have been looking at this very closely.

We have contingencies and plans that we can provide the Secretary and the President when they're required. Obviously I don't intend to go into details on that today, but I think, if asked, General Austin will be able to provide what the nation needs.

Tom Bowman:

Anybody else on that? Okay.

Daniel Feldman:

I'm happy that the SRAP is -- the special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, so enough complex issues in my portfolio. I don't have anything to add on Syria.

[laughter]

Jane Harman:

I'd like to add that I think that U.S. boots on the ground in Syria in any format, whether big or small footprint, is an unlikely outcome. I think the issue that the government is wrestling with is whether to provide arms to some folks -- "the opposition we trust," quote -- on the ground or not, and the President, my guess is, will make that decision in a near-term now that he's said he's considering it.

Tom Bowman:

This gentleman back here with the military bearing?

Male Speaker:

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen, Major Taz Bailey [spelled phonetically] from Headquarters Marine Corps. This question is for Admiral McRaven. Sir, where do you see the biggest growth opportunities for SOF and general purpose force integration and cooperation and what kind of obstacles do you see to improving those capabilities?

William McRaven:

You know, actually, I don't see any obstacles. I see a lot of opportunities. As I mentioned earlier, I've got great relationships with all the service chiefs, and as the service chiefs begin to look hard at how they're going to shape the force in the future in support of the combatant commanders and in support of the President, we're talking almost daily. In fact, I just had a lengthy discussion with the commandant of the Marine Corps here last week about how do we -- U.S. special operations force,



particularly the Marine special operations forces, and the maritime expeditionary forces, how do they move forward. So we are having a great dialogue with General Odierno on how we partner with the Army, the Air Force. These are natural linkages for us, and, of course, the Navy in general with Navy SEALs on ships and our support to the fleet has always been out there. So I don't really see any challenges. There are a lot of opportunities. Now that, you know, we're drawing down in Afghanistan we will have the capacity to frankly be able to support them in greater numbers. So that creates the opportunities I think we're looking for.

Tom Bowman:

Okay, Kim up there in the back. You got a fast ball there?

Female Speaker:

So, Admiral McRaven --

William McRaven:

Kimberly [spelled phonetically], how are you?

Female Speaker:

I'm good. So, I've heard a lot of special operators fume about how the term "counterinsurgency" has gotten taken over by one definition of the term; large Army counterinsurgency versus smaller footprint, irregular warfare. Could you explain the difference between the two as you would apply it to Afghanistan and how that might play out over the next year-and-a-half in transition?

William McRaven:

Wow, that sounds like the thesis to me, Kim. I'm not sure I can answer that in the time we have allotted. But, as you know, there's always differences among those folks that work strategy and work doctrine. I'm not sure the term of art is as important as the application of the strategy. But, again, I will actually defer to the expert on this, who is Linda Robinson. How's that, Linda? How'd I do?

[laughter]

Tom Bowman:

That was good.

Linda Robinson:

I will actually -- it's -- I know, Kim, you know a lot of this, but the world of doctrine is a very complicated one, and people don't know a term called "foreign internal defense," and I would just raise that because I think it makes a good counterpoint for COIN as it's been used and understood in the last decade. And foreign internal defense is really what the old-timers used to call "counter insurgency," but it's all about supporting the counter insurgency effort of that country. So I think that's really the model that is coming to the fore now and that people should take a look at. Whatever name you want to put on it, because I know, for example, ASD Sheehan uses "security force assistance," and that's a much broader, umbrella term. But the key point is you're not in the lead; you're supporting them and in an ideal situation they're the ones pulling the trigger and shooting the ordinance.

Tom Bowman:

Right back there in the red.

Female Speaker:

Thank you, my name is Nadu Adusuri [spelled phonetically] and I'm from Yemen. My question is to Admiral McRaven. So, I like your remarks about building the capacity of local partners and allies so that they can take care of their problems. And my question is do you mean governments by "partners and allies"? And if that's the case, how do you deal with the dilemma of when governments are not seen legitimate by their own local population? At the local level where the change needs to happen, what are your alternatives? And how do you also deal with the dilemma where the local social fabric is so delicate that engaging with such social fabric, in the case of him and the tribes, would do more harm than good? Thanks.

