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A Conversation with General John Allen,  
Commander of the International Security Assistance Force

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**PARTICIPANTS:**

**Introduction:**

PETER SINGER  
Senior Fellow and Director, 21st Century Defense Initiative  
The Brookings Institution

**Moderator:**

MICHAEL O'HANLON  
Senior Fellow and Director of Research, Foreign Policy  
The Brookings Institution

**Featured Speaker:**

GENERAL JOHN ALLEN, USMC  
Commander  
International Security Assistance Force, Afghanistan

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## PROCEEDINGS

MR. SINGER: Well, I'm Peter Singer, director of the 21st Century Defense Initiative here at Brookings, and it's my honor to welcome all of you to this event with General Allen on the U.S. Mission in Afghanistan. In addition to those of you joining us here today in person, I'd also like to welcome the audience that's joining us via CNN.com and Twitter.

In our field, we often try to cut to the heart of the matter by reaching out to the numbers behind the key debate in foreign policy. Here at Brookings, for example, we host the Afghanistan Index, the one-stop shop for all key data and figures on the operation.

The thinking behind this is, as Einstein once said, breaking an issue down to its raw numbers offers the "poetry of logical ideas." The challenge for all of us, though, in the last few weeks of debate, both in the media and on Capitol Hill, is that we've seen how the numbers that surround the mission in Afghanistan can be deployed in a way that very much illustrates the saying that was attributed to the Scottish politician who said, "You might prove anything by numbers."

These are just some of the numbers that surround the Afghan operation right now: 557 billion, that's the amount that the U.S. government has spent overall on our mission in Afghanistan over the last

10 years -- to put that into context, this is slightly more than the U.S. government spent on the entire Depression-era New Deal in current figures; 8.2 million, that's the number of Afghan children who are currently enrolled in school compared to less than 1 million in 2001; 89,000, that's roughly the number of U.S. troops deployed to Afghanistan; 2,996, that's the number of American citizens killed in the 9-11 attacks that led to the start of the U.S. mission in Afghanistan; 350, that's the number of IED attacks in January 2012, 150 more than in December of 2009, when the surge started; 180, that's Afghanistan's ranking in corruption in the world -- only 2 countries list behind it, Somalia and North Korea; 138, that's the number of Afghan army battalion formations presently deemed independent, up from 101 just a year ago; 78 percent, that's the number of Americans, according to a February poll, who backed President Obama's decision to begin the Afghan drawdown; 54, that's the percent of Americans who want to pull out of Afghanistan even if the Afghan army is not adequately trained; 27, that's the percent of attacks initiated by the insurgency that are down in the last month compared to this same time last year; 9, that's the publicly reported number of U.S. servicemen who gave their life in Afghanistan this month, making a total of 1,915 over the last 10-1/2 years.

My point here is that the numbers, for all their power, can

only tell part of the complex story that is the U.S. mission in Afghanistan right now. That's why we are so honored to host this important conversation today, to go beyond the simplicity of the numbers and dig deeper into the heart of the matter.

This conversation will be led by my colleague, Michael O'Hanlon. Michael is our director of research here at Brookings, 21 CDI, and author of two books that specifically relate: one, *Toughing It out in Afghanistan*, and the other, a new book called *Bending History: Barack Obama's Foreign Policy*.

But perhaps the numbers that best illustrate why he's so suited to this conversation are 2,200,000 and 8. These are the number of times that Mike has been cited in Google related to Afghanistan, showing how he's been a critical voice in shaping the public debate, and eight is the number of research trips that he's conducted there serving as both an election observer and also with visits to ISAF Canadian forces and U.S. Marines.

And joining Mike is General John Allen, U.S. Marine Corps. The number that perhaps best introduces General Allen is 1976. That's the year he graduated with honors from the Naval Academy to begin his distinguished service to the nation. In the time since, he's earned three additional master's degrees from Georgetown Defense Intelligence

College, the National War College.

He served in a variety of roles, command of the Basic School; 79th commandant of midshipman at the Naval Academy, the first ever Marine Corps officer to serve in this position; principal director of Asian and Pacific affairs in the Office of Secretary of Defense; command of the 2nd Marine Expeditionary Brigade deploying to Iraq for OIF '06 and '08; deputy commander, U.S. Central Command; and currently commander of International Security Assistance Force, Afghanistan and U.S. Forces, Afghanistan, a role that he began in July of 2011.

