

UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS HISTORY DIVISION

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW - FIELD REPORT

Interviewee: Mills, Richard P MajGen

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(On May 2, 2011 Major General Richard Mills was interviewed by ISW President and Founder Dr. Kimberly Kagan at an event titled “Field Report: The Fight to Secure Helmand Province” co-sponsored by ISW and the Marine Corps Association and held at the Navy Memorial in Washington, DC. They discussed his time as commander of Afghanistan's Regional Command Southwest. A Q&A session followed in which the audience asked questions. The following is a transcript from audio captured by Marine Corps oral historian Rob Taglianetti and proofed via the videotaped presentation.)

Dr. Kagan: I actually would like to begin by having you talk a little bit about what Helmand was like at the beginning of your tenure; if perhaps you could remind us of the kind of province that you came into; the degree of enemy control, what the enemy was trying to do. I think it would be an important refresher when we get to the end of the discussion.

Mills: Sure. First of all, let me thank ISW for having this discussion this afternoon. I think it's important that we tell people what is happening over in Afghanistan. I also want to thank the Association very much for this invitation. Very important for the

support that you give the Marines out there on a daily basis. Thank you very much for what you do out there. Helmand Province -- and that's really the focus of my efforts for the past 12 months -- as you all know, sits in the southwest corner of Afghanistan. The Americans have a long tradition in Helmand, and we've benefitted from that tradition. The older Helmandis remember us very, very well. The Province is -- the major geographic feature in that Province is the Helmand River which runs from northeast down in the southwest. Up in the northeast corner is the Kajaki Dam built by the American tax dollars back in the '50's and '60's. That Dam produces some electrical power, but more importantly it services a very simple, but efficient irrigation system. Again, built by Americans in the '50's and '60's that turned the desert of Helmand into very much of a lush agricultural area. I say that because it sets the stage a little bit for some of our activities. In addition to growing world-class pomegranates and potatoes, tomatoes, all kinds of crops, it also produces the world's largest supply of heroine. It is an ideal place to grow poppy. That poppy is used by the insurgents to fuel him. That's his resource. That's what he funds himself on. Poppy is kind of the ideal crop for a farmer. It really is a farmer's dream. A guy shows up in the middle of the night in October, hands you a bag of seed, you throw it on the ground, it takes very little care, very little water, it's very weather resistant. In April, May it blooms, you harvest it. Another guy shows up in the middle of the night to take it off your hands and gives you a bag full of money. So it's a very, very important crop and one that we had to deal with. When we got to Helmand in the spring of 2010, we found a very, very resilient insurgency in progress. We found one that was well-manned, it was well-equipped, it was fighting hard, it was being well supplied through some very refined lines of supply

coming out of Pakistan and moving north into the Helmand Valley. It was an insurgency which had given up control of many of the district centers to the Marines on the ground already as the British Forces there. In fact, controlled most of the population, most of the road structures and most of the really key terrain throughout the Province. Most importantly, they still controlled the two major drug production areas; one in Marjah and one up in Sangin.

As I said before, used that fuel itself for its future combat operations. By the time we left a month or so ago, I think it was a much, much different environment there. Through a series of pretty rigorous battles all last summer and into the fall, I think that we took away the momentum of the enemy. One of the things that we did when we got there was kind of take a look at the situation on the ground and we felt it was in a stalemate. The Marines that had been there before us had done a great job. They had taken some key ground, but their numbers were small, relatively small. When you go back even a little bit further into the history of Helmand Province, the Brits were there first, again in relatively small numbers; and then the MEU's came in again relatively small numbers, so again, a pretty large insurgency. We felt we had to regain the momentum on the ground and that was our strategy throughout the year. We closed some bases, we thinned some forces down, developed some maneuvering capability and went after him in places where he felt himself very safe, very secure; where he'd go to refit, retrain, resupply himself. We took the fight to the enemy. I think what we saw on the battlefield was an enemy that was backpedalling, an enemy that had lost momentum and, in fact, there was some serious resource allocation problems because of his lack of ability to get to the drugs and his lack of ability to resupply himself. So a much changed insurgency by the time we

left, one that I think will counterattack, has to counterattack but himself is in a much weaker position than what we found it.

Dr. Kagan: Talking about the enemy in the central Helmand River Valley, you talk about the way in which our forces were thinned in order to generate combat power. Can you tell me why that is important and how it is that the additional troops that you had actually made it possible for you to change the momentum of the Taliban?

Mills: The enemy's strategy was to give ground in exchange for time as our surge forces arrived. So we were able to seize key locations within various parts of the Province. Then as we settled into our FOBs and our COPs, our forward operating bases, our combat outposts, he then came back and basically placed a minefield around your positions. He used IEDs as the enemy in World War II used minefields. He mines you and restricted your movement, and then began to trip you at the times and places of his choosing by being able to launch his forces against you, while you were still trying to work way through through rather sophisticated defensive minefields. By thinning out the forces, by closing some of the bases, we were then able to generate a maneuver force that got outside the wire and stayed outside the wire, and went to places where he previously felt himself pretty safe. He chose to take the battle to us and then be able to go home. He's an enemy that fights cyclically. He likes to fight for a couple of days, then take a couple of days off. He didn't like to stay constantly under pressure, either offensively or defensively. I'll give you an example. Probably the best example is Marjah. Probably some people in this room that have heard of the town of Marjah. In all honesty, in June when General (Stanley A.) McChrystal came out with his statement about Marjah being a bleeding ulcer, in fact, the battle had really dissolved into a stalemate. We felt the battle

of Marjah was not going to be won in the streets of Marjah.

But, in fact, it was going to be won in the neighboring towns. Places like Sistani to the west, Trek Nawa to the east, [Crazy Sadie?] to the north. Places where he was using his assembly areas to then move down into Marjah to attack us on his terms. When we took the battle into those spots, I believe that we changed the momentum of the attack and got him to backpedal. He is not an opponent that likes to be maneuvered against. He's an opponent that's terrified of supporting arms. He's terrified of helicopters and close air support. And when you're able to bring that to bear in places where he didn't want you to fight, we found it changed his way of thinking. So by moving the battle from places where he wanted to fight to where we wanted to fight and by maintaining constant pressure on him, we were able to disrupt him, I think, significantly. Again, in the wintertime.

Many people have heard of his cycle of fighting, if you will. He fights during in the summer and fall, and then he takes the winter off, and he's done this traditionally through the years. If you read some of the history, you can make an easy miscalculation that the drop off in kinetic activity during the winter is somehow victory by your side. In fact, his leadership goes to Pakistan to take some days in the sun to relax a little bit and his foot soldiers go back to their villages and back to their homes, again, to take a vacation, if you will. We made a determination in the fall that we would not give him that luxury, that we'd keep the pressure on him throughout the winter months. In a series of fairly aggressive movements up around the Sangin area and south against the border in Barham Chah, we kept pressure on his lines of supply, kept pressure on his forces as they really tried to move to find areas to rest and relax in. We had some significant gains against

him in that way and began to see some of his forces begin to crumble. As the supply lines were cut, we got excellent intelligence that showed us it was impacting him in the fighting holes. He was running out of money. He was running out of equipment, he was running out of ammunition. We saw that in things like him digging up old IEDs to attempt to reuse them on the battlefield. Things he would not have done had he had a warehouse full of them sitting somewhere. We saw him saving his expended ammunition in order to repack his rounds. Things like that showed that he was having supply difficulties. We had very good intel that showed his subordinate commanders were so selling personal equipment, such as cars in order to pay their troops. Again, something he would not have done had he had access to the resources that he had at one point in time. So I think the pressure on him, the constant pressure, and the ability to fight him on ground of our choosing had a significant impact on his success.