Tom Bowman:

There you go. That's the kind of fast pitch I'm looking for.

William McRaven:

Well, it's a fabulous question, and I think you've done a great job of kind of characterizing the complex world we live in. And this is why it really does require, you know, somebody who has had years and years of experience to understand how to engage with, in this case, the Yemenis, if you're referring to that.

So -- but let me kind of walk you through the process. Again, we won't engage with any government that the State Department doesn't begin to say, "Hey, this is an appropriate thing to do for U.S. policy." So that's step one. So any thought, again, that we are out there engaging with governments that have not been approved by the State Department, it doesn't happen. So the policymakers make a policy decision on whether or not this is an appropriate government to engage with, and, again, I don't make judgments on the value of the various governments. Our job is to kind of carry out the policy. So, once that decision is made that this is a government that we are working with, that will help advance their policy goals and our policy goals, then that's where we kind of come in. And then, again, from there it's a -- kind of a straight military plan. So if the decision is made for us to engage with a particular military counterpart, then we build the plan, we present it to the State Department, we present it to the geographic combatant commander, and we move forward. But it is not my place to decide whether or not we are going to engage with a particular government. That is the decision of the policymakers, and once they make that decision then I execute that decision.

Tom Bowman:

And luckily we have a State Department official right here that can help address that. How do you square that if you're -- some would call an unsavory government, maybe some people in the hills say why are we dealing with X country? Walk us through how you make that happen.

Daniel Feldman:

Well, again, I'll start with the same premise that the admiral did, which is that the decision to engage in any particular country is obviously a very complex one and in part -- and comes out of an inter-agency process and there's any number of things that will go into that. But once we're there, then I think there's -- there -- we have experimented with and I think become quite successful with a range of different ways that we have tried to do exactly this, in terms of building capacity in Afghanistan. One particular example: obviously there's been a huge effort to combat corruption in Afghanistan. We helped to create the Major Crimes Task Force, which was initially with our support, but with U.S. law enforcement personnel from the FBI, from DOJ, from other civilian agencies to then mentor

Afghan professionals and create a resident law enforcement community in Afghanistan.

We obviously have to -- we select which ministries we can work with most effectively. We have a series of oversight mechanisms now, which we have greatly increased over the last few years to ensure that we try to do that effectively. We revisit it with metrics to make sure that we're getting -- we're trying to meet our goals from it. And so once we have the actual decision, I think there's a variety of models now at our disposal in terms of how we can operationalize that and implement that, but the decision first has to be made in terms of where we see the value in engaging.

Tom Bowman:

And how's that anti-corruption effort working for you in Afghanistan?

Daniel Feldman:

It's -- no one's going to be Pollyannaish about what you can -- about what we can actually achieve and over what amount of time, but it doesn't mean that we obviously can't try to do this and that we have to make an effort to do it and that once we've got far fewer military and civilians in Afghanistan that this will be on the -- you know, solely on the arms of the Afghans to continue to carry, and we'll have to see where that goes.

Tom Bowman:

Sir, right down here.

Richard Downie:

Thank you. I'm Richard Downie from Delphi Strategic Consulting. Thank you for a wonderful discussion here today. You know, given President Obama's trip to Mexico today and thinking about the last six years where we've had such tremendous security cooperation, including the U.S. military and Special Operations Forces between the United States and Mexico. We've been seeing in recent days a lot of articles about how the current administration, under Enrique Peña Nieto in Mexico, may be drawing back from some of that cooperation and willingness to cooperate with the United States. I wonder if you could comment on that, Admiral, or anyone in the panel, could talk a little bit about your expectations how that may affect -- how you see

that affecting Special Operations Forces or the military or in general our efforts with Mexico. Thank you.

