

INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY of WAR

Military Analysis and Education
for Civilian Leaders

SPEAKERS

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PRESENTATION

Afghanistan Review Conference Call
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Moderator Welcome to the December Afghanistan Review Conference call. At this time, all participants are in a listen-only mode. Later there will be an opportunity for questions and comments. Instructions will be given at that time.

I would now like to turn the conference over to our host, Megan Ortagus, Director of Communication at ISW.

M. Ortagus Hello. Thank you, Krista. Thank you, everyone, for joining the call today. As Krista said, my name is Megan Ortagus with the Institute for

the Study of War. We're going to keep this conference call to an hour and we're going to try to keep it on military time here, so I appreciate it when everyone has time for questions and answers that you please keep your questions brief.

In addition to having a conference call, we also have an interactive Web portion of this conference call. I hope you all got the e-mail. If not, if you're in front of your computer, please log on to www.accuconference.com. You're going to click "Join a Meeting" and you'll see that in the upper right-hand corner of the home page by the flag. Once you click "Join a Meeting," you're going to enter our participant conference call number and the participant code in order to see the PowerPoint presentation that we have for you today.

In addition to having our interactive conference call, we're going to have a presentation first by Carl Forsberg. Carl is an Afghanistan Scholar here at the Institute for the Study of War. If you have not had a chance to download it, I encourage you to go UnderstandingWar.org today and download his new report that was released this week. It's called *Counterinsurgency in Kandahar: Evaluating the 2010 Hamkari Campaign*. Carl was invited to Afghanistan in July 2010 to join a team conducting research for General Dave Petraeus following his assumption of command.

In addition to this report on Kandahar, Carl has also authored two prior reports, *The Taliban's Campaign for Kandahar* and *Politics and Power in Kandahar*. He has presented his findings in Congressional testimony at a weekly Pentagon forum and, of course, in the media.

For those members of the media and press on the call, please note that this call is on the record. We're happy to set up personal interviews with both of our presenters if you'd like to take some more time with them.

Our second presenter will be Jeffrey Dressler. Jeff is an Afghanistan Scholar as well here at ISW and his report, his new report on Helmand entitled, *Counterinsurgency in Helmand: Progress and Remaining Challenges*, will be released on Monday of next week, so I encourage everyone to keep an eye out for that and visit our Web site Monday or Tuesday of next week to download the report.

Jeff was also part of the team conducting research for General Petraeus in Afghanistan this summer. His prior report on Helmand is *Securing Helmand: Understanding and Responding to the Enemy*. He has drawn praise from the Marine Corp. intelligence community for his work on the Enemy Network in southern Afghanistan and in addition, he has been

invited to Camp Lejeune on several occasions to brief Marine battalions prior to their deployment to Afghanistan.

Jeff is also available for media interviews for those members of the press on the call, who would like to take more time with him after.

One last, final bit of shameless self-promotion: Dr. Kimberly Kagan, who is the President of the Institute for the Study of War, has an Op-Ed today. It's co-authored with her husband, Fred Kagan. It's in *The Washington Post*. Again, you can find that on the home page of our Web site or visit *The Washington Post* to read their Op-Ed on the Afghanistan review. It's a great read. I'm biased, obviously, but I think it's really important for everyone to take a look at that. It's a short Op-Ed, so you can get through it quickly.

I am going to turn the call over to Carl Forsberg, who is going to present his findings on Kandahar.

C. Forsberg

As Megan said, I'm Carl Forsberg and I'm talking about Kandahar this morning. The long and short of what's happening in Kandahar is the coalition has reversed momentum in Kandahar during the course of the last six months. To start with, the importance of Kandahar, it's true that some people say that the Taliban may have simply moved some of their

forces to other areas of the country after the operations in southern Afghanistan this summer. But I think the thing to note here is that there is some terrain, which is much more important than other terrain in Afghanistan. Kandahar has strategic value that is probably greater than that of any other provinces in the country.

Kandahar was the home of the Durrani Monarchy. It's the home of the Karzai family. It's, in many ways, the political and spiritual home of southern Afghanistan. Of course, it was also the home of the Taliban movement. Most of the Taliban senior leadership came from Kandahar and Kandahar was the de facto capital in the 1990s.

So the Taliban has made retaking Kandahar a chief objective and psychologically in Afghanistan, as long as the Karzai government can hold Kandahar it deals a significant blow to the Taliban's momentum and to their images of viable alternatives to the Afghan government. So Kandahar really is key.

The Taliban started their campaign to retake Kandahar; within a year or so after 2001, it began to reconstitute; and slowly increased their influence in the province. ISAF conducted a number of clearing operations, sweeping through some of the key terrain in Kandahar, but was never able to fundamentally dislodge the Taliban.

Now if you can go to the next slide: There are a few critical districts around Kandahar City. To the south and north of Kandahar, you've got desert and mountains, fairly barren terrain, but around Kandahar City itself, you have several very fertile districts. They're densely cultivated, large population centers. These are Arghandab, Zhari, Panjwai and Dand districts. These are the districts the Taliban targeted from 2003 to 2009. These are the districts in which they gradually rebuilt control. By 2009, they more or less controlled large parts of Arghandab, Zhari and Panjwai.

From these districts they ran very complex attack networks, had a very specific infrastructure, which included weapon stockpiles, safe houses, four to five bunkers, some of them very complex. They also ran homemade explosives production facilities and IED factories. They were able to infiltrate Kandahar City, control much of the population. They ran shadow ports through Kandahar, most of them based in Zhari, Panjwai and Arghandab. It became a very complex insurgency, which the coalition was unable to fundamentally weaken.