Dr. Kagan: You talk about the leadership of the Taliban, and I think it would be very helpful, particularly today with the tremendous news that we've gotten this morning for you to talk a little bit about what the Taliban is within Helmand Province. How does it work? How is it commanded? How is it controlled? You talked a little bit about how they fight, but if you could talk a little bit about why they fight, that would also help.

Mills: Well, it's essentially a localized insurgency. Essentially, in Helmand Province it's very localized. It's basically local boys fighting as recruited by a hard-core of guys who are getting their guidance out of Quetta and from the high command down there.

Essentially, at the strategic level, that is all outside the Province and really outside the country. Using a system of couriers and using rudimentary telephone systems, they pass their guidance to their fighting troops on the ground. At the regimental level, that's about

the highest level of command and control that you see actually operating within the Province. What we did was we used Special Forces which we had a fair amount of them within the Province, both the British Special Forces, the United States Special Forces both Army, SEALs, and also the MARSOC, the Marine Special Operations Command. We put them against his command and control system and the impact was devastating. My highest compliments go to both the intelligence agencies that found Bin Laden and to the SEALs that were the brave men that carried out that action this morning. They did absolutely magnificent. Absolutely magnificent. I think our Special Forces are the very, very best. Integrating intel systems and finding the target and surgically striking it, taking that target down with great impact. I think that on a smaller level they did that throughout the time that I was on the ground. They went after the enemy's command and control to a really devastating effect. If you were a battalion commander in Helmand Province for the insurgency, your life expectancy was extremely short, extremely short. When we got there he had an experienced leadership of pretty savvy guys that had been fighting for a number of years. Good leaders, good tacticians that could operate on the battlefield. By the time we left, that had been reduced. It was estimated to me at one point that the average battalion commander, for want of a better term in the insurgency, was about 35 years old. A fairly experienced veteran on the battlefield. A man who knew how to allocate resources, knew how to command and control and could inspire. By the time we left, that same age was about 23 because our Special Forces had targeted and eliminated from the battlefield those individuals. It had a devastating effect at the lower levels. It meant the promotion of younger, more inexperienced people and it really took away some of the real motivators, if you will, who could come up from Pakistan,

deliver a message, and inspire people around them.

But I'd say, generally, within Helmand Province the majority of insurgents we looked at were probably young men who were looking for a job and who were inspired sometimes young men in our lifetime or our country join the service by this romantic Taliban who strolls in the village at night in long, flowing robes and a big turban and big beard and has an AK-47 on his hip and a couple of bandoliers of ammunition around each shoulder; probably looked pretty romantic. We found during the summer and fall he didn't look so romantic when they were tossing his body in the back of a pickup truck to get rid of them. So I think in some ways, that was the kind of insurgency we faced. A hard-core insurgent middle, reinforced by an awful lot of young men who were out there fighting for a paycheck or fighting for the romantic appeal by doing something that would impress the people back home in the village. I can remember early on in my tour I met with the Mullahs who are the religious leaders of the Province. We sat down and had a long conversation. At the end of it, the senior Mullah pulled me aside and he said, "General, let me tell you about the Taliban." He said, "Of 100 percent Taliban, 70 percent of them are in there to make a paycheck and they're not very committed. And they will, when the fighting turns against them, simply disappear. They'll go back to their homes; they'll go back to their villages. They'll just kind of go back to their old way of life and put the rifle down and pick up a spade and go back out to the field." He said, "There's probably 20 percent that you're going to have to deal with in some formal way. You're going to have to reintegrate them. They have blood on their hands, they're in leadership roles; they're going to need to be dealt with in some formal process." He said, "Then there's 10 percent you're going to have to kill." He said, "Those guys are just simply incorrigible, they will

never change their ways, you have to eliminate them."

And I think right now, looking back, he had his numbers pretty good. I think if you look now at the reintegration efforts taking place in Helmand Province in Afghanistan, those numbers are playing out about what you think. Within Helmand Province there's two levels of reintegration which is the reabsorption of the insurgency, if you will, back into the community. The first is a very formal one set up by the government of Afghanistan, and it has a very formal structure to it. It involves kind of a formal surrender, if you will, of the member of the insurgency who will return to his village, formally surrender his weapon, be given some gifts formally in front of a crowd and he'll be reintegrated through a system of education and jobs. There is money that supports that program and there is structure that supports that program. And in Helmand, at least, we've had some success, but limited success in that way. But there's another structure set up in an informal basis really by the village elders and by the local leadership. That is, the young man who just simply comes home. And he, again, in public, usually with an elder, but in a much smaller, less formal ceremony surrenders his weapon and is given back a token in return, and then he just simply goes home. His family kind of guarantees his good conduct for the rest of the time that he's around. We had anecdotally significant numbers of those guys coming across. Again, they're simply worn out. They don't want to fight anymore and they are coming home. We've begun to see other breaks in that solid wall, if you will. Some of you may have heard of the Sangin security agreement that was reached late last year. I'll just give you a little background on that. Sangin, of course, is in northern Helmand Province. It's, again, a center of drug production and very important to the Taliban, both psychologically because it's really the last real piece of terrain that he

holds; and, I think, more importantly as a source of his money, it's very, very important to him. So he's fought very hard for Sangin. That's where 3rd Battalion 5th Marines fought all fall. That's where the 3rd Battalion 7th Marines, along with British Forces fought all last summer, and it's been a significant battle. But it's a battle that we're winning. There's no question in that at all. There is one particular tribe that controls all the terrain in that area. Sometime late last year around December, the elders of that tribe who are considered to be a hard-core insurgent organization decided they wanted to negotiate. And over a number of meetings with Governor Mangal in a very first informal and then rather formal method they negotiated a turnover, or at least a reintegration back into the government of Afghanistan. Late in December, I got back on the 1st of January I was asked to come do a formal meeting as a guarantor of the security agreement. I met with 15 elders from the tribe, and they gave us guarantees that we would be able to operate up in that area without being shot at, that they would get the out of area fighters and they would get the local Taliban to lay down their guns and come to the table. They also guaranteed us access to a road that was very important to us that led up to the Kajaki Dam and also guaranteed us they would identify IEDs to us and help us to remove those IEDs. That, in fact, worked out. In return, what we gave them was really very little. We demanded and received permission to patrol within their area. We demanded and received permission to search their compounds if the need arose, and in return offered them construction of the road that they wanted anyway, and the fact that we would then offer them further economic development a little bit later in the year. So all of that has worked out as a strategic level. Tactically there's still some shooting going on around Sangin. Some of the local boys are holding out. But at a strategic and operational level

since that road was cleared with no casualties. We have had people come out and show us where IEDs are. That, in fact, has worked out to our benefit. I think that could be the future.

