

Voices from the Field Keynote Address: An Update from Afghanistan

Opening Remarks: Dr. John Nagl
President, Center for a New American Security

Keynote Speaker: Lieutenant General David M. Rodriguez, USA
Commander, International Security Assistance Force Joint Command &
Deputy Commander, U.S. Forces - Afghanistan

June 2, 2011
11:00 a.m. - 11:50 a.m.

Transcript provided by:
DC Transcription – www.dctmr.com

MR. JOHN NAGL: Ladies and gentlemen, the most important work in any conference tends to happen in between sessions and we appreciate that by that standard this conference is so very successful, but we are deeply honored to have with us today, at least in avatar form, Lieutenant General David Rodriguez as the keynote speaker of our fifth annual conference. General Rodriguez assumed command of the International Security Assistance Force Joint Command or IJC in October of 2009, and he's joining us today from Fort Lewis, Washington, where he's helping Lieutenant General Scaparrotti's I Corps get ready to assume operational responsibility for the mission in Afghanistan later this year.

Lieutenant General Rodriguez is a proud member of the famed West Point class of 1976, which has done so much to help in the war we're currently fighting. He's previously served as the military assistant to Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, and before that, as commander as the 82nd Airborne Division, the All-Americans, and as commander of Regional Command East in Afghanistan. He has previous combat experience in Iraq, in Desert Storm, and during Operation Just Cause.

He's going to address us on the subject of Afghanistan, 2011, an operational commander's perspective. And then, if the gods of the internet cooperate, he'll take questions. Over to you, sir.

LT. GEN. DAVID RODRIGUEZ: Good morning, everybody, and, John, thank you very much for that kind introduction and for the invitation to speak before this distinguished audience. I apologize for not being there in person. As you stated, currently, I'm in Washington State at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, conducting training to prepare I Corps and the Afghan – I'm sorry – the European Rapid Reaction Corps for their upcoming deployment to Afghanistan.

And my friend, Lieutenant General Scaparrotti, will take my place as the ISAF Joint Command this summer. And Scap and I have done this several times in the past at brigade command, division command, Regional Command East, so I feel sorry for him, but he keeps getting stuck with the mess that I leave. But I know he'll do a great job.

I also like to recognize members of the CNAS team. John, first of all, thanks for inviting me. You've been a practical, thoughtful observer and a commentator on this mission, and CNAS continues to provide a vital function under your leadership.

Nate Fick, I know you did several tours in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq with the marines and thanks to you also for your leadership. You clearly understand the challenges that we face in Afghanistan. (Laughter.)

Lieutenant General Retired Dave Barno, a classmate and a close friend, the first officer to stand up a coalition command in Afghanistan back in 2003, thank you for charting a course in Afghanistan that

has opened the door for many of those that followed, including myself. And Andrew Exum is a former Army Ranger who served in both Iraq and Afghanistan. You know the ground situation and what goes on there, and it's great you're here. And in short, the CNAS team is definitely Afghanistan-strong.

Okay, so this is how I intend for this talk to go this morning. I'll give you a short overview of the operational plan from now until 2014 and discuss in more detail where our – where we are currently in that plan. I'll tell you what I think is going well and what worries me. I'll end with a brief comment on what I think the future is with regard to transition, drawdown, and 2014 and beyond.

So first, what does the campaign look like? Well, our objectives remain the same – to deny al Qaeda sanctuary and prevent the Taliban from retaking Afghanistan. And by the way, the death of Osama bin Laden has not changed that mission. And we have not seen any effects of his death on the ground to date in Afghanistan. Next slide, please.

The unique foundation of this operational plan is threefold: a focus on key areas, a changed prioritization and sequencing of multiple lines of operation, and an approach that very much resembles the Clausewitzian trinity. With regard to the focus on critical terrain, that of population centers, commerce nodes and routes, that was a matter of necessity in operation that has never been lavishly resourced. I remind everyone that the peak of troop deployment and the peak cost of operations in Afghanistan was two-thirds of the troops employed in Iraq, and 100 – and two-thirds the cost of Iraq operations for a country 1.5 times the size of Iraq.