If you look at the maps, they're very telling to note the change in the coalition force presence from even the summer of 2010 to the fall of 2010. Kandahar was prioritized by the 2010 troop surge, which President Obama had authorized in December of last year. There were nearly two brigades'

worth of increased forces and these forces deployed to the critical districts around Kandahar City where the Taliban ran their networks and controlled much of the population.

If we go to the next slide, you'll see a layout of the operations ISAF conducted starting in June of 2010, which continued on through November. These operations were extremely deliberate and took advantage of the increased force presence on the ground to ensure that ISAF could target all of the Taliban's strong hold simultaneously and sequentially to prevent the Taliban from simply shifting resources and forces from one front to another.

If we go forward two slides, we'll see the Arghandab district. This is where the coalition's operations began. Arghandab was very important for the Taliban. It had some of the densest terrain. It's interesting, because in an area with mostly desert there are parts of Arghandab that look very much like jungle. The Taliban used these areas to run IED factories where they exported IEDs across the province and into Kandahar City. It was a critical element of their system.

It took ISAF some time to clear these areas, because the Taliban had built extremely sophisticated IED belts, defending their key positions. ISAF started operations at the end of July. By August, they had pinned the

Taliban in. Throughout August and September, they conducted a number of aerial assaults to seize key Taliban facilitation centers and IED factories. Then in early October, they breached the Taliban's defensive lines and occupied these villages. The Taliban resistance disappeared within the course of several weeks and coalition forces have now started building tactical infrastructure, have started winning the support of the population. The population has been willing to turn in IEDs and cooperate with the coalition and you've seen a dramatic shift in the course of several weeks in October from Taliban control to coalition control.

To go back one slide: We next have the Zhari and Panjwai districts.

These areas were similarly key to the Taliban's operations. The Zhari district was the home of Mullah Omar. They ran their court from these districts. Most of the leadership of the Taliban came from these districts and the Taliban movement started here in 1994.

Through the course of September and October, the coalition conducted a number of very deliberate operations to seize the most important of the enemies' command control nodes, their most important lines of communication and rat lines and to seize their weapons stockpile, some of which were very considerable. By the middle of October, the enemy resistance had collapsed in much of Zhari and they were down to a couple of villages, which they held on to through November.

In Panjwai, to the south, ISAF launched a number of aerial assaults into the last of the Taliban strongholds in mid-October. By the time ISAF forces moved into Panjwai, the Taliban's ability to conduct operations had really collapsed due to the pressure put on them in Arghandab and Zhari in the previous months. So by the end of October, by early November, coalition forces controlled what had formerly been the most critical terrain for the Taliban. This had severely weakened the enemy's system.

There was a very good article in yesterday's *New York Times* by Carlotta Gall that talked about the extent to which the Taliban had been demoralized. Everything that we've seen from Afghans in talking to Afghans in Kandahar suggests this really is the case; that there's been a huge psychological shift.

Afghans were extremely impressed by the commitment that coalition forces showed when they came in with a very heavy force presence. It was something that had never been seen before in Kandahar. The speed with which the Taliban's system collapsed made a deep impression. You have areas in Zhari where in the course of two weeks ISAF went from employing several dozen Afghans in cash-for-work programs to employing 4,000 to 6,000 Afghans. Many of whom had probably been insurgents at one point, but after the insurgency collapsed were very happy

to sort of go with whoever had momentum and that meant going with the coalition.

Coalition commanders have been very successful in having ... with the local population, which indicate the Taliban's psychological control of the people is waning. They've been getting more intelligence tips from the population as well.

The Taliban will no doubt try to reinfiltate Kandahar in 2011, but they'll have a very difficult time doing so. Their success in the province through 2009 was due to the complex infrastructure they had built and that has been denied to them at this point. The coalition is setting up bases in what used to be key Taliban commander control hubs, so the Taliban will find themselves in a significantly weakened position if they try to reinfiltate the area. For the first time as well, ISAF; that's the coalition; is committed to actually holding these areas and working with the local population to prevent enemy reinfiltration.

So there are several other themes that we could touch on in questions.

There is a question of the Afghan national security force effectiveness.

Kandahar has seen the largest deployment of Afghan security forces in the course of the nine-year war and this is a major step forward for the Afghan security forces. There are also some governance issues that remain in

Kandahar and that's a big question going forward; whether the coalition can address those. That would be something that I'd be happy to address in questions.

With that, I will turn it over to my colleague, Jeff Dressler, who will talk on the Helmand Province.

J. Dressler

Thank you for joining us today. My name is Jeffrey Dressler. Megan Ortagus discussed a little bit about my background. I'm focusing today's talk on the Helmand Province in particular. I just completed a study on the Helmand Province that will be out on Monday and it really assesses the coalition's progress in Helmand in particular since the summer of 2009 when ISAF initiated really comprehensive counterinsurge of the operations in the Helmand Province. I'll talk a little bit about that.

What is Helmand? I mean Helmand basically, prior to the summer of 2009, was a firmly entrenched enemy system from top to bottom, from the south border with Pakistan all of the way up to some of the northern districts in the Helmand Province. It is also really the center of the narcotics Taliban nexus in Afghanistan, which generates millions of dollars in revenue for the Taliban every year. It's also the place where ISAF has focused some of their initial efforts in Afghanistan, particularly the U.K., who assumed responsibility for Helmand in 2006.