Now that peace agreement came at some price. 3rd Battalion 5th Marines, 3rd Battalion 7th Marines, 40th Commando Brigade, savage battle up there all fall. I know right now body counts are not really politically acceptable, but we estimate we killed some 500 enemy soldiers up along that area. So it was not a light that suddenly came on one day and these guys decided, you know, "peace, love, and rock and roll" was the way to go. But instead it was a hard decision they made. When people ask me though about that, they say, "What's changed? Why is that agreement going to hold and others in the past have not?" I would offer up this. I believe in years past we had to tell the people of Helmand Province, "Trust us, things are going to get better. Things will get better." This year, I think we can point to significant tangible results on the ground that convinced the elders that things have gotten better. One of the things that Governor Mangal did I thought was really very useful was when he opened negotiations with them, they did so in Lashkar Gah, which is the capital because it was safer for them to come us. At the end of their first negotiation, he put them on a bus and took them on a bus tour, a windshield tour around Lashkar Gah and he showed them the school. He showed them the bazaar. He showed them the paved roads. He showed them the power that was on. He showed them what it was that peace and security could offer those people up there. And now when you go into many places, Nawa, Marjah, Garmsir, part of Geresk, parts of Nad Ali, you can show them tangible results of what security brings and you can show them the fact that the coalition forces are not there to stay, but instead are transitioning out and

leaving the security responsibilities to the Afghan people where they so properly belong. And there are some tangible results that we can show them. Things that people want. In our negotiations with the elders literally of every area, you ask them what they want after security and they tell you education. Because the Taliban denied them education.

Helmand Province, a million and a half people live there. Ten percent of the men can read and write. Less than one percent of the women can read and write. The education was just destroyed by the Taliban when he went there. One of my challenges was that we stood up a local police force in the Province. We needed 7500 young men that could read and write to the 3rd grade level to be a police officer. Could not find them. I had to recruit illiterates and then offer in their basic training a literacy program that would carry on to the first precinct house they went to that would eventually train them to a 3rd grade education. Absolutely hard to believe, but absolutely true. If you walk through the schools in Helmand Province today, 125,000 students; 20,000 girls, all of which would be unheard of a year or so ago. This has nothing to do with me, this is all about the progress made by a lot of hard working battalion commanders and Marines out in the field. There's an awful lot of good people that worked in the regional platform, PRT. They put a lot of effort into it. Out of 125,000 students in a school system that is working fairly well; women being educated. Great example, how important this is to the families. In Garmsir which is a relatively benign area now. Several months ago on a Sunday night, insurgents came into town and burned one of the schools down, burned it to the ground. They burn schools, we build them. They burned the school to the ground. We didn't even get the word on that, but the next morning at one of our outposts a group of parents arrived, knocked on the front gate, they asked if they could borrow some tentage. We

gave them the tents. They themselves hauled it down to the schools grounds, embers of this fire were still burning, still smoking of the school that had burned down. They erected the tentage, the school started by 12 o'clock the same day. When you have parents who are investing their children into a system in which the insurgents told them, "If you send your kids to school, we will kill you. If you send them to school, we'll kill them. We'll kill the teachers that teach them." When you have parents making the investment sending their children into that, there is a trust level there and there's a metric there, I think, which is hard to measure, but it's very, very important. It's the people buying into it. I am not a particular believer in surveys. You can certainly find surveys to tell whatever you want, but there was a survey done the end of last year, the people of Helmand Province; and it was not a U.S. Marine survey by any stretch of the imagination, nor was it a coalition force survey. An outside, independent survey in which they talked to the people of Helmand and said, "What is it that you want?" and where a year ago their number one concern was security. Number one concern. Almost 100 percent of them said security. We have to secure it. Now 80 percent said education. We want education and that, to me, again, tells a lot about the way things have changed over the years. A few other just quick examples, again, to show you the progress being made there, is freedom of movement. We were charged with providing freedom of movement within the Province. We divided it in half, so there's two aspects in freedom of movement. First one is traditionally what everyone thinks of, being able to drive around and travel around wherever you want. We worked very hard at doing that, and I'm happy to say to you that in December, Governor Mangal issued an order to the people who worked for the provincial government, they would no longer fly in Marine Corps

helicopters from point A to point B, that they would drive throughout the Province. Something they could not have done a year ago. It would have been suicide. The second piece that we worked at very tough was to have the movement of ideas. Both the freedom of movement of people and goods which is important, but also the freedom of movement of ideas. We worked at that through the education process, through the provision of cell tower coverage so that people could talk 24/7 on the very important cell phones that they have. And that capability of being listening to the radio and get the information in a clear, concise manner. One of the examples I tell about. The radio in a box become very valuable to us. It was Afghan run radio. We funded it, we helped them erect it. But we turned it over to the Afghans working for us, who provided public affairs announcements, news, entertainment, and religious instruction and religious prayer. All of it over the radio. Very, very popular. And, again, I met with the Mullahs one time and we had about an hour a day when they could provide prayer over the radio. And the Mullahs came to me and said, "Well, that wasn't enough time." They wanted more prayer, they thought it was more important, people wanted it probably 24 hours a day would be the preferred show time. So I told them, "Hey, I'll check into it." So we developed a survey sheet. It had 15 different categories on it, everything from popular music to soap operas to news to gardening advice, and we had prayer in there. We gave it to our patrols, they took it out on their patrol routes, they queried the people they met, "What do you want to hear on the radio?" The results came back to me. There were 15 different selections. Prayer came in 15th. So I had to have another lunch with the Mullahs because I had bad news to tell them and explain that probably the mix was about where we wanted it. But, again, all of those to me are indicators that the people had

begun to accept the security situation as it is, and began to look at other facets of their life as being important. And the security situation has improved. The Afghan police on the ground. A much, much more effective organization than what it was a year ago. You know, a year ago in Marjah, for instance, when I first met them in June and talked to the local Mullahs and the local leaders, I asked them, "What about a police force?" And their answer to me was, "Never. We don't want local police. Local police are simply uniformed thugs, shakedown artists, and pigs. We do not want them. You can keep the Afghan Army here, they're okay, but we don't want local police." Well, we worked with them, we talked to them a little bit, we brought in some veterans from other parts of the Province who were veteran police officers, put them to work and pretty soon the tide began to turn. Before we knew it, we had six young men volunteer to become local police officers. We put them through our training package, a package that stresses both police skills, but probably more importantly literacy and ethos of a "protect and serve" nature as opposed to the ethos of grab all you can get that they had before. As I left Afghanistan, we had 200 plus policemen on duty in Marjah. Five different precincts have them, and some 120 of those were local boys. So all of that adds up, I think, to a much improved security situation. With success on the battlefield, an insurgency that has been reduced in capability and scope, and a local security aspect that has arisen in their ability to deal with that insurgent. The last point -- I rambled on here a bit. My last point will be that the Afghan Army, the ANA. Very, very important about their capability as well. Partnered with at every level with coalition forces, everything from my partner who is a two-star Afghan general, down to the corporal level on the ground where you have squads working with Afghan squads. All of it partnered and the results are beginning to

show. The 215th Corps which is the Afghan unit that we worked with has about 12,000 soldiers in it. They put about 8,000 on the battlefield on a daily basis. They have a leave and liberty rotation that they use. They have three brigades, all of whom are capable of conducting semi-independent operations. We support them with such things as close air support, some communications capability and MEDEVAC; but they have their own supporting arms, they fire their own artillery. They have heavy weapons up to the range of 50 caliber machine guns and they have shown a real aggressiveness to go after the enemy. They like to fight. There is no question about that. They like to get out there and tangle with them. They're like soldiers and Marines the world over. When we first put them together, most of them are northern Afghans. They come from places around Kabul and north of that. They expect to be home on a regular basis. When they weren't, we had a UA rate, an unauthorized absence rate, of about 20 percent. About 20 percent of them started disappearing. Now we got our mentors down there, our team leaders, our sergeants down there working with them, and, you know, you find out why does the Afghan soldier disappear off the battlefield. For the same reason a Marine disappears from Camp Pendleton or Camp Lejeune; he's not getting paid. What we found out is as amazing as it seems, the Afghan armed forces are paid electronically. They're not given cash like I was when I was a second lieutenant. They, in fact, are paid electronically by electronic transfer. And although they are illiterate, each Afghan soldier will hold a little plastic card, a little money card and he uses that to move money around. And so it's very important for him to be able to transfer money from his government account to his personal account so his family back home has access to it. There was no way for him to do that in Helmand Province. So he was going to go home to go take care of his family.