Now, the effect this focus has had on key terrain was that we are largely able to focus the majority of our coalition and international efforts where we need them and when we need them. And when we do this, our resources are sufficient. And I can't overemphasize what a big idea that's been to our efforts.

Now, since the peace operations decade of the 1990s, we have long talked about the importance of unity of effort, where there is no formal unity of command, and the progress in this regard has exceeded expectations. We have managed to guide the Afghan security forces to focus in the right places, and we have gained support of many of the civilian actors to direct their terrific people and programs where they need to hold key terrain that has been cleared.

Now, by making a big deal about key terrain, we have given everyone specifics to anchor on. And in this focus on key areas, we have made explicit the building block of this district. This is where the people see are governed, in action or not in action. Not all districts are important, as I have already said. And this does not imply that the province or Kabul are not important, but this is a rural insurgency. The challenges lie in the villages. And the first line of assistance for the villagers is the

district government.

Now, there are those who think we do too much when we focus on districts. But there is no real alternative for the reason I just said. Is this key terrain construct perfect? Well, of course not, but nothing ever is. Now, with regard to sequencing and prioritizing the lines of operations that the plan has made very, very explicit, as plans always intend to do, it has attempted to correct some of the challenges from the past, some practices that actually made the situation worse. As you know, we had incredible development going all over the place. And while more children were in school and more roads were built, the security situation declined.

Then we had more troops and resources and cleared areas much more effectively for about 60 days, only to have to clear them over and over again. Now, we're much better off. We spend the bulk of our military effort on degrading or destroying insurgent infrastructure to include the leadership. But we also ensured that the planning for local security and good governance begins early enough to be inserted and follow on as soon as the conditions allow.

Now, we have made real progress with our civilian counterparts, both in the Afghan government and the international community to sequence and synchronize these efforts. Next slide.

Finally, underpinning the execution of this plan is the recognition that absent a sweeping political settlement, the best chance of stabilizing Afghanistan is to mobilize the people to demand the fulfillment of their modest requirements.

Now, this is dependent on the connection of the good government to the reliable security forces and to the people. And when all three legs of that stool or of the trinity work together, from the bottom, with a little help from the top, we will squeeze out enough of the enemies of the Afghan people to build sufficient stability for Afghanistan in the future.

Now, you can see from the weight of the arrows on the chart that what the people need from Kabul is indeed minimal. There does need to be a small but reliable and steady flow of funding from national to local levels to fund operating costs and minimal basic services. What this also means in execution of the plan is that our young commanders out there on the ground have to make decisions every day about how to allocate their precious resources of time and effort. They must ensure the proper weighting between taking a fight to the enemy and strengthening communities by building the capacity and the connection of that good government to the reliable security forces and to the people. And this trinity results in a spiral of popular mobilization, and it works.

So how has the campaign unfolded? And how will it unfold? In a moment, I will highlight the gains we expect to achieve, and I will tell you that unequivocally, that where we have focused our efforts in

accordance with our plan, we have achieved progress every time.

So if you ask me if I'm hopeful that we can achieve sufficient security across the country, I am indeed. Now, of course, operational and tactical successes will take us only so far given the time constraints we believe we will be under. I'll talk about more of this later. I do believe that, given enough time, the tactical and the ground up approach will prevail, just as it did in our own country a couple of hundred years ago.

Now, these next three slides show you the expected results of executing the plan and in other words, extending the areas that should be stable by winter's end, 2014. And by 2014, we will have fully executed Operational Plan Omid, or Hope, in all the places that matter most.

Next slide.

Now, you can see where we want to be by spring of 2012. And it's important to understand what the spring brings to us, because it is after a violent season in the summer that leads through to fall, and then the wintertime where there's a huge opportunity to continue to build the Afghan capacity while the violence tapers off a little bit. And you could see there, what we want to do is really extend that area down in central Helmand River valley and Kandahar in the south and southwest, and over in the east, to continue to build the security zone outside Kabul to the east and to the south. Next slide. You can see in the next slide how that will expand over time, and it's expanding and connecting everywhere throughout the country, expanding more and more to more of the Afghan population and the production centers and commerce routes.

Next slide.