The story of Helmand today is much different than it was in the spring of 2009. Today you have significant force increase in Helmand compared to the spring of 2009 when there were several thousand forces to today, where there are over 30,000 coalition forces, as well as the Afghan National Army and police and some Special Forces elements in the province. What they've been able to achieve really over the past 18 months is nothing short of remarkable.

My paper demonstrates some of the progress that has been made, which will be out on Monday again, but quite frankly, Helmand is unique in Afghanistan and the reason why in terms of the counterinsurgency effort is that it's really the first place that ISAF has executed the comprehensive, fully resourced, counterinsurgency operations. You can see sort of the troop increase if you look at this first slide that I have up here. It demonstrates the increase in forces from the spring of 2009 to today, which is the winter of 2010, the slide and the graph that you see on the right of the screen, a tremendous force increase.

The reason why this is significant, as I mentioned, not only is it the first place that they're in Afghanistan to have really fully resourced counterinsurgency operations, but it demonstrates that counterinsurgency

can be effective given the right inputs, which is what you see in Helmand.

I think it's pretty remarkable, again, what has been achieved.

Really, the story, the recent story of Helmand, the significance of the counterinsurge of the operations started in the summer of 2009 when the troops that President Barack Obama ordered in December arrived in Helmand, some 10,000 Marines actually, from the 2nd Marine Expeditionary Brigade led by Brigadier General Larry Nicholson, were sent to Helmand Province. Really, what they were tasked with doing is securing southern areas, areas of southern and central Helmand prior to the elections, the elections that were taking place. The population was going out to vote in August and they went in in early July.

You could argue about the significance of the population getting out to vote. Really, what the operations were able to do is they were able to try to sever the enemy system in southern and central Helmand, attempt to push the insurgency back, which, by that point was fully entrenched throughout southern and central Helmand, and bring some semblance of security to some of these key population centers in the Helmand Province. What you see now, a full 18 months later, is significant progress in many of those areas and I'll talk a little bit about that.

The uncertainty in Helmand is really hurting at this point. There have been a lot of statements recently by senior Marine commanders in Helmand talking about how the insurgency is financially strapped. They're not able to influence the population to the extent that they did back in the spring of 2009. They're increasingly being pushed to the periphery, both to the extreme south and the extreme north as Marines are continuing their push north.

I'll talk a little bit about sort of what is behind those efforts. But as I mentioned, the Operation Strike of the Sword began in July of 2009, going into the districts of Garmsir and Nāwa in southern and central Helmand to try to sever the enemy system that was operating really from south to north, infiltrating from the Pakistan border and resourcing the insurgency that was active, again, throughout the province. They were really dominating pretty much the entirety of the province, save for a few district centers, but they were able to operate with impunity and, in addition to that, facilitating their narcotics networks throughout the province.

So you had operations that began in the summer of 2009 and those continued all of the way until the winter of 2010. In February, Marines launched an operation in a district called Marjah, which is in central Helmand. The reason why that is significant is because Marjah represented really the stronghold for the Taliban in Helmand Province,

both for the narcotics elements, for the production of IEDs and weapons and helped resource the fight really to the south and to the north. It was really the central node of the insurgency in the Helmand Province. Quite frankly, it also affected progress in areas to the south and to the east where Marines had been operating since the summer of 2009.

So it was very important to disrupt and dismantle the Taliban's operations in the Marjah district, which is what the Marines did in February. It received a tremendous amount of attention. It was all over the news. It was a massive operation on behalf of the Marines. It was actually very slow going for a while, simply because of the nature of the terrain in Marjah; it's very lush, agricultural areas with canals crisscrossing about the district. It's very difficult to control, very difficult to maneuver, but what you see now, since February, you actually are starting to see the first signs of significant progress in Marjah. The State Department assesses that that is in fact the case and Major General Mills recently stated that essentially the hard fight in Marjah is now over. The insurgency has been routed. They've been able to keep the insurgency from reinfiltrating the district and so that's actually significant progress.

Right now, what you're seeing is Marine operations have been consolidated in southern and central Helmand. They're starting to build on the gains that have been achieved over the past 18 months, both in

security, in the establishment of effective district governance, with the help of a very effective provincial governor in Governor Mangal, who works very well with the coalition, is very supportive of his district governors.

The issue with Governor Mangal is more the fact that he is not an ally of President Karzai. President Karzai has not been tremendously supportive of Governor Mangal, primarily because he supports another individual, who was basically driven from his governorship by the British, by the U.K. efforts when they came into the province in 2006. I'll talk a little bit more about that.

If we go all of the way to the end of the slides, what you can see here is basically a graphic showing the enemy disposition in the province from the spring of 2009 all of the way up until time. What you see is actually significant progress. The enemy currently still maintains a sanctuary outside of the province in Balochistan, in Pakistan, Balochistan, but within the province, there's been significant progress. The southern portion of the province is no longer able to support operations, both in the south and the center and in the north.

It's been dismantled. It's been disrupted. The insurgency really cannot mount an effective counter offensive to try to destabilize the Marine's

efforts, both in security and in Afghan governance. They're very limited in terms of what they can actually do in terms of kinetic activity against the Marines, but also even really coming in at night and intimidating the population is having extremely limited effects and is not nearly as effectual as it was in March or shortly after the operations there.