William McRaven:

Well, again, this is going to sound like an unsatisfying answer, but, as was mentioned, I wait to see what the policymakers want us to do. So this becomes an issue of the inter-agency, as referred to, primarily on the Stateside, the Western hemisphere. You know, they're the folks between the State Department that work and engage with the Mexican government. And that inter-agency forum is going to have to decide what our engagement looks like with Mexico. And once that's decided, then I'll move forward to support it. And the reason I keep kind of coming back to this pat answer is because, again, there is this misperception out there that we are kind of off on our own, you know, developing policy, working with countries, and that is as far from the truth as it could be. There is a very strict and disciplined process before Special Operations Forces get put downrange anywhere, and that -- it's a very careful vetting. And once it is approved at the appropriate level, Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, or up to the President, until that happens we don't move forward.

Tom Bowman:

And I -- Dan, I assume you have enough on your plate. You don't want --

Daniel Feldman:

Yeah. Again, I mean, unfortunately for me I have nothing to add on Mexico but --

Tom Bowman:

[inaudible] -- want to comment on that?

Jane Harman:

Yeah, I did. We have an extremely well-regarded Mexico Institute at the Wilson center. I thought this maybe was a plug for us. Thank you.

[laughter]

And we had a panel the other day on changing strategies to combat the drug problem here, and Mexico and Latin America's contribution by providing drugs and, you know, the obvious networks and cartels that go with that. And I

choose to see this change as positive, not as negative, from what I understand. And I am not a Mexico expert, but I think a changed strategy may end up being more effective, and part of that change is for us in this country to see the problem differently and not to decriminalize it totally -- a couple of states have decriminalized marijuana, which is obvious -- but to have an approach that's on prevention and treatment more than on incarceration. And the thought is that that could depress the demand for drugs and then different strategies in Mexico could work better. So, I don't chose to see it as though we're thrown out. I think this change in strategy may work better. And, by the way, there's really a good-news story in Mexico. The economy is thriving. It's growing much faster than ours, and that story is almost never told. And President Obama is down there, my understanding is, to start the dialogue about change -- the changed Mexico and the advantages of close collaboration. So I don't see us moving apart, I just see some -- a course correction, perhaps, in the approach to the drug issue.

Tom Bowman:  
Right down here.

Robert Litwak:  
Thank you. Robert Litwak from the Woodrow Wilson Center. Question for Admiral McRaven. In tandem with the developments that you outlined, the growth of -- and future of Special Operations. There are those that are occurring in the intelligence community where over the last decade or plus since 9/11 there's been a ramping-up of their paramilitary capabilities, and the -- sort of the public narrative out there is that the CIA, in its own sort of reevaluation of their mission, is going to scale those down and some of them may be transferred over into your -- under your purview. Could you just talk about the sort of interface between kind of the -- your command and its operations and the parallel sort of functions that have been going on in the IC, some of which, you know, can't be openly discussed, but --

William McRaven:  
Right.

Robert Litwak:  
-- how this sort of plays out in practice?

William McRaven:

Well, I'm not going to talk about the future of the CIA. I'll leave that to John Brennan. What I can tell you, though, is that our relationship with the intel community, so the Special Operations relationship with the intel community really since 9/11 is remarkable. I think the American people would be very pleased to see the -- frankly the inter-governmental relationship we have with all of these agencies, but in my case, in particular, the intel community.

So when you look at an average operation, you know, any night in Afghanistan and all the ones we did in Iraq, we don't do anything without the support of the National Security Agency that provides the technical support, the CIA that will provide the human support, the National Geospatial Agency that will provide the geo-int [spelled phonetically] support. All of those agencies come together: the Defense Intelligence Agency, the FBI. They are all with us in this incredible inter-agency organization that leverages the power and the information of every one of those intel community elements. But, again, SOCOM is not part of the IC, we are not part of the intel community, but we live off the great work that they do and it is absolutely amazing.

You know, as Jane mentioned here earlier, but, frankly, as I told her when I walked in, I didn't realize that this was the anniversary of the raid, but now that she has raised that point, I have said it before but it's always worth repeating, when you look at the magnificent work that the CIA did along with other members of the National Security Agency and others to find Bin Laden, it will go down as one of the great operations in the history of intelligence organizations, and rightfully so. And the work that these agents do every day for the good of our country and for the good of other countries is just incredible, and so my hat's off to them. But getting back to your question, it's a great relationship and I expect it will continue to strengthen that relationship as we go forward.