And you can see in 2014 how it really starts to expand to all the places that the Afghans and us believe will create enough stability to stabilize the entire country of Afghanistan. And it does not have to be everywhere, as you can see.

Now, you can see that we will fight longest in the east. And frankly, the east will be the toughest part of this tough neighborhood that will be Afghanistan for a long time. I won't go in detail on the plan to 2014 right now, as this is the purview of future commanders, and in fact could change, and as we are all fond of saying, the enemy has a vote. And nowhere is that more true than in Afghanistan, given the volatile region in which it resides.

Now – next slide – I will talk a little bit about where we are right now in Operation Omid. And by the way, lest the old saying that hope is not a method popped into some of your heads when I said that, the name of the plan was “hope,” and I assure you that the Afghans named the plan Omid not

because it is dependent on a lot of prayer and hope – although my experience is that that never hurts – but because the plan will result in greater hope in the heads and hearts of the Afghan people, hope for a better future that is more akin to what they observe happening in the rest of the world. And believe me; they do know what is going on outside the boundaries of Afghanistan.

Now, we started in the central Helmand River valley, number one on your map, because it was the nexus of the narcotics industry that fuels the insurgency and the insurgency's strongest hold.

Our Pakistani partners call this “Taliban central.” That was last year. And this year, after a very successful winter campaign, we see the central Helmand River valley near stable, with the insurgents' ability and capability drastically reduced, and pushed to small pockets on the edges of the central Helmand River valley and into the northern Helmand River valley.

Now, this year, our main effort is in Kandahar and its environs and connecting Kandahar and its environments to the central Helmand River valley, which is linked between one and two. Now, I'll talk about Arghandab as a fairly representative example of what is happening in and around Kandahar as well as in the central Helmand River valley.

Now, it's a district just outside of Kandahar City that has been a tough place since the first time the coalition went in and stayed. In July 2009, Arghandab was a Taliban stronghold, and people could not move around without fear. In early January, 2011, the district governor was killed. The district police chief was wounded by an IED, so that he couldn't continue to serve in his assignment. There were no government officials present except the district governor and a – (inaudible) – maker and the police were not present among the people. The district center was described by many as just a combat outpost, because all it did was defend itself.

Now, I was just there recently, and the change has been incredible. There are more than 16 government employees working with the new district governor. There's a new police chief whose police force is visible, present among the people and responsive to those people. And there's a local shura that represents the people and holds their government accountable to those people. And the locals, on a Friday afternoon, Afghan family time, are out and able to picnic in the Arghandab River valley, a significant change from 18 months ago.

Now, the activities that are occurring in Arghandab are examples of what are happening across the country where we are focusing our efforts. Now, Kabul City, number three on the map, home to one fifth of the Afghan population, is one of the safest places in Afghanistan. The Afghan security forces are in the lead for security throughout the city, proving that our Afghan security partners are up to the challenge of increasing not only quantity but quality.



Now, we're going – we are continuing to expand the Kabul security zone to both the east and the south. And in the east, we have seen gains in discrete areas in Jalalabad, out in Nangarhar – which is number four on the map – as well as in both Logar and Wardak, just south of Kabul City.

Now, the east contains the most difficult human and physical terrain. And as many of you know, J.C. Campbell just transferred authority for the region to Dan Allen of the 1st Cav Division. What J.C. was able to do and what Dan has already picked up on is truly incredible. Now, the Afghans have a saying that you can't carry two watermelons in one hand. And I believe that in RC East, not yet our main effort, we are attempting to do just that and the results are pretty remarkable. Still, we have a way to go in the east, and nowhere will the Afghan security forces be challenged more.

Next slide.

Now, up in the north, just last week we lost an influential Afghan leader, Regional Police Chief General Daud Daud, as well as the Takhar provincial chief of police and several coalition force members. Now these were friends of Minister Mohammed. He's shown in the picture on the screen. Our Regional Commander Major General Markus Kneip was wounded and is recovering back home in Germany and will return soon.

Now, we expect these kinds of attacks to continue. The Taliban cannot expect to regain territory. So right now they're attempting to degrade the trust the coalition and Afghans have in each other through insider attacks as well as to intimidate the people in hopes of making them believe that their government cannot protect them. But so far the partnership remains strong and, in many places, the people aren't buying the fact that the government cannot protect them.