What the Marines are now doing is they're starting to push north and you can see that the north is still a Taliban stronghold. They have safe haven up in some of the northern districts. There is a tremendous amount of kinetic activity. The Marines have essentially taken over for the U.K. in the northern regions of the province, who have basically drawn back and consolidated in some of the central districts where they're operating. The Marines have now taken over responsibility and so what they're finding is a tremendous fight up there. It's really, as I mentioned the last safe haven for the Taliban in Helmand Province.

This area up in northeastern Helmand, on the border with Kandahar, is part of the larger southern Afghanistan enemy system. It effects the security efforts that are ongoing in Kandahar Province, so it's very important to get after that, but it's also the center of the narcotics elements in Helmand Province that were driven from Marjah. So the Marines are basically pushing up north.

As I mentioned, they've taken over for the U.K. there and right now, they're essentially trying to push from Sangin District in the north up to Kajaki through Route 611 to try to get to the Kajaki dam to secure the dam. In the dam facility, some of the turbines that are operating there supply electricity for northern and central Helmand, but also for parts of Kandahar as well. So they're trying to get there so they can install a third turbine that was actually delivered a few years ago and they haven't been able to install it because they simply can't get the supplies there given the ... security situation on the road and so the Marines are currently trying to do that.

There are a few other issues though. Aside from the security situation that I mentioned has tremendously improved over the past 18 months, the Afghan National Security Forces in Helmand, operating in Helmand, have also improved significantly. The Army in particular has a relatively new corp, a 215th Corp that was stood up in the spring of 2010. They're actually having tremendous progress given where they were during some of the initial operations that they participated in in the summer of 2009 compared to where they're at today. The partnering is critical. The partnering has increased. The Marines are actively partnering on patrols and increasingly the Afghan National Army is able to actually take over responsibility for some areas in a few key districts, in Nāwa District in particular, which is in central Helmand, part of the 2009 Strike of the

Sword Operation. The Marines have essentially turned over control of the security situation in the central areas and some of the key patrol bases throughout the district and are moving to the perimeter in sort of an over watch role so that the Afghans can operate independently. That's been a significant improvement.

Also, the Marines have basically instituted their own training effort in Camp Leatherneck, which is their base in the Helmand Province. That's also been very significant. As you may know, the training of Afghan security forces is done on a national level, but the Marines have sort of taken it upon themselves to build capacity at the local levels as well, including recruiting and training and that's having a significant effect as well.

The Poppy Problem: Narcotics in Helmand are a significant issue. It's probably one of the areas where we haven't made as much progress as folks would like. It's a very difficult situation with many factors, but what I will say is that the effort to interdict narcotics in Helmand, which is basically going after traffickers, going after stockpiles, going after refineries has been tremendously successful. They've been able to uncover a tremendous amount of drugs, chemicals.

Increasingly what we're seeing is that this stuff is co-located with IEDs, with homemade explosives and so what that really represents is sort of a joining of the narcotics and the Taliban elements increasingly so over the last several years, but we're also seeing the Taliban really taking more control over the narcotics trade in the Helmand Province. They're involved in all aspects of the business now, from collection, encouraging farmers to grow, to processing and refining and then trafficking. It allows them to sort of maximize their profits.

There is also sort of an Alternative Livelihoods Project that has been under way for several years, essentially trying to get farmers to switch from illicit to licit crops. There have been some successes with that, but one of the things that concern me is that that program over the next year has been pegged to scale back. That's particularly problematic, number one, because the farmers are sort of reliant upon this to help them make the shift. They've been promised this and now it's being scaled back.

One of the things about moving from illicit to licit crops is that it really is a several year process. You can't expect that from one year to the next everything is going to be taken care of. They need support. They need materials, such as seeds and fertilizer. Previously the Food Zone Program in Helmand has provided that, but concerns about it being scaled back, I think really threatens to jeopardize some of the gains that have been made

on the counter narcotics and alternative livelihood front over the past several years.

One of the other things that I think is key, which my colleague, Carl, discussed in Kandahar is the governance issue. As I mentioned, Governor Mangal is a tremendously supportive governor. He's respected by the majority of the population. He's not a corrupt individual. He has taken a very proactive role in governance issues in Helmand Province, but there is another individual, who was formerly the governor of Helmand Province, who was removed after a cache of opium was discovered in his basement several years ago, who is still influential in the province. This individual ... is actually an ally of President Karzai. What I talk about in the paper, which will be out, again, on Monday, is sort of the links and the relationship between these individuals and that it continues today.

But the reason why this is problematic is because ... is negatively influencing developments in the Province. He wants to come back to power. President Karzai, thus far, as signaled at least in part that he is supportive of that and ..., along with some individuals, who are aligned with him, are negatively impacting the situation. They're not support of Governor Mangal. They have intervened on several occasions in district governance efforts that have helped to destabilize a few districts in particular. So this continues today.

I talk about this more thoroughly, obviously, in the paper, but I think it's an important thing to flag, because as much as the Marines make progress and the U.K. efforts make progress and the Afghan National Security Forces and we move forward on governance, reconstruction, development and counter narcotics I think the issue of negative influencers from the national and from the provincial level in Helmand could threaten to jeopardize some of the progress that has been made. So it's very important to address that in really the most effective way.

I'll just close with a recent study that was released by *The Washington Post*, ABC and BBC and from December 2009 the population really, I mean they were ... by some of the progress that was made, but the gains had not been solidified yet. Now we're starting to see that. The number of individuals in Helmand, who raised their security is good, it increased 14% since December of 2009 to 67% as of December 2010. Two-thirds of Helmand residents believe that Afghanistan is on the right track. Seventy-one percent describe their living conditions as good, which is also an increase of 27% since late last year. Of those surveyed, 59% give positive marks to the availability of jobs, which is, again, up 50% from last year, which is a tremendous increase.