Kind of got to respect the guy that does that, but anticipate that's why he's doing it. So we worked with the Bank of Kabul, we worked with the [Aziz?] Bank over there and we were able to get facilities set up on the major Afghan bases, so that soldier can insert his card, hit the magic numbers and transfer money back home to his wife or family that he was supporting. Very simple solution, and one that every military man in this room would look at and go, "Yeah, no kidding." But, yet, something that we had to do. The second thing was they expected to go home on leave. The Afghan Army kind of operates in cycles. They want to go home for several weeks, perhaps a month, and then they want to come back, then they go through a training package, then they go back out to the battlefield. What they're used to and what they want to do, but there was no organized leave and liberty package, if you will. The officers were all getting leave, they were going home on a regular basis. The senior staff NCOs were getting home on a regular basis, but the troops were not. Again, working through our mentorship teams we got that corrected to where now the Afghan Army contracts its own aircraft, they fly the soldiers home on a regular leave opportunity and the result was, "Gee, no kidding." The unauthorized absence rate dropped from over 20 percent to about 9 percent. Still got a ways to go, but much, much, much improved. And for what? Just basic leadership techniques that any sergeant in the U.S. Marine Corps or the U.S. Army would quickly recognize as being the cause of their dissatisfaction. So, again, as you see that capability in them rise, you see them being treated -- again, I'll add one more thing. The one thing I was very concerned about being a veteran of Anbar Province was what kind of support was coming from Kabul. Was the national government supporting those security forces and supporting the other people who worked for the government down at the provincial

level. So we did a survey every payday to see whether every soldier was getting paid, and they were. We did a survey every payday to see whether the police officers were getting paid, and they were. We did a survey every payday to see whether the teachers were getting paid. There it was a little more spotty, but, again, by drawing it to someone's attention, you can correct that problem. We felt that applied to the corruption problem, it applied to the unauthorized absence problem, and it applied to that attraction to become a school teacher and benefit in the future population of Afghanistan. And so, I'll turn it over to your next question, but the picture I'm trying to paint, and certainly people have accused me of being too rosy; perhaps I am. I mean, there is still danger in Helmand Province. There are still pockets of resistance in Helmand Province. I anticipate a savage counterattack this spring. But I think when you look at the lines on the chart, when you look at the progress being made, that given the timeline that's been given, I think that General Patraeus' strategy is extraordinarily effective, and I think in the long run will pay off.

Dr. Kagan: I thank you for the incredible overview of Helmand. It is really extraordinary to think about a place that was enemy owned and operated in 2009, being a place that is government operated, at least in the central areas of the Province and increasingly so toward the fringes more. It's really quite an extraordinary change and an extraordinary story. All the more important, I think, because Helmand has been such a safe area for the Taliban to live in, to flourish in, and such a good area for him to fight us in back in the old days. And so, as we look at the kinds of changes that we see, we're really watching the enemy being pushed to the north and marginalized within the main River Valley and it's really quite a startling accomplishment and quite a startling change

that you described well. I, for one, am incredibly impressed at the changes that are underway. But rather than having me ask a question, I think it would be a tremendous opportunity for us to go to our audience and make sure that they get to ask what they find important. I would actually ask that we start with members of the press, and I have a little bit of a challenge in that there are lights in my face, but Yochi can go ahead. You're going to be first. A microphone is coming your way.

Q. Hi, General. Welcome back.

Mills: Thank you.

Q. Just wanted to ask you. The news of the death of Osama bin Laden obviously removes what had been for a long time the primary stated motivation for the reason that we're at war in Afghanistan. Do you think that substantively it removes a reason for the war, and do you think that as a result of his death, the momentum to withdraw more troops this summer than may have been planned will begin to pick up steam?

Mills: I think it will be more symbolic in many ways than having an actual impact on the battlefield. I think his organization still has some impact there, but I think his death itself, while it will be a huge psychological blow to leadership of the insurgency, may not have the huge benefit on the battlefield that perhaps we had anticipated. I think what it shows to the enemy is that we don't quit and we don't stop, and that whatever he may think about timelines and deadlines and this and that, whatever discussions he may hear about we're getting tired of the war; the fact is, if you're on the list, we're going to come visit you. And I think that in many ways that will have a huge psychological impact on people like Mullah Omar and other members of the leadership to understand that the Americans do not forget. The Americans are not going away, and we don't necessarily

have to be stationed next door to you to have an impact on your life. So I think it will have an impact. I think that perhaps it will be less dramatic in the short term than maybe what we think, but I think long term at the strategic level, I think the impact it will have upon the leadership of the Taliban, I think will be significant.

Dr. Kagan: General, just a follow up on that. There are some who would say, "Well, if, in fact, it is possible to kill or capture a significant insurgent or terrorist such as Osama bin Laden, then, in fact, we don't need ground forces in Afghanistan in large number." How would you respond to them? Is this some insurgency or a terrorist movement that can be significantly damped by the Special Forces raids that you described earlier in the talk?

Mills: I think it's a combination. It has to be a combination of all your forces. I think the Special Forces have a tremendous role to play, both in the elimination of key leaders and key nodes within the insurgency. But I think that you need the conventional forces still to occupy and hold certain key terrain. You need conventional forces to work with the indigenous forces to train them, to raise their capabilities up so they ultimately can handle their internal security on their own. And I think the presence of ground forces indicates the importance of what we're doing to the rest of the world. When you commit American ground forces, I think there's a statement there and it means something to the rest of the world. I think it gives heart to our allies. I think it puts fear in the heart of our enemies, and I think that ultimately that the presence of ground forces in a very robust insurgency such as you saw in Helmand Province was critical. I'm not sure Special Forces -- I believe when we got there I think things were a little bit out of balance, if you will. I think that you had the conventional forces focused very heavily on the civilian

population and doing those kind of development projects that are necessary, but can't be your complete focus. I think that one of the things we tried to do was to bring that balance back into a better relationship. You can't forget the enemy. If you take your eyes off of him, he'll dictate the action. He gets a vote and he has incredible ability to influence what's going on, obviously. And so you have to use those conventional forces to keep pressure on him allow those indigenous forces to raise their capabilities; that, then, is your ticket to get out.

Dr. Kagan: Any more questions? Please.