Tom Bowman:

Okay, right down here.

Female Speaker:

Yes, my name is Angela Dickey [spelled phonetically]. I'm a Foreign Service officer and a State Department fellow at

the U.S. Institute of Peace right now. Sir, I'm very glad to hear of your great respect for the country team principle and working with our ambassadors. We've been talking a lot today about the light footprint. From where I see it, your footprint looks huge. You have more people in your command than we have in the State Department --

William McRaven:  
Right.

Female Speaker:

-- and you have more special operators than we have Foreign Service officers. And to me, civilian oversight of the military presumes that we have enough civilians to oversee the military. That's just a comment I'd like to make, because the other point that was made earlier is that we surged civilians into Iraq and Afghanistan. I'd just like to point out that we -- in doing so we beggared our other embassies where we had 10-percent staff deficit during those surges, and this raises very serious problems for me personally as a Foreign Service officer and for our profession. So, just like to make that comment and see if you have any reaction.

William McRaven:

Well, I think it's -- the comment is a good one. I do have tremendous respect for the Foreign Service and for the folks that are deployed in range. In terms of civilian oversight, I mean, one U.S. ambassador and one country team can certainly provide oversight for a small platoon of SEALs or Special Forces guys. It doesn't require a one-for-one oversight, as you know. So when I talk about the fact that we are in 78 countries around the world, in some cases it's one or two people. In Afghanistan it's about 9,000. So the numbers are pretty skewed. When I talk about the fact that we got 11,000 people, you know, out and about across the world at any point in time, yeah, they're not all in one -- well, they're mostly in Afghanistan, but when you look at them and where they are across other countries, they're in very small numbers.

So I don't think we've ever had a problem with -- at least from my experience, of civilian oversight of the force -- of the soft force that's in a country. But I'm all about growing the Foreign Service, you know, so I'll put that plug in, as well. I'm all about more money for the State Department for all the reasons Tom raised. This is an



incredible enabler for the country. You know, anytime we can -- there's diplomatic relationships at the lower Foreign Service level all the way up to the ambassadors, that is money in the bank for us as a nation.

Jane Harman:

If I could just add something. The Admiral gave a shout-out to Anne Patterson and Ryan Crocker, two extraordinary ambassadors.

William McRaven:

Extraordinary.

Jane Harman:

Anne is now in Egypt, having served before that in Pakistan, having served before that in a couple of Latin countries, and she is in harm's way, and just a little plug for small women adding great value.

[laughter]

William McRaven:

Small, tough women.

Tom Bowman:

Right here, sir. You've been patient.

Raha Wala:

Thank you very much for an interesting panel. My name is Raha Wala. I'm with Human Rights First. I want to ask about the relationship between direct action and a broader counterterrorism strategy, especially in a post-war environment. I know congressman -- former congressman Harman raised that earlier in the conversation. And in particular, you know, on the day of the second anniversary in which Osama bin Laden was killed, I think we're in a very different environment and everyone agrees about that. Core al-Qaeda according to -- you know, I'm obviously not privy to classified intelligence information, but what I have seen core al-Qaeda is, you know, strategically -- on the verge of strategic defeat, not capable of a catastrophic attack like 9/11. There are other threats out there in the world, but by and large, as we're, you know, winding down the war in Afghanistan people are starting to ask questions about what a next phase of counterterrorism strategy looks like.

There was an interesting set of comments made by former General Counsel Jeh Johnson this past fall where he described that we're approaching a tipping point in which we must be able to say that we're no longer in an armed conflict with al-Qaeda and associated forces and that our military assets must be reserved as a last resort -- and I'm paraphrasing here -- and that our diplomatic intelligence and law enforcement assets must be front and center along with our partner nations in combating terrorism. I guess I want to ask you, Admiral McRaven, whether you agree with those remarks provided by former General Counsel Jeh Johnson and how we can make sure that our direct action activities, you know, which are operational activities, don't become a substitute for a broader strategic approach to dealing with terrorism?