In Regional Command North, the German team was back out very publicly meeting with General Wiesa (ph) and other Afghan security force leaderships two days after that horrific attack. And in Kandahar several weeks ago, after the same type of horrific attack, the very next day, after those simultaneous, multiple ineffective attacks occurred, the residents resumed their normal daily activity.

Next slide.

Now, our security activities in north have to date been focused on the Baghlan-Kunduz corridor, number five on your map. This area is a densely populated intersection that includes two main commerce routes, so we have focused our efforts on expanding a security area around that intersection and increasing the freedom of movement in that area.

Number six on the map is also very important because that's the last place to be completed on the



Ring Road, and as a result of Regional Command West's operation spring operations in the Bala Murghab area, we are making progress there. And we have made significant security gains in both the Badghis and the Faryab area that will allow this road to be completed in the future.

Herat, number seven on the map, is a bustling city, largely free from violent incidents and ready to initiate the transition process through Afghan leadership this summer.

Yes, there was an attack this past week. But the Afghan security forces did not allow the enemies to reach their intended target. And this is a trend that we are seeing more and more across the country: the increasing desire and ability of the police and army to take their own security challenges, rendering the insurgent attacks increasingly ineffective.

Now, last year or so the implementation of the plan demanded focus, synchronization, and a nuanced understanding of the required approach. And we have proven that where we, the coalition and the Afghans, work together we will make progress.

Next slide.

So where are we? While progress in achieving our objectives of making Afghanistan a place inhospitable to terrorists is indisputable, but it remains fragile and reversible. There is no doubt the Afghan security forces have grown in quantity and quality. Growth remains ahead of schedule with more than 284,000 Afghan security forces across the country. And since 2009, there's been a 50 percent increase in the number of Afghan security forces. And today in key areas across the country the vast majority of the Afghan Security Forces are partnered closely with ISAF. And there is no doubt they can and will fight. And their operational effectiveness in destroying the enemy and protecting their people grows daily.

Our partnership has given Afghan leaders like General Karimi, the chief of the general staff, pictured on the next slide, and his leaders at every level, and his units at every level, the courage to confidently use the skills they already had and to develop new ones.

Next slide.

That's General Karimi addressing some of his Afghan soldiers. And if you could see the look of confidence in those Afghan soldiers' eyes while he talks to them across the country, you couldn't help but be impressed. And I always am.

Next slide.

There is also no doubt that the government presence is expanding. Now, there's no doubt that Afghanistan contains the required elements of irreversible progress. Plenty of human capacity to meet the Afghan needs, an immense source of income from natural resources and regional transit. Afghan national security forces, they're all on track to assume the lead and largely the right government initiatives in place.

Now, I want to return for a moment to my first point on this subject. The single most encouraging factor throughout my time in Afghanistan has been the human capacity of the Afghan people. Their resiliency after more than 30 years of conflict is remarkable. Over the years I have met many inspiring leaders and people. They're tough and determined and have a sense of humor and graciousness to those who respect them. And I'm not ashamed to say that I generally like and respect many of the Afghan people. And while we are not there to make friends, it's heartening to believe that the most important resource any country, organization, or mission has, its people, is sound in a country to which we have devoted many of our most precious resources.

Next slide.

As is often the case, the greatest strengths can quickly turn to weaknesses and the resilience of the people morphs to a survival attitude that is not helpful. The people have formed habits to keep them alive in the face of terror, and this often means they won't stand against the small numbers of Taliban for whom they actually have very little affinity.

Now, there are other things that worry me. I'm concerned about a drawdown that is not totally aligned with growing Afghan capabilities, or is so rapid that the army and police make mistakes or temporarily leave gaps that while not critical in and of themselves, make the people's shaky confidence waver and their survival instincts rise to the forefront. Now, if this happens, the Taliban can regain their foothold among a fearful population. I'm also concerned about the support for the insurgency that continues to flow, mostly from the ungoverned spaces of Pakistan. The worse the problem becomes there, the stronger we have to build the Afghan national security forces and the communities that people live in. And this may take more time than we have.