Q. I just wanted to see if you could discuss what the Marines that are there now after your departure are looking at in the coming year in terms of, you said they can expect a savage counterattack this spring. It's spring now, and I wondered if you could discuss what they might be up against in the coming year.

Mills: Well, I would say this. I think that he has to counterattack. I think that he can't give up the things that he's given up which are really that resource base that he so desperately needs. He grows his defense budget out of the ground in Helmand Province. That's where he gets his money from. The drugs are incredibly important to him. He taxes the growers, he turns that into cash, and that's what he turns into his troops on the ground and his ability to arm them and to resupply them. Like any commander, he's faced with a significant resource shortage. We estimated that we cut his operating budget in half when we were there, just in the fact that we could interdict enough of the drugs flowing out of the country, hundreds of tons. So I believe that he's got to make some kind of a move to get back, and I think that he tried to fight an offensive fight a few years ago, and he lost. He tried a defensive battle last year, he lost. Not a single engagement

did he win. He lost every place he tried to defend, from Marjah, to Safar Bazaar, to Khanashin, to Sangin. Everywhere he dug in and said we couldn't come, we walked over him, and I don't believe that he can afford to give that all up. He's got to come back. The key will be how does he come back. That's kind of what we have to lean into. I don't want to get into a lot of detail on that, but I think we are well positioned to counter what we think will be an indirect approach to get back in there. I think he's going to use other means. I don't foresee a Tet, but I do think that he will try to use what he has left to regain the momentum. He has to. If he doesn't, I think he's in serious trouble.

Q. Do you think there are enough Marines on the ground? Do there need to be more Marines on the ground, or will they do fine with what they have, or will they need fewer Marines?

Mills: Enough Marines is usually more than one.

Q. Of course.

[Laughter in the room.]

Mills: I felt that I was able to accomplish my assigned tasks with the forces I had at my disposal. Marines are Marines and foot soldiers and are a resource like anything else, they have to be allocated. Let me say this, every time I asked for something, I was given it, immediately. When I felt there was a need to bring battle tanks into the battle, I asked, and I immediately received the battle tanks that I asked for. They were flown into me, and they were on the battlefield literally within weeks of my request being made. I could go right down the line. Everything from IED dogs to more drones. If I asked for it, it was provided to me. So I think right now if you look, we even had a reinforcement sent in. The 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit, second best MEU in the Marine Corps. General

[Healy?] is going to come out of the stands here in a second. But they were committed to the ground when I asked for them. Again, so when you asked for it, you got it, and so I can't complain about anything. I was not denied anything.

Q. General, Tim Basher, I'm going to Zabul as the senior civilian rep in a few short weeks. Hello, Rich. How are you doing?

Mills: Good to see you again. Tim and I were platoon commanders together in 1st Battalion 5th Marines back when they issued muskets and tri-cornered hats.

[Laughter in the room.]

Q. Rich, can you tell me how you separated conventional security operations from Rule of Law policing style operations? Where did you make that break? How did you do that?

Mills: That's a really good question and there is a very fine line between when you need police who are basically paramilitary, Carabinieri, if you will, who can conduct military operations under the guise of policing and then those police who are then doing local protect and serve conventional. That is a very, very difficult call. One of the advantages I had was, I was given access to the national police force, called the ANCOP which are Carabinieri, for want of a better term. They are provided in units that you can move around the battle space and put into Marjah initially, then up to Sangin and they provide you with kind of an MP on steroids capability. So they were kind of my initial step in getting police on the ground. Then it was really more of a gut-feel, as to when you transitioned into a police role of doing protect and serve. Again, I hate to keep using Marjah as my example, but outside our main base in Marjah, near the main bazaar there's a particular crossroads and last June and July, you cross that road, you did so at your own

peril. You certainly took fire, I mean, there was no question about it. RPGs, small arms, whatever it was, it was a constant fight along that strip into the main bazaar for supremacy. Last time I was there right before I came home I walked through the crossroads, there was a police officer standing in the middle directing traffic because of the amount of foot traffic and vehicle traffic going into the main bazaar. So I cut against -- because I was kind of in a rush, so I cut against the traffic to go downtown. He blew his whistle and came over to see me. And he was going to cite me for jaywalking. I kind of showed him that, this is who I am. It didn't cut the mustard, he didn't see the import of that one bit. So I got ticketed and, as a matter of fact, I think Colonel [Lenning?] there is laughing. I think we have to fly back next month to pay our traffic ticket for cutting across the road. I felt like I was in Myrtle Beach on spring break, waiting for the handcuffs.

Dr. Kagan: General, can we get those in Kabul?

Mills: So, again, I don't want to make light of it, it's a great question. What it is really is, is that's really when you need that battlefield feel. What progress has been made and what's the stability. You go there, no question Garmsir, places in Gereshk, they have police in progress and you don't see a whole lot of uniforms. We had a couple of events where the Afghans held all their own security. We had the election in September that the insurgents told us could never go. We opened up all our precinct stations at 10:30 in the morning and we closed them all at 10 o'clock exactly. Not one was interdicted. All of that protection was done by Afghan security. Police inner ring, Army in outer ring. We stayed in our bases in a QRF, quick reaction force, capability. That went down with no incidents.

We had two concerts. The Afghan "Elvis" came to town and he presented a concert in the soccer stadium, if you will, in Lashkar Gah where the Taliban used to carry out its punishments. We had Elvis show up and put on a real professional show; 10,000 people arrived and attended and had a great time. All of the security for that provided by the Afghans themselves. Nothing at all by us. Right before I left we had the female "Elvis" show up and quite a risqué show. At one point she removed the headscarf and the crowd went wild. I've got to tell you, in that crowd of 15,000 were females, were women, segregated in their own section. But, again, ladies could come to the concert and could enjoy music. It was a very professional show; lights and the whole nine yards. Again, all of that security provided by the local Afghan security. So those are kind of light anecdotes, but, again, they are capable of doing that and that shows you the rise in their police. Very traditional policeman. I mean, just what you would think of. So that's a great question, one with a little bit of risk. That's one where the commander takes some risk and has to make that call. It's one that you hope works out for you because you don't want that catastrophic failure; but, again, when you get that presence of Afghan police and some Afghan Army collocated, you can separate their roles and responsibilities and it seems to work out.

Q. I'm Kori Schake from the Hoover Institution. Given the extent to which our strategy is dependent on once you have created security on the State Department and USAID being able to translate that into longer term stability. I'd like to ask you to assess their performance. Were you satisfied with the quality of the handoff between you and your civilian counterparts; and, if not, could I ask you to ruminate on a couple of things that you would like to see the State departments focus on to be able to do a little bit

better?