Also, the public assessments of the availability of clean water and medical care, which is a significant concern, are sharply higher than last year and so that's sort of an indicator of how the population feels about this. Again, we can talk until we're blue in the face about progress of counterinsurgency operations, but ultimately, this is about the population and so I think that demonstrates that the population is supportive of what we're doing and some of the gains that we've seen there.

I will close with that. I'd be happy to take questions and I'll turn it back over to Megan.

M. Ortagus

Chris is going to offer a few instructions for those who would like to ask a question. If you could, whenever it's your turn, please say your name and the organization that you represent or your affiliation.

While everyone is taking the chance to line up in the queue to ask questions I'm going to take moderator's prerogative and ask you guys the first question. Really, this is for Jeff or Carl since I know, Carl, you're undertaking a new study on the north and, Jeff, you obviously have studied the east a lot. One of the complaints about the efforts in Helmand and Kandahar is, yes, we have seen demonstrable progress. The enemy really does seem to be beaten back in these provinces, but the argument is that they've moved on to places in the north and the east where they're

finding new safe zones, new places to hide out. Did the command expect this? Did they not? Should we be concerned? Should we not? How much of a problem is it?

C. Forsberg

Afghanistan is such a large country that inevitably you're not going to be able to do counterinsurgency across the entire country. So it is very much an issue of prioritizing certain areas, deciding what areas have strategic effects on the rest of the country. That's what we've done, particularly with Kandahar. There is some debate occasionally whether Helmand is quite as important as Kandahar. I think it has some importance, because it does tackle the entire enemy system across the south.

I think the biggest question we're asked is what areas are important or is the importance of the east, which does have some significance, especially because areas of it can be used. Jeff can address at a greater length areas that can be used to move into Kabul.

But the command certainly did expect that they weren't going to destroy the Taliban across the country within the space of several years. I think they expected that the Taliban would move to other areas. They went about prioritizing the south because of its strategic importance, because that's key to the Taliban's attempt to paint themselves as a legitimate

government. That is their heart land. If they're driven out of the south they are not a viable force going forward.

Of course, when you were talking about where the Taliban have gone to there's always the Pakistan question as well. It's true the Taliban are using Pakistan to reconstitute at this point and so that will be a consistent concern. But nevertheless, if you can make progress in Kandahar and the Taliban are relegated to being based in peripheral areas and in Pakistan it's hard to win an insurgency when you're based in a foreign country and you don't actually have a presence on the ground. So there are limits for the Taliban if they decide to go with the strategy of simply withdrawing to safe areas, "Let's run into Pakistan." Eventually they'll say it is a relevant force in Afghan politics.

J. Dressler

Yes. I think Carl makes some very good points. I would just add to that that of course, the insurgency can relocate, but the fundamental issue here is that southern Afghanistan was really their central location. It was their base. It was where they originated. But it's also really key to them in terms of support and in terms of their firmly entrenched support system and enemy network, which Carl certainly described in Kandahar. They no longer have that, so the impact on the enemy has been profound.

The command prioritized southern Afghanistan particularly for this very reason and what we see now is the enemy is increasingly being squeezed out of there and they're forced to relocate to other areas where there's not a tremendous ... population. It's not their typical base of support. Quite frankly, they're hurting because of it and so that's what you have to do in a situation where you have to prioritize areas because you don't have as many resources as you'd like. That's always going to be the case.

Afghanistan in particular presents tremendous challenges, both because of the size of the province and the complexity of the terrain, but southern Afghanistan was prioritized. From where we are now versus where we were throughout southern Afghanistan in the spring of 2009 has been tremendous, tremendous progress and the enemy is certainly feeling the effects of that.

M. Ortagus

Chris, I'll turn it over to you to let the first caller ask a question.

Moderator

Let's go with our first question in the queue. Caller, go ahead with your question, please.

T. Parker

I'm Tom Parker from OSD Policy. Can you comment a little more extensively on the quality of the Afghan Army units that you saw in Helmand and also in Kandahar and any comments on Raziq and his forces?

J. Dressler

I'll just touch on the Helmand ... briefly and then I'll let Carl tackle the Kandahar issue.

The quality of the ANA units has improved tremendously from where they were really in 2009. During the initial operations Strike of the Sword in July of 2009, General Nicholson did not have as many Afghan units as he would like. They were sort of cobbled together from various other corps. As I mentioned, the 215th corps is sort of a new creation. So what the Marines have tried to do is partner very closely with these units, monitor their progress and really sort of train them in the field rather than just the training that they receive in the military bases in Kabul and in Helmand. That's really where they're going to progress in terms of learning how to interact with the population and skills in patrolling and all of the other tasks that come along with being in the Afghan National Army. It has improved significantly. The partnering has increased.

In Operation Moshtarak in February of 2010, there were some problems with ANA performance in the field. Individuals refused to patrol. They refused to get out of their trucks where it was warm. They refused to help to supply some of their neighboring units that were operating in Marjah.

Since then I think there's been some significant progress. The Marines report that the ANA is really quite effectual compared to where they were. Now General Mills reports that they're able to execute small, independent operations, including operating in enemy controlled territory for days, even without coalition artillery or logistical support. Over the summer, in particular, they planned, they led and they supported their own operations in the central district of Nahri Sarraj, which is really something we haven't seen before.