Finally, I'm worried about the parochial interests of a minority of formal and informal leaders across Afghanistan. Whether they are representing their own families' accumulation of wealth, their own ethnic group, or an amorphous, ever-shifting combination of interests that forsake and alienate the Afghan citizen, this is not acceptable. And the Afghans, together with the coalition, have to start addressing these challenges more effectively.

The corollary to that is that we have not yet managed to strike the right balance between respecting Afghan sovereignty and demanding inherence to the non-negotiable responsibilities that accompany

that sovereignty. Essential among those responsibilities includes actions to stop the leaders who steal money, opportunity, and respect from the Afghan citizen. And in my mind, absolutely paramount is the demand that the Afghan government stop those formal and informal power brokers who are directly harming our troopers and through their support of the enemy who wields violence against us. If they don't stop them, we should do that through whatever means necessary.

Next slide.

Now, I'll talk briefly about the major – (inaudible) – movements the future brings. No answers, but a description of the things we are grappling with.

Transition, transition will be a conditions based progress, with one caveat, in that we will recognize that of course Afghan politics will sometimes trump facts on the ground from time to time. The Afghan leadership will have a need to balance across ethnic and power broker lines.

The first tranche has been selected, and these are the easy ones, the provinces and municipalities that have been in good shape for years. Transition in the tougher areas will involve the thinning out of coalition forces from secure areas to shift them to other areas or to redeploy.

And I started this talk with the importance of Operation Omid, and I'll come back to that to emphasize that we will not chase transition. There's no faster way to dilute our efforts that we've worked so hard to focus for this last several years and undo all that we have accomplished, just to chase transition. We're going to continue to execute a plan that the Afghans have developed with us and the natural outcome of that will be transition.

Now, the second tranche should be selected by the Afghan leadership in August. And it's on track, and I believe the plan to get the Afghans in the lead for security by 2014 is achievable.

Now, on drawdown, General Petraeus calls himself the four-star action officer for this critical issue. Therefore, I'm not at liberty to discuss detail, and also in part because they're not yet determined. But at my level, I am emphasizing to the field commanders that we have got to push our Afghan partners to start leading more and more. We have to start taking more risks in this regard and having more trust in them. We know that at the platoon and company level, the Afghans are largely capable of conducting operations with little assistance. So we'll thin out from the bottom up, focusing on building headquarters capacity and eventually leaving in place only the critical enablers such as medical evacuation, access to joint effects, and intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance assets.

And finally, 2014 and beyond – I spoke to you briefly about how I see the campaign unfolding from

now until 2014. Before 2014, however, we should have a strategic agreement in place that will offer assurance to both the Afghan people and the enemy.

Now, all the details need to be worked out, but it is critical that we transition our relationship from one of wartime, expedient footing, to one of normalization.

Next slide.

Now, this about wraps it up. I have not discussed reintegration or the Afghan local police program, both potential accelerants and a part of growing confidence on the part of the Afghan people.

And now I'm happy to take questions on these topics or others that you're interested in. Thank you for coming today, and thank you for your interest in Afghanistan.

MR. NAGL: Thank you, General Rodriguez. I'm going to take the liberty of asking the first question. And I'm going to pick up just where you left off. You described a classic clear, hold, build counterinsurgency strategy that's necessary but insufficient. Can you talk to the reconciliation and reintegration efforts that many people think are going to ultimately prove decisive?

LT. GEN. RODRIGUEZ: Yes, I'll really focus my answer on that on reintegration. And where we have had success and where the Afghan security forces and the Afghan government has continued to grow in their capacity to lead their nation, where the Afghan people have become mobilized because of improving security and improving government capacity, the Afghan people are ready to reintegrate, and the Afghan foot soldiers, who have been a big part of this insurgency, are ready to reintegrate and be part of those communities.

And that has occurred across the areas that we've been in successful in. And we're at just under 2,000 in a formal program and about the same number who are on the verge of entering that program. So as the success continues to grow in security and governance and development, that will happen more and more. As we continue to reintegrate more and more of these foot soldiers into their society, it's going to put a lot more pressure on the reconciliation efforts and also give us a better position from which to negotiate from.