Mills: It's not so much a handoff as it is working together with all the State Department - and, in my case, with both State Department personnel who were there on a regional platform basis, and with the PRT, the provincial reconstruction team, which was a British-led organization. Again, both of those organizations were looking at long-term development. The key piece there is the interaction. There is, again, much as Mr. Basher mentioned, there is a boundary between police doing paramilitary going into protect and serve. Same way there is in the development phase when you move from hot stability operations, if you will, things I expected my commanders to do on the ground and to turn over into long-term development. That boundary is fuzzy, probably not well defined and could use some work. What I mean by that is, after you've done the clear, what you want to do is show immediate benefit to the people of why we're here, why the coalition, why the government of Afghanistan is on the ground. You do that through very short term, quick projects to usurp the commanders emergency response fund which is funds that are down at the battalion level and company level that those commanders can use to immediately address some issues within the newly cleared areas. You can clean the canals out, you can pick up garbage on the road. You can pay people to do meaningful work, but immediately get them some cash in their hands so that they see an immediate benefit to what's just taken place within their area. And that's good. And you can get some schools refurbished. We're all familiar with the kind of projects that you can do on a short term basis. What you really want to rely on USAID and the State Department folks for is the long term development and to make sure that what we do there is sustainable and meaningful to the folks on the ground. We don't want to be building bus

stations and football fields. That's kind of silly. What you want to do is put things together that: (a) they'll be able to sustain after we leave; and (b) that will actually bring a benefit to the people. Education jumps right out at you, but some basic things like hard surface roads and some basic ways to improve the rather rudimentary economy that they have operating. So what we did, we ended up doing through trial and error was arrive at more of a partnership as opposed to each of us taking charge of a phase and putting together a Helmand plan signed off on by myself, by the Department of State rep, and by the PRT which laid out a sequential way forward both in security matters, but also more important, development matters, and then signed off on as well by Government Mangal who agreed to it. A huge step forward in the development process is the election in five of the cities of Helmand Province of district councils. A very, very big step. And that's an election. The district governors are appointed. The district councils are voted in and they exist in five of the cities of Helmand Province. They are composed mostly of elders and what they do is they make the decisions on where the development should go. They give you suggestions, recommendations and ultimately have a budget that they maintain and a run sent down by Kabul and that gives you a feel for what it is the Afghan people really, truly want rather than us build what we think they think they need, we can then build what they want. It's a great first step, if you will, in the democratic process. It replaces their -- knowledge, again, jumps right out at you, but there's actually now political friction between the governor and the head of the district council. They're competitors. They want -- you know, the governor wants to stay and the district council chief wants to become governor, so there's kind of a natural friction developing all which is good for the health of the process. So I think that more than improvements, I think just

the recognition of what everybody's capabilities are, both the military, the State Department, and the NGOs that come in. And, again, you have to attack it in a realistic manner. I had 30,000 people that worked for me. The provincial regional platform had 27. I mean, it was obvious I had more, I could just out-move them. That wasn't the purpose. The purpose was to work together and lend off some of my expertise. I had a very talented major, for instance, a Reserve female who is a school administrator from San Francisco. By lending her to the regional council, she was able to generate some gains in the education field. So I think the military brings a lot of strengths with it, we just can't overpower the civilians, and make sure they are doing what they're supposed to do, and then hand it off to them at the right time when we leave, when security is such they can do the job without having a Marine there to watch.

Dr. Kagan: General, I actually want to pick up on that discussion because you are describing a province that is, on the one hand, very difficult, but also in some respects unique, or let us say, exceptional. Exceptional in the fact that so much of its funding is generated right there in the Province. Also exceptional in the fact that it has a governor who has been at its helm since 2008. And I would like your sense to what extent is this kind of government activity and growth in Helmand Province actually dependent on Governor Mangal, himself. And what are the signs that you see that there are some sorts of institutions developing elsewhere in the Province?

Mills: I think the real risk we got there was that Governor Mangal, a very talented guy, was running everything out of his shirt pocket. He kept cell phone in his pocket and that's what he ran the government out of. Over the year we watched the transition where he began to build up his staff and put some depth to his organization. He brought in a

talented guy to be his deputy, and he brought in some very good help in the Minister of Education. Some others in ministry that gave him some depth for what he had. And we began to see from a guy that only allowed himself to make decisions to one who left the Province from time to time, medical care in India and things like that; took a trip to London to visit his sons, and he left behind a staff who was empowered to make decisions. So I think he was training his replacements and I think he does do that today. So the loss of Governor Mangal today through whatever means would not be the devastating blow that it would have been say 12 months ago. So I think he recognized. But Helmand Province is not necessarily unique. The other province that I had under my responsibility was Nimroz Province right next door. Nimroz is an interesting place. It borders Iran. It has only about half a million people, most of whom live around the one city of Zaranj. There's a very good road that run from the Iranian border, up to Route 1 the ring road. You all go to Zaranj, it's got shops, it's got malls. You can buy western ladies clothes there, you can buy jewelry. Hard surface roads everywhere. Electrical power and water that comes in from Iran. It's a much more modern Middle Eastern place. It's got a good governor, has a good police force. There's literally no insurgency and it has an economic dynamo down on the border that generates cash for things coming back and forth across the border. One of my failures is a throwback State Department and other folks. One of my failures was, I wanted -- I had no forces, very few forces over there because there wasn't much of an insurgency. Also, I was very conscious of the Iranian border and didn't want that to -- didn't want to operate my troops too close to the Iranian border. But one of my fears was, I tried to generate a joint interagency task force that would work that Province. I felt it right for USAID, for civilian leadership to get

some development going down there in a relatively benign area. And I just couldn't generate the interest. But, again, there are some other provinces that have some real potential and can be worked quickly to transition. Because, really Nimroz is in transition in all effect. We visited there probably twice a month. I would send helicopters down there with some of my people on board to meet with the governor. We did do some low level developmental projects, a million dollar canal project, some infrastructure improvements. So Helmand is not unique in them being a success. Nimroz Province, I think, was successful as well. So there is some opportunity over there, I think, for us to work through that. Getting back to Helmand Province, though, the real day-to-day operation of the Province is done at the district level. That was the important improvement that I saw in the governments. The district governors, the county guys who the locals see on a day-to-day basis. That's who helps them out with their water problems, makes sure the garbage gets picked up, does all those things that you'd expect a governance to do.

When we got there, most of the district governors were basically Wyatt Earps. They were in very tough areas, and they had to fight their way every day to work and they had to live in their district centers meant they were taking indirect fire. You needed a brave guy, not necessarily a smart guy. And we had a fair number of them. I remember the Marjah governor, our first Marjah governor. He walked up the side of his compound wall and shoot over it during meetings. I mean, he was truly a Wild Bill Hickok. A brave guy who lived down there 24/7. I'd come in to visit him, run in, have a quick meeting, and then run out. I was gone. He lived there. A brave man, but illiterate. Eventually, during the summer as the battle wore down and we changed things, they

replaced him. They brought in a technocrat, a college graduate, had been a lieutenant colonel in the Afghan Army, had served in two ministries up in Kabul. He was a professional administrator. He knew how to set up a government, and a politician. Loved to cut ribbons. Want to get the guy to come to a meeting, put a ribbon across the door. He'd show up. Guy loved scissors. I'll tell you. He was unbelievable. But he was a politician. He got out and about and you'd meet him in the strangest places, shaking hands and meeting his constituents and the progress was remarkable. And that happened throughout the Province as they pulled the man who would kind of "settle the score," if you will, and gotten things halfway calmed down and brought in professional administrators who actually understood how it was the build and to budget and to bridge that gap between the people and the government in Lashkar Gah and ultimately up in Kabul. So those are some significant changes we saw in the government.

Q. I'm [Alex Bushay?]. I'm at the Center for Complex Operations at the National Defense University. I actually have a follow up question on civilian and military cooperation at the district level. You talked a little bit about platform and PRT's, but I was hoping you could address that along with, if possible, your use of the district stability framework.