So again, the close partnering, the training, the mentoring and as the corps mature I think you're going to see this continue. That's just a little bit of the Army in Helmand. I'll turn it over to Carl.

C. Forsberg

Well, to start with the Afghan National Army, in Kandahar you've got two brigades operating in Kandahar right now. One of the First Brigade, which is one of the more distinguished units in the ANA, it's been around for a number of years and performed with a fair amount of independence initiatives in Kandahar over the course of this year. The second unit is the Third Brigade of the 205th Corps of the ANA, which was a very recently generated corps, one of the products of the accelerated NTMA training process in Kabul, which has now really picked up the pace. But this unit is, I think, one of the interesting test cases on the effectiveness of this sort of more mass production, rapid training that's going on right now.

The initial reports from some of the units in this Brigade were somewhat negative in Kandahar, but frankly, very negative in areas. This is a unit where even the officer corps was more or less new. The NCO corps was new or hardly existed. The enlisted guys were all completely new.

The question is here, I think, not so much what the quality of the unit was when it first deployed to Kandahar, but whether it is improving. The coalition is committed to partnering throughout Afghanistan. Jeff touched on that. But partnering can serve as a more effective form of training than basic training far away from the battle fields in Kabul. If you look at the example of Iraq partnering with very new Iraqi security forces and the coalition was a very active way to build a strong Afghan Army.

So I think the critical test; we know the unit started off being extremely raw, not very effective. The critical test is whether operations in Kandahar will also improve the quality of the Afghan Army or whether there are some concerns that you had some ... significant attrition. That's slowed down recently because of some measures taken, but we'll have to look at what comes of these units as they become more effective.

Dr. Parker, you also touched on the question of Raziq. Abdul Raziq is technically the Commander of Afghan Border Police in the Spin Boldak

District, which is on the Pakistan-Kandahar border, but he's also a very prominent power broker. He runs his own significant tribal business networks, accused of narcotics involvement. He essentially runs Spin Boldak as his own independent system. He's an extremely controversial figure; his strongest units are those coming from his own tribe.

There are some tradeoffs in using him. The coalition has deployed him for multiple operations in the course of Hamkari. He brings a certain local knowledge to the fight. His unit is probably one of the most effective in the entire Afghan National Security Forces because of the sort of strong personal loyalty that comes from using a tribal militia. So it's been very effective in combat and very effective in securing the Spin Boldak District.

But there are tradeoffs, because there are also long-term problems with using figures like this. There's a broader question of who owns the government in Kandahar. Is it owned by a very small clique of power brokers, people like Ahmed Wali Karzai, whose name has also come up very frequently recently? Ahmed Wali Karzai and his allies, like Raziq, and this is one of the huge concerns in Kandahar is that the government is very exclusive. Most Afghans in Kandahar question the ..., question whether a government run by a small number of tribes and power brokers is really a legitimate government. Figures like Raziq have also been

accused of significant crimes in the past, which they've not been punished for. So there are these important tradeoffs. Ultimately, you do have to give in to the population. The government is more than just a collection of power brokers and militia commanders and so using Raziq does pose long-term challenges. I think ISAF will have to seriously address this question going forward.

Moderator Let's take our next question from the queue. Caller, go ahead with your question, please.

D. Erickson Dale Erickson from the Center for Complex Operations. I wonder if you could speak a little bit to moving away a little bit from the maneuver force and the kinetic aspect of the fight. Maybe speak a little bit to the level of integration by the maneuver forces, both Afghan and coalition with the development aspect of it, the district support framework and maybe even the village support operations on the soft side, the level of integration and effectiveness or non-effectiveness.

C. Forsberg Well, I can start with that, talking about what's occurred in Kandahar. In Kandahar, you have a pretty sophisticated civilian governance strategy actually, that was formed in consultation between the regional command south, ISAF headquarters and the regional civilian platform, which is a U.S. state department platform and then the Canadian-U.S. Provincial

Reconstruction Team. This was also done in consultation with Kandahar Governor Tooryalai Wesa.

The governance and development strategy was very much an integrated strategy that involved input from the military and the civilian ... and the ... government in Kandahar Province. The civilian surge has allowed the coalition to put a number of district support teams in the critical districts around Kandahar City, where we have small teams of U.S. civilians, who go and live with and mentor the district governor. That's an effective way to have some eyes on the ground at the district level when it comes to governance and development questions. Those teams are tied extremely closely to the military battalions in the districts. The integration is very good.

The military, of course, ends up doing a lot of the reconstruction because of its ... budget, because it has the boots on the ground, but those efforts have been very closely linked, not only with U.S. and Canadian civilians, but also with the Afghan government and the governor ultimately had an integral role in designing the civilian strategy in Kandahar.

You also asked about integration with the village stability operations being done by special forces. There are several of those in Kandahar. The very first Afghan local police programs was in the Arghandab District, where

they gathered together a group of village guardians selected by village elders, who would serve as a sort of informal defense force in some of the more stable areas of Arghandab. In the Arghandab District, that program worked very well and it's also been closely tied to the battle space owners, to the battalion that's there.

The battalion commanders are also getting involved in trying to win support from local villages. You have two programs. You have the Afghan local police, which is the Special Forces Program and the battalion commanders are also working on a program called Sons of ..., which forms community watch programs. So these efforts are very integrated.