Now, it's interesting that when – this was mentioned to President Karzai – he's convinced that if we can just reintegrate all the local people throughout the country, we won't have to be worried about reconciliation. But again, that's his opinion, and we'll have to see how that goes in the future. But it is a huge accelerant. It's started and is continuing to grow every month, and we believe that it will be a huge accelerant to building the momentum here. And we have to be able to do that based on the growing security and governance that keeps improving throughout the country.

Thank you.

MR. NAGL: Thank you, sir. Other questions? Could you please – right here, in the blue shirt – and could you please stand up, identify yourself?

Q: Sir, my name is Jake Diliberto. I was a Marine, served in 2001 with the 26th MEU and Iraq, 2003. General and everyone here, I thank you for your service. I'm a freelance pundit, and I spearhead a coalition called Veterans for Rethinking Afghanistan – so maybe a little bit different.

General, the question is, I was in Afghanistan a little bit ago, and I talked with Minister – (inaudible) – who's in charge of the Afghan Taliban reconciliation and reintegration program from the Afghan side, and he had said that he had yet not spoken with military commanders or State Department officials, which is critical for this. Have we made the appropriate steps, in your opinion, to connect with them, work with them, partner with the reintegration part from the Afghan side, not just from the military and insurgent side?

LT. GEN. RODRIGUEZ: In response to your question, the answer in the reintegration arena is absolutely yes. We work every single day with the Afghan reintegration leadership up in Kabul. We also work every day with our military partners and our Afghan security partners at the provincial level, where they have the provincial reintegration councils. And then we absolutely do that all the way up and down.

On the reintegration issue, I'm not in charge of that and the reconciliation effort. You'd have to ask the State Department and other political leadership who lead those efforts. But in the reintegration effort, absolutely. Thank you.

MR. NAGL: Sir, I'm going to pass on a question that has been tweeted to us.

Last year General Mike Flynn wrote a paper called "Fixing Intel" that was very critical of the intelligence system in country, in Afghanistan, in particular, the picture it presented of Afghan forces and of the Afghan people. He made a number of suggestions in that paper. Have any of those yet been implemented and are you seeing results from a different focus on intelligence?

LT. GEN. RODRIGUEZ: Absolutely I see great results that – in that area. We built the whole IJC around a organization called the Information Dominance Center that collects information across the broad spectrum of things that are important to a counterinsurgency – to a comprehensive counterinsurgency strategy and information needed to be able to adapt our plans and operations to the conditions on the ground. And the depth and breadth of what's understood and known in that

Information Dominance Center that supports all of our efforts is truly incredible. And I think that if we brought Mike Flynn back there and took a look at that, he would be astounded at the incredible difference that that situational understanding, one, provides us and, two, provides the Afghan leadership that enables a more effective use of the resources that we have.

Thank you.

MR. NAGL: I could also let this audience know that General Flynn is on the ground here in the States. He's doing a whole lot of efforts here to fix the intel system from this end.

Tom Lynch, please. Wait for the mike, Tom.

Q: Thanks, John. And thank you, General, for your service in Afghanistan and the incredible work over the last year. I'm Tom Lynch from National Defense University. I have a question going to your assessment of the enemy's vote this season. Indeed, the Taliban campaign that right now appears to be focusing on – as many writers have offered to us from inside Afghanistan – focusing on the confidence of the Afghan people in their security forces and in their police forces. Indeed, as you alluded to, since January there have been three prominent police chiefs killed by Afghan infiltrators. There, of course, have been infiltration attacks in the Ministry of Defense, the infiltration attack that was with school students, as well as a couple others on recruiting stations.

Indeed, this is a time honored tactic for insurgents. But I think there's a number of writers, a growing chorus of Afghan writers, that say this is undermining the coalition strategy because it's causing the Afghan people to question whether the Afghan security services can protect themselves, much less the Afghans.

What do you and your command see as the trajectory of this campaign by the Taliban? And how do you counter the perception that in fact the Taliban are succeeding because they're showing the Afghan security forces as too weak to protect themselves?