Mills: [Indiscernible.] Yeah, at the district level is where the action took place. And that and we talked about a little bit of the friction that takes place between the civilians and military. I think it's at the district level where you probably see that. The reason you see it is because you're working two different timelines. You have two very different groups of people trying to pull together to accomplish the same thing, but on very different timelines. Our battalions in the Marine Corps go to the field for 7 months.

They're out there for about 7 months total. That's about the lifespan, if you will, of that battalion on the ground. So you have a battalion commander who's aggressive, who wants to change the world, and he's got about 6 months to change the world, to right every wrong that is possible within his area of operations. He's been selected because he's the kind of guy that does those things. He's been trained to do those things and he considers himself a failure in some ways if he doesn't, you know, make his campsite look better when he left than when he got there. On the other hand, you have a very dedicated and brave group of civilians working in DST, district civility teams, who are basically after the same thing. Improving life, developing projects that are going to be sustainable over time. But they're looking at a much longer timeline, and that's where, sometimes, the friction develops in that the military man finds a quick solution to a very obvious issue and the DST is looking at how does that fit in the framework of larger development. I'll give you another anecdote. I had a town called Musa Qala up in the northern part of the Province. A very important town to us. I had an infantry unit in there and had DST in there. Both of them very energetic, they're good people doing good things. Musa Qala is separated by a large wadi that runs through the middle of town. You may have been there. The eastern and western part and the people cross back and forth. Often there's water in the wadi and it's just difficult to move trucks and vehicles across the wadi. People want to go from point A to point B and that's what they asked for, that ability to do that. The DST put together a very good plan. It had a bridge designed that was in the works. A really good bridge, good looking bridge that would last a thousand years. It would go from one side of the wadi to the next. It had underpasses for the water and all sorts of great things; double lanes, very, very good bridge. But it was probably not going

to be put up for 4 or 5 years, and it was going to be part of a provincial-wide transportation network that would allow products to be moved all over the Province. So it would tie into hard-surface roads, that would later tie into hardball roads, that would tie into highways. It was a ways out there. The battalion commander, on the other hand, said, "The people want to move across the wadi." He took HESCO which is just wire baskets full of dirt and sand, put those in place, filled sand bags in around them. Filled the rest of the thing in with dirt. That would last probably 6 or 7 months until the next flood washed it away; but, in the time being, the people got across the wadi. In his mind he solved the problem. In the DST's mind, they'd solved the problem. There was considerable friction between the two teams as to who had the right solution. The answer was, both of them had it, but that kind exemplified the approach to some of the problems we had between the DST's and the battalion. Everybody trying hard. Everybody doing the best they could. Everybody's well, well intentioned, just a Venus and Mars kind of mindset, if you will. How do you solve the issue? A lot of the Marines were going back to the old speed march reaction course to -- how do you take two sticks and get across the river, as opposed to, perhaps build that bridge that will last 100 years. But DST's great folks, dedicated people living a hard life, a dangerous life and really producing some outstanding results.

Q. General, this is Said Jawad, former Ambassador of Afghanistan. Great seeing you. Thank you very much for a wonderful report.

Mills: Thank you, sir.

Q. We in Afghanistan appreciate your leadership all over, but especially in the south, where I'm from. Thank you, very much. It's really reassuring to see that someone is

fighting to win. The discourse here is mostly fighting not to lose.

Mills: Thank you, sir. Thank you, very much.

Q. Thank you. A quick question. You have indicated that the Taliban at the strategic level operate in Pakistan. Our Chief of Intelligence have told me that the leadership of the Taliban, send dispensable Taliban into Afghanistan, and we cannot win this war by killing dispensable Taliban because they will be replaced. They will be recruited and retrained. In the light of the good news last night of taking another enemy of humanity out of the equation, do you think that from your field experience on the ground in Helmand including Balochistan as a part of the area were drone could be used to take some of the leadership of the Taliban? It will save the life of Americans and Afghans who are fighting side by side?

Mills: I think you have to decide on what your end state's going to be and how you're going to define success on the battlefield as to where you should be applying your forces and your targets. If it's a question that you think that you're going to reduce the insurgency completely to zero, then you have to address the question of the strategic leadership. If you think that's necessary. On the other hand, you can reduce his ability to influence activity within Afghanistan down pretty significantly by taking out that dispensable Taliban you talked about. We've seen through the impact of losses on the battlefield and through his inability, again as I said, to resource himself that he's losing some of that dispensable Taliban, some of the \$10-a-day Taliban that people talk about are not going back to the colors because they have seen that they're not simply going to be slaughtered for someone else's gain. So I think that you can reduce the insurgency to such a level within the frontiers of the boundaries of Afghanistan, that the people that

remain outside are reduced to a nuisance as opposed to a direct threat. What you're talking about, sir, is, as you know, is a strategic decision with international implications, something that's way above my head. I was tasked with setting the conditions within Helmand and Nimroz Provinces and I had a hard enough time doing that then to get involved in... But not to make light of it, sir, I do think from my perspective, from the battlefield perspective, I think that we can reduce the threat inside Afghanistan to such a level that the indigenous security forces can handle themselves, can handle that threat and you've got perhaps the people just sitting outside of Afghanistan then just simply become a voice out in the wilderness that's more of a nuisance than he is a real threat.

Dr. Kagan: Have you seen signs that you can talk about of friction between Taliban who are based inside of Afghanistan and those who are perhaps based outside of it most of the time?

Mills: Yeah. We saw significant evidence that there's significant friction between those two groups. There is a feel with the people inside Afghanistan, the foot soldiers doing the fighting and the young officers, the junior leadership of, "We're here now, we're taking the losses," and listening to your direction for those of you who never come in here and take the same risks. We saw significant, significant evidence of that. As I said, kind of the junior, the mid-level leadership, the colonel-level leadership, if you will, routinely took vacations during the wintertime. We saw them back on the battlefield early. Having spent 36 years in the Marine Corps, you don't bring your leadership back off leave because things are going well. If you're off on leave somewhere and the general pulls up and says, "Hey, get yourself back here right away," it's not because your unit's doing well in your absence. It's because you're needed to solve a serious issue, and we

saw clear evidence of that. So, yes, I think there's a wedge that can be driven between the out-of-Afghanistan leadership and the guys who are taking the risk on the battlefield. At some point the guy that's doing the fighting want to look over their shoulders and if they don't see anybody behind them, it causes doubts.

Dr. Kagan: It is impressive to remember that some of the leadership has been out of Afghanistan for a decade which is a long time, particularly for a fighting soldier.

Q. Hi, I'm Debbie Smith, Executive Director of PATHS. Thank you for your service, General Mills. I wanted to ask you a question regarding long-term sustainable development and you had said, I think, that the Afghans felt that education was their number one need, concern. And in light of the fallout from Three Cups of Tea and Greg Mortenson and the apparent existence of ghost schools, I'm wondering if you had any ideas on how to create greater long-term sustainable development of education so that we don't end up with just a bunch of empty schools that are used for whatever, anything but education.