Mike, General, thank you very much for joining us today for this important conversation.

GENERAL ALLEN: Thank you, Peter.

MR. O'HANLON: Peter, thank you. And let me ask everyone here to please join me in thanking and welcoming General Allen to Brookings. The way we'd like to proceed today – and thank you all very much for being here yourselves – is roughly as follows: We're going to talk for about 25 minutes and have an opportunity to bear down on some of the issues concerning current operations and the current campaign in Afghanistan. In the period of time between now and 2:15 or so when we're doing that, you are invited to pen a possible question on an index card that you will have found on your chair. And please be done with that

by 2:15, because at that point, we will ask people to come to these outside aisles and collect the cards and they're going to bring them to me. This is for maximum efficiency in our use of time.

And you're welcome, of course, to express whatever questions you would like and think I won't have posed by then myself, since you'll have to be guessing where I'm going a little bit. But we are going to focus primarily on the campaign, on operations in Afghanistan. We're not going to be as inclined to prognosticate about where debates may go in this town or in Kabul or Islamabad or such matters. And, of course, we can't get into sensitive diplomatic issues.

But with all that said, this is Brookings, and General Allen has proven through his running of Annapolis, and other distinguished academic efforts, and his testimony on the Hill last week that he's more than up to the challenge of discussing a very complex topic. So let's begin, General, if you don't mind.

And what I'd like to do, and having reviewed the transcripts from last week and your testimonies, I'd like to just give you a chance at first to explain in broad terms where you think the campaign is right now. Because a lot of times we focus on the latest incident, or we focus on the question that naturally concerns Americans of how much longer do our troops have to stay. But I don't know if we always get an understanding

back here, as much as we need to, of, you know, where we are in the evolution of this campaign. I just wanted to ask you, in your own broad terms, whether it's going back to when you took command or even further and bringing us up to date, where do we stand in the operation?

GENERAL ALLEN: When I took command on the 18th of July, within minutes actually I had my first meeting with my commanders, and then met with the senior leaders throughout the theater very quickly thereafter, and I gave them four priorities.

The first priority was to continue the continuity of the campaign, continue to pressure the enemy as much as we possibly could with the forces available. And the intent was to facilitate through a continuity of the campaign other outcomes which might accrue, a willingness to be engaged in a reconciliation, for example, an acceleration of reintegration, those kinds of things. So the first priority was to maintain the continuity of the campaign and continue to pressure the enemy.

The second was to do all we could to accelerate the movement of the ANSF into the lead, into the fore, the idea being that, of course, in a counterinsurgency, especially where foreign forces are involved, you really are attempting to do two things. One is to shape the campaign, shape the insurgency within that campaign, but the other very important thing that you're attempting to do is to shape the defeat

mechanism of the insurgency. And that's a bit of a stark term, but the defeat mechanism in many respects, and in most counterinsurgencies, is the indigenous force itself.

So in shaping the campaign with campaign continuity, using the ISAF forces, and at the same time building the ANSF, the idea, of course, would be to move them to the fore, to be the principal and the lead element within the counterinsurgency over time. So that was my second priority.

And then the third priority was to set the conditions and ultimately support the concept of transition as it had been enunciated in the Lisbon Summit in November of '10.

And then my fourth priority was just be prepared, be agile, be prepared for changing situations as they may evolve or present themselves, both at the level of being a commander, but also with the staffs for the purposes of planning to account for the unexpected or a wild card scenario.

With that as my early perception of the priorities for my tenure as commander, I haven't changed any of those. Shaping the insurgency, continuing the continuity of the campaign, maintaining pressure on the enemy I think is still the number one priority. But right behind it, and increasingly nearly on the same line, is the concept of

moving the ANSF into the lead.

So where do we find ourselves now? 2012 is a year that will have a variety of unique operational conditions to it. The first is, of course, we will be in the second phase of the recovery of the surge forces. The drawdown associated with that, that forces will start moving out of the theater probably within several weeks, the lead echelons of that.