You have some incidents here and there where you've got less integrated efforts. In northern Kandahar, for example, you have a small team in Kharkez District, which is really not tied in at all to that small Special Forces team, not very well tied into the rest of the effort, but that's a somewhat isolated incident. In central Kandahar, the level of cooperation has been extremely close between Special Forces, U.S. Army, the Canadian teams and civilian effort and the Afghan government.

J. Dressler

I'm going to talk a little bit about Helmand, to address your question, which is an excellent one. The integration is key. A lot of the Marines that I talk to in researching my paper talk about how at a district level the

partnering of the battalion commander and the district governor is extremely close and extremely important. They work very, very closely together to help.

In many cases you're standing up district governance where it really previously did not exist or at least not in an effectual way. So what you're doing is, Carl touched on district support teams; you have groups of individuals with various skills, from economics to governance to development, who come out and work with the district governor, help him recruit and train a staff, help pay the staff. But there's also another key element of district governance, which is community councils, which is really a selection of some of the influential figures in the district, tribal leaders and what not. These are the individuals that really consult with the district governance to help figure out what projects to tackle, how to spend the money, what the population really cares about and so it's the relationship between the community council and the district governor and his staff that is also key.

Actually, what we see in many cases, in many districts in Helmand where the Marines have been operating, really, for the past 18 months is that that is working very well. The Nāwa District is extremely advanced. Marjah you're seeing, after replacing the previous district governor you're seeing progress in Marjah on the governance front.

One of the challenges that the Marines talk about is local capacity, trying to identify capable civil servants. Just one of the issues with that is simply an issue of pay. If you have a literate ... in southern Afghanistan, he's going to work as an interpreter making, in some cases, as much as over \$2,000 per week, which is pretty significant. If you look at the district governor's salary, in some cases it's around \$80 a week, so that's a tremendous disparity. So what that means is really, the talented individuals, the ones who are literate, the ones who can communicate well, who know the area, are going to take the job as the interpreter and so the Marines, it's a significant challenge. They've tried to work on that with a civil service academy and some of these other things. That remains to be a challenge.

I'll just talk a little bit about the local police issue that Carl touched on. Marines do things a little bit differently in the Helmand Province. One issue I'll highlight in particular sort of demonstrates the success of these local defense initiatives. In Marjah District, in particular there is an individual, who is a former ... commander that basically stood up his own force in the village of Dutonel in Marjah. This individual has hundreds of locally recruited people, who have come to help police the village, to keep the Taliban out.

What you're seeing is a tremendous development push and reconstruction push in that village in particular, because these individuals have secured it and it's safe for the PRT, the Prevention and Reconstruction Team to go in and do these things. It's having such a tremendous effect that the other villages are now looking at this and trying to figure out how they can create their own force. Of course, the challenge with that is that you want to make sure that those individuals are not using their force to achieve their own ends, whether that's going to be invading a neighboring district or settling scores or even dominating the poppy trade.

So that's a thing that the Marines will have to keep a close eye on, but the fact is that what you now have is villagers standing up for district governance. They're keeping the Taliban out and it's been a tremendous force multiplier, particularly in Helmand Province.

M. Ortagus

Let's move on to our next question.

J. Doyle

This is John Doyle with the 4G WAR Blog. In the classified overview that we got to see yesterday of the Afghan report there are several mentions of sanctuaries across the border in Pakistan and the danger they pose to meeting the final goals of dismantling the insurgency and Al-Qaeda. I was surprised to see in your map that there is a sanctuary located across the border in Balochistan at it seems to be the borders of both,

Helmand and Kandahar Province. I had always been led to believe that most of these sanctuaries were in the Northwest Territories and the tribal areas much farther north and to the east. So my question is whose sanctuary is that? Is that Al-Qaeda or Taliban? Is it ... or Balochistan or does that even make a difference? Finally, how much of a threat is that sanctuary to what's going on in Helmand and Kandahar Provinces?

J. Dressler

I'll try to tackle that as best I can. I think it's an excellent point. I think it's really one of the first and foremost concerns going forward in Afghanistan. You're not wrong about the sanctuary issues in the Pakistan border, really, in the east in particular, where you have a sanctuary that is protected by elements within the Pakistan security establishment in north ..., focusing on some of the east and the southeastern areas of Afghanistan, but in the south, you do have sanctuary across the border. From what we've seen, the Pakistani Army and ... ability to deal with that has really not developed whether it's a question of will or capacity you can kind of take your pick. I think it's a little bit of both, but quite frankly, you have sanctuary across the border.

I'll just talk about Helmand Province in particular, because I think this is a very key issue. Across the border in Balochistan, there is a refugee camp there. There is a town on the border call Barham Chah that is really the key hub for Taliban infiltration into Helmand Province. The Marines are

increasingly trying to push out towards that ... from the Afghan side, but there's no complementary effort on the Pakistani side and so they do have the ability to recruit, train, facilitate homemade explosives and all of that from the Pakistani side of the border. Quite frankly, the Pakistani security forces have not done as much as they could with this issue. Now, whether or not that threatens to jeopardize all progress in Afghanistan or people say we can't win if we don't get at these sanctuaries, I don't know that I would go that far.

I think despite these sanctuaries in Helmand Province you're seeing significant progress and that's enduring progress. That's not something that can be undermined in a matter of weeks or months, so it is an issue. I think the biggest issue is in the east, in the southeast, as you mentioned, and the Pakistani Security Force's protection of those sanctuaries to really support their proxy forces in Afghanistan. I'm sure Carl can talk about that a little bit more and how that applies to Kandahar, but yes, you do have a sanctuary issue. It's a very negative influencer on security and progress. Quite frankly, I think it's something that we need to do a better job learning how to engage the Pakistanis on this through a variety of means.