LT. GEN. RODRIGUEZ: Well, again, first of all, the – that's going to be the exact tact that the enemy takes because, again, they can't control and regain the control of the people that they had before. And they are going to continue to attack all the things that limit their ability to control the people, which is why they're going after the leaders, like you stated, why they're going after the Afghan national security forces, why they're going after the elders who are leading the communities to a better future. And we're going to have to all weather our way and lead our way through some tough challenges.

Now, the Afghan national security forces have done very, very well in many of those situations. And

in other situations, of course, they need to do better. But that's going to be what we all have to do together during this intimidation campaign and campaign of sensational attacks aimed at destroying those things that are helping the Afghan government better control their people.

Now on the – the other thing that's important about this is to actually watch and see what goes on where those attacks have occurred. And the real important part is, how fast or how far does that Afghan community return to a sense of normalcy? Thus far, that has continued to respond that way.

But we're going to have to really focus our efforts with our Afghan partners to prevent these horrific attacks from ever changing the confidence and trust that the Afghan people have increasingly grown in areas where we've focused.

Thank you.

MR. NAGL: Please, Sharon.

Q: Yes, Sharon Sloane, WILL Interactive. My question has to do with the way things are evolving and how things are going to be different going forward to 2014. What kinds of different skill sets or roles will the Afghan security forces be taking on, and if there are new responsibilities and skill sets needed, what kind of training do you envision taking place?

LT. GEN. RODRIGUEZ: Yes. Well, as we look forward, the skills that will take the longest for the Afghan national security forces to develop are the sophisticated command and control requirements, the ability to integrate intelligence through a broad range of intelligence systems, the ability to bring joint effects to support their efforts, the ability to provide logistical support while fighting, as well as medical evacuation.

Now, that is going to set the tone for what of our forces, one, remain longer to continue to coach and build that capacity, and also the efforts of the Afghan institutions to train those. So when you look at joint effects, it's a microcosm. I'll talk about indirect artillery fire and mortars and air delivered munitions.

Right now, they have initiated the training for the forward observers which complete the system so that they can call indirect fires. And again, it's just begun, so it'll take a couple of years to fully bring those capacities throughout Afghanistan. And then the JTACs, or the Joint Tactical Air Controllers, who will have to bring some air effects to them, has started, and that'll take a little longer from the forward observers. But those are the types of skill sets that will be needed in the future. And again, that's why and how we will thin out our forces. So we'll be taking away first the forces who are

directly in the fight, the infantry soldiers or the patrolmen in the police who are directly in a fight. We'll move those out first and keep the headquarters and the skill sets that I just discussed in those areas a little bit longer as we draw down and continue to build the capacity of the Afghan national security forces to properly secure their country.

Thank you.

MR. NAGL: I've got one last question, which also was tweeted to us. General, can you talk to whether and how the Taliban strategy has changed in the past year, and whether you think those changes are permanent or temporary and reversible?

LT. GEN. RODRIGUEZ: The Taliban strategy has changed for a couple of reasons. One is they no longer control the support bases and the populations, the main ones that they had the last years, both in the central Helmand River valley, Kandahar city, its environs, as well as many other examples. So they're coming in without the huge support that they had before.

They have adjusted their tactics, like was mentioned earlier, about focusing on things that are limiting their ability to control the Afghan people. And that as – those are the Afghan national security forces, the Afghan government, and the Afghan leadership that is now the focus of their targets. So they're – the way they're going to approach us this year is, just like we've said in the past and they have proven thus far, is they're going to go after sensational attacks. They're going to go after leadership. They're going to have to go after from the inside trying to break the trust and confidence between the Afghan national security forces and the partnered ISAF forces, and they're going to try to shake the trust and confidence that has been developing in the Afghan people.

MR. NAGL: Sir, we've going to let you get back to working with General Scaparotti and preparing his soldiers, the I Corps, for the responsibilities they're about to assume, and we're going to hand over from you to your West Point classmate, Dave Barno, who's going to talk a little bit more about the regional strategy. But before we go, on behalf of everybody here at the Center for a New American Security, and frankly, all of us here in the United States, we'd like to thank you and the men and women under your command for the sacrifices they're making on our behalf.

Thank you, sir, very much.

(Applause.)

LT. GEN. RODRIGUEZ: Thank you.