Mills: Yeah. That's a great question. I appreciate it very much. I'll put a plug in for a program that we have ongoing through the Headquarters; and Headquarters Marine Corps is the point of contact on this, is the Adopt a School Program, in which we have contacted organizations back home in the States to help the schools out because the schools are very, very rudimentary. I mean, really, many of them are just mud huts with a teacher trying to teach off an old chalk board and the students don't have pens and pencils. Afghanistan's kind of unique. Many of us in the room here, lots of us, have been all over the world and you travel around and when you walk through villages in Korea or other places, you always run into little children and they always ask the Marines for

candy. I've probably been asked for candy everywhere I've gone. Afghanistan's different. They ask for pencils. It's incredible. These little fellows run up to you and ask for a pen or a pencil. They're fascinated by the writing. So anything that we can do to help provide those schools with the basic essentials of paper, pens, that kind of stuff, absolutely helps them do it and it helps them fight a budget situation which is not great. I think the other thing is long term is they are desperately short of teachers. Desperately short of qualified teachers. Anything that we can do to support that. There is a teacher's college in Lashkar Gah, for instance, to train teachers, to get them back out to the Province in the remote areas. It's difficult, because if you are a college educated Afghani, and you have that kind of a background, you are a valuable commodity and you can certainly work for NGOs, you can work for the Afghan government itself. You can make a lot of money doing other things rather than teach. So I think we need to make it a profession that is attractive to people and brings people in because of what the return is on what they do. Like all of us, we don't do what we do for money, it's the fact that we think that perhaps we're serving a little bit of a higher cause. So anything we can do to attract teachers and promote them. Anything we do to help the schools be equipped to give that education, I think all of that goes to it. I read Mr. Mortenson's books. I've enjoyed them. I think they're great. I wish him nothing but the best. I know there's some controversy these days. I have no comment on that, but I wish him the best. But I do tell people when I talk about education in Helmand Province that I wished I could have bought those schools for three cups of tea. I really do. No, I'm serious. Those schools cost me over 200 dead troops. Over 2,000 wounded. There's a price that's paid for that kind of progress. Don't let me fool you here. You know, we lost well over 200 Soldiers,

Sailors, Marines, Airmen, coalition forces. The Afghans lost a lot more. I sent 2,700 of my troops home with wounds, some of them devastating. We all know what the IED can do to the human body. You know, I wish I could have bought that progress for three cups of tea. I'm not degrading Mr. Mortenson's efforts at all. They're wonderful, and he's a good man, but education costs money and it cost more than money. It cost dedication, professionalism, perseverance and we've got a lot of young folks out there that are doing a tremendous job. I think anybody who thinks that the generation that we've raised in America is weak is absolutely off the mark. We have the finest people on the battlefield now, men and women, that I've ever seen in my 36 years of service and I would challenge them against any generation we every put out on the battlefield. They're brave, they're courageous, they're focused, they're smart, they do what has to be done, and they take hits. They take horrendous hits. Go to Bethesda and take a look at some of those folks up there. Go to Walter Reed. Go down to the burn center in Texas. They are taking tremendous hits and they bounce back. The fact that we have troops, male and female, that every morning get up, put the pack on, pick up the rifle and go outside the wire knowing the threat that's out there, knowing that you have a ruthless, cruel enemy who's out there using a weapon, the IED, which is designed to inflict the most damage possible on the human body; the fact that our troops get up every day, go outside the wire and do their mission, I stand in awe of those young people. I stand in awe of them. Every one a volunteer. Nobody has to be out there. Every one of them could be home doing what their peers are doing which is having fun and going to the beach and enjoying life, but instead, they came when their country needed them. They stood up and answered the call, and I would tell anybody who has any doubts about the future of this country, the

threats to the future of our young people, go talk to them. Go talk to them. You cannot help but come away incredibly impressed and you just want to thank them because of what they do. It's not those senior guys, it's not the leadership over there, it's the lance corporals, it's the PFCs, it's those young Marines and Sailors and Soldiers and Airmen who are doing just a fantastic job.

Do we have time for one last story? Let me tell you one last story to tell you that kind of thing. I talked about Bahram Chah. Bahram Chah sits on the border of Pakistan. It is an evil place. It is a dark, evil place. No one lives in Bahram Chah except people buy drugs and people who sell guns. That's what it is. It is an evil, evil place. We decided to reduce that and take it out. It's a main supply point for the insurgency. It's where the drugs come to be sold, it's where the weapons and explosives go to be used. We decided to knock it down. We went down there. It's a long ways away. It's about 80 miles south of my nearest position. We decided to take a raid force down to this fall and take it down. It was being defended in a very traditional manner that all of us here would recognize. It was a national training area defense paired between a minefield and narrow gap covered by fire with bunkers behind it. It was a fortress, but we decided we were going to knock that thing down. The key to our plan was to hit that minefield right at first light. We were going to put a line charge out, which is an explosive rope, blow that line charge and that was going to take out most of the mines. And push an armored bulldozer, under fire through the remainder of that minefield to clear the gap and then push our vehicles through for the attack. Key to that was an armored bulldozer which was going to push those mines out of the way so we could do it. Without that, we were lost. That night we moved down about 70 miles over just wide open desert, there are no

roads. Got about halfway down there, I was with the column, and the one vehicle we had carrying the one armored bulldozer broke down and got stuck in the sand. The general's great plan was falling apart real fast. His MSM was flying away. Radios crackled and the colonels were talking and what to do. We couldn't sort it out, and the majors got involved and the captains and everybody. We were really in a dilemma. Tough situation, tough spot. Then to make it even tougher, we tried to yank this vehicle out of the sand, we break the axle. Now we're really screwed. I hope you didn't write that down. So in the midst of our discussions about what alternate plans could we come up with, a young E3, lance corporal, very junior enlisted man walked up to the back of the truck, jumped up on top of it, climbed up in the bulldozer, started it up and backed it off the lowboy. He raised the blade up high so he could see. Asked the gunnery sergeant who happened to be standing there. "Hey Gunny, which way do I go?" Gunny pointed south. The lance corporal turned the bulldozer and headed south. About 3 and a half kilometers an hour. So down in Bahram Chah as the sun came up and we were firing on our prep fires, over the horizon comes our bulldozer with old lance corporal driving it. He didn't even slow down, he just headed right into the gap and the attack went on time, and I'm a genius. Those are the kind of youngsters we have out there on the battlefield. Those are the guys that are actually winning this fight and I would leave you with that: we're winning, and it's because of the the caliber of Marines, Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Coast Guardsmen that we've got out there fighting. Reserve and regular; male and female. It was a privilege and honor for me to be associated with them.

[Applause in the room.]

Dr. Kagan: I really want to thank you for joining us today. For talking to us about what

you and the tremendous Marines under your command have achieved to remind us that there is still a lot of hard work ahead, but also to remind us what a really special country we live in and special force we have the privilege to work with day in and day out. I flew around with your Marines on the 4th of July, 2010, and it was an awfully hot day, but I can't imagine anything that could make me more proud than sitting with them flying into Marjah with an American flag hanging in the back of my smooth-riding Osprey. Really, it's been a tremendous achievement, a tremendous fight, and I don't think we can underestimate or understate here what it is that has been accomplished by the great Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, Airmen, and Coast Guardsmen out there, and also the Afghans that they have worked with. It's been a pleasure having you today and as a little token of our thanks, ISW actually has a tradition. We know that gift giving is a tradition that comes very naturally to you now, and we want to honor you for your service and thank you so much for being here.

Mills: Thank you very, very much. I appreciate it.

[Applause in the room.]

[End of recording.]