William McRaven:

Thank you. Great question. First, I absolutely agree with Jeh Johnson. I think he did a great of kind of framing the way ahead for us, and in fact that is the point of my narrative. When you talk about how I view -- and I would say it's combating terrorism now, but it's kind of counterterrorism, but combating terrorism to me means how do we partner, how do we build this partner capacity, how do we help countries help themselves so that, frankly, we can kind of buy down the extremism and those countries can deal with terrorism in their countries at almost a law enforcement level so that it doesn't become regional and it doesn't become global? So it's about kind of getting ahead of the threat so that I don't have to use direct action. At the end of the day, direct action ought to be the very last resort, and that's really where we ought to be proceeding in terms of -- again, I think the future of Special Operations and the future of combating terrorism. But I agree wholeheartedly with Jeh Johnson.

Jane Harman:

I just would add, Tom -- I know time is running out here -- that it's time, in my view, to review the authorization to use military force, which has been the underpinning for most of the action that both Presidents Bush and Obama have taken across the world in response to post-9/11 threats. The AUMF was passed by Congress -- I was there; I voted for it -- to respond to those who attacked us based in Afghanistan. And no one thought that this would be the underpinning statute 12 years later. There is a number of members of Congress who want to review this. One of them

is Bob Corker, who is a Republican ranking member on the Senate Foreign Relations committee, and I think it's time to start a public conversation -- maybe we'll do it here at the Wilson Center -- about whether the AUMF needs to be modified, repealed, replaced, or whatever to be -- to frame a new narrative going forward.

Tom Bowman:

Okay, real quick. So let's try to get a couple more questions. Go ahead.

Daniel Feldman:

Yeah, no, just in response to that and also wrapping in one or two of the previous questions, as well. I mean, I hope everyone recognizes the kind of -- the rigor and the robustness of this inter-agency process on kind of when to engage and where -- how the White House runs that and the types of deliberations that go into that. But obviously it all comes down to the balancing that you would expect of what our interests are in that engagement. And on something like Afghanistan, it's obviously the clearest case in terms of trying to dismantle and degrade al-Qaeda. But in other instances, and certainly in Pakistan, where I'm also involved, something like the CT effort is very much international interest for engagement. And so when we were able to put our bilateral relationship on firmer grounding last summer and restart some of these working level groups that we had had with Pakistan, the very first one that we had was on law enforcement and counterterrorism to talk about capacity building kind of things, to talk about specifics on counter ID proposals, legislation, and operationalization of some of these things. And then in terms of the capacity piece, again, as we have our draw-down in Afghanistan, we obviously have to be moving from the stabilization efforts that we had a few years ago to what is much more sustainable over time, and that is completely incumbent on what the capacity is that we are able to develop there.

Tom Bowman:

Okay, good. I probably have time for one more. Up here, sir.

Frank Oliveri:

Frank Oliveri from Congressional Quarterly. On Capitol Hill there's a very robust debate going on about the small footprint. There are inherent risks with small footprint.

Obviously Benghazi, we saw what happened there; the terrible loss of life. And I want to get a sense from you as to -- you know, if we weren't in this fiscal situation, would small footprint be a debate right now? Would it even be done? And I just want to know if it's driven more economically in our fiscal situation. And so if you could address that, I'd appreciate it. We hear this on the Hill quite a bit.

William McRaven:

Yeah, no, it's absolutely not driven by economics, at least not in my case. You know, small footprint where it is appropriate to have a small footprint. And, again, as Linda said, you know, Special Operations Forces are not a panacea for everything and there are times when a small footprint just won't be able to do the job. But I would contend, as we move forward, the time for a small footprint is a better strategic choice or probably growing, but it isn't a function of economics. The cost of applying a small footprint forward is pretty small, and my budget within the Department of Defense is pretty small. And even if we take some cuts, which I expect will happen, I think we'll still be able to provide this capability to the Secretary and to the President.

Tom Bowman:

Okay, we're out of time. Sorry. Thanks. Terrific questions. Thank the panel: Admiral McRaven, Congressman Harman, Linda and Dan. Thanks so much.

[applause]

And, Admiral, don't be a stranger.

[end of transcript]