C. Forsberg

Dale, there are similar Taliban commander control hubs just across the border in Kandahar. So it doesn't entirely show up on the map you have

in front of you, but across the border from Spin Boldak there's a town of ... on the Pakistani side, which is also a very important Taliban commander control node for the entirety of Kandahar Province.

To zoom out, I think if you look at Afghanistan, you could say there are three critical issues, which we're facing. One is the military question against the Taliban. The second is the governance issue. The Afghan government is weak. It does not have the support of the population and security forces at this point. They have some time before they're going to be ready to secure their country. The third issue is the Pakistan safe haven.

I think you could say that if the coalition solves two of the three problems that's probably enough. So even if the sanctuary remains in Pakistan, if you can solve the governance issue and defeat the enemy in Afghanistan itself that will prevent sanctuaries in Pakistan from being of any significance, but it's true that the sanctuaries in Pakistan do impose a higher standard to some extent on the coalition. If we do have to leave behind a government that can secure itself, that has popular support that has effective security forces, given that there always will be the risk of insurgent networks that can regenerate across the border.

M. Ortagus

Then on to our next one.

Lt. Bouchard

This is Lieutenant Bouchard. I'm with 3rd Brigade Tenth Mountain Division and based on the destruction of the Taliban network and safe havens in Kandahar Province specifically over the course of 2010 what do you think the enemy's most likely course of action is going to be in 2011? So if we had these networks and safe havens in Panjwai and Arghandab to influence what's going on in Kandahar City do you expect the Taliban to attempt to rebuild those networks or bypass it and focus specifically on Kandahar City? Do you think they're going to try to undermine Afghan forces in particular or go after civilians to retain that fear factor?

C. Forsberg

That's a great question, Lieutenant. They definitely will attempt to reinfiltate central Kandahar. There is very little doubt about that. It's key terrain for them. They need to do that to maintain their status. I think some lessons of what will happen, if you look back to previous places across northern Afghanistan where the Taliban were put out and then had to reinfiltate in the face of a large coalition presence that will probably serve as a decent template. Looking at what happened in Marjah over the summer, for example, might be useful.

The Taliban will avoid direct confrontations, especially at this point given that their attack networks have been dismantled. They will focus on intimidating the population. That's what we've seen in the past in places

where the Taliban face a very large, overwhelming coalition presence. That will involve things like assassinations. They continue their assassination campaign in Kandahar City. It's possible that the Taliban will try to use pockets of Kandahar City for sanctuary, given that they're still at the edge of the city where there's a smaller coalition presence. Their attempt will be to intimidate the population to the extent the top population will no longer be willing to communicate with the coalition.

If the Taliban can do that, it will help them maybe run a very low-grade IED campaign. That would be more difficult for them than it has been in the past to use an IED campaign, however. They'll probably place greater priority on the northern districts of Kandahar given that those areas have a smaller coalition force presence. The Milan District might be very important going forward, but I think it will mostly focus on a campaign to intimidate the population and to create the perception of, as much as they can, violence against the coalition, while not actually conducting the associated attacks they've conducted over the past several years. So it will be occasional, sporadic fire fights, occasional, sporadic IED attacks.

J. Dressler

Yes. I know Helmand is not your AO, but there are a couple of issues that I think I can highlight that have applicability really across provincial lines. Number one is the intimidation thing. I mean what we're seeing in Helmand is that the Taliban's intimidation attempts are really not paying

off for them anymore. It's fine when the population doesn't have anybody to turn to and there's no security. It's quite easy for the Taliban to intimidate the population.

What we're seeing as security increases and as Afghan governance increases on the district level and development and assistance comes in, the population does not respond well to Taliban intimidation. They don't like it and it really is not able to achieve its desired effect that the Taliban is trying to achieve, which, of course, is to prevent cooperation with ISAF and legitimate Afghan governments. So that's one thing. It wears thing.

In the Helmand Province, they simply will not be able to mount a sustained counter offense. They've been squeezed north. They really don't have anywhere to operate from in southern and central Helmand and as you know with military operations, you need to have a base of support. You need to be able to project force forward. They don't have that anymore and so they're getting pushed north and that's a bad thing for the enemy.

The other thing is that aside from intimidation they also look for things that they can exploit. Number one, which comes to mind immediately for Helmand Province, is the poppy trade. They come in and they'll encourage farmers to plant poppy. Then they'll offer protection to protect

their fields from Afghan eradication efforts. Then they'll actually pick up the poppy from the farm and pay the farmers for it at that point. So the poppy thing creates really an opportunity for the Taliban to expand their influence. So it's going to be very careful to watch that over the course of the coming year.

M. Ortagus

We have actually reached the end of our time on this conference call. If you had a question and you did not get an opportunity to ask it, please feel free to e-mail me and I'll get you in touch with either Jeff or Carl or both and try to get your question answered.

I'd like to thank Jeff and Carl for doing an excellent job. I think this presentation was really enlightening. Hopefully everyone on the call enjoyed it as much as I did.

Thank you for listening. We encourage you, again, to stay in touch with ISW. Please check out our Web site, UnderstandingWar.org. Thank you very much.

Moderator

Thank you. That will conclude our call for the day.