I'll make my final decision with respect to those 23,000 troops and ultimately submit that decision through the chain of command, ultimately to the President. Those troops need to be out of the theater by the 30th of September.

Other important dimensions to 2012 will be obviously the reposturing of the combat power within the theater to account for the departure of 23,000 troops. We will also be inserting the lead echelons and most of the advisory force, which we hope will continue the process of developing the ANSF, and, in fact, may be able to accelerate the ANSF into the lead.

This is a unique fighting season this year in that where Ramazan hits -- Ramadan called elsewhere -- but Ramazan hits, it may, in fact -- although we're not sure yet -- it may, in fact, create some uniqueness to this particular fighting season in that it could have the appearance of being two fighting seasons instead of one. And in terms of

the unfolding of the fighting season, we had some pretty good success last year in the south, in particular in Kandahar and in the Central Helmand River Valley, and we'll be seeking to leverage that success this year by consolidating our hold in the south, while we'll continue to employ our combat power in the east in a counterinsurgent mode, obviously to take care of the insurgency as it continued to boil in the east.

In the north and in the west, there has been I think some significant success in the north in the German-led element of the coalition, and in the west with the Italian-led elements of the coalition.

And our desire there will be to continue to secure key lines of communication, but also to continue to secure the population centers, as well, to deny the enemy access back into the population across the country, but in general, in the north and in the south, or north and in the west, and then in the south around Kandahar and the Central Helmand River Valley, while in the east, we'll seek to push out of the Kabul security zone, some of what we'll call the orbital districts and orbital provinces.

So it's going to be a busy summer, and we anticipate that the campaign will balance the drawdown of the surged forces with the consolidation of our holdings in the south, continued combat operations in the east as we insert the advisors into the Afghan security forces, with the idea of pushing them into the lead.

MR. O'HANLON: Could I follow up a little bit on -- you've really sketched it out beautifully and really set up most of where I want to go in the next 20 minutes. Before I come back to the Afghan security forces and ask you to explain a bit more about why they are, in some ways, better than we thought, which was a memorable phrase you used last Tuesday with the House Armed Services Committee, before I come to that, I'd like to ask you to explain a little bit more sector by sector in the country the trends that you see going on.

You just touched on a number, but let me just ask you to start with Kabul in the north and west. And I think you've just suggested that these are all looking reasonably good. Of course, there are still journalists and members of nongovernmental organizations and other travelers to Afghanistan who are struck by the fact that these parts of the country are more dangerous than they were five, six years ago, and so I'm wondering how to square what these folks sometimes say with what you just said.

I think I understand the answer, but I'd like to hear it from you as to what's the overall condition in Kabul, where we saw these spectacular attacks last year, to the point where sometimes the whole buzz was about is Kabul now under siege. Is this, you know, an equivalent to, you know, some kind of siege of the capital city like we've

seen in Vietnam and other wars, or are the north and the west slipping away and the Taliban starting to nestle itself within Pashtun populations and those areas and use these as bases to assassinate key leaders and otherwise stoke up violence? How would you explain the trends, and why do you say that they've gotten a little bit better in these parts of the country?

GENERAL ALLEN: Well, we measure a whole variety of indices and indicators, and the initiation of enemy attacks is one of the biggest indicators for us. And in Kabul, that number on a week-to-week basis -- and we watch it very closely -- is 1 percent or less of the 100 percent that would constitute all of the enemy-initiated attacks across the country. In RC North, that number is 5 percent or less typically, and RC West is 5 percent less.

And, you're right, I think that the Taliban has sought to seek advantage in the Pashtun enclaves in the north and in the west.

But, interestingly, in the north and in the west we've achieved our greatest successes in reintegration. On 1 January -- roughly 1 January of 2011, there were about 600 or so reintegrees across the country. Yesterday I saw the number. It appears to be about 3,880 since 1 January 2011, and many of those have come out of the north. There are another 400 or so in the pipeline for acceptance. And so we've seen

both in the numbers that we track a reduction in enemy-initiated attacks in Kabul, the province of Kabul, RC North, and in RC West. We've also seen a reduction in numbers in the Central Helmand River Valley. In some of those areas, pretty dramatic numbers, as much as 80 percent reduction in enemy-initiated attacks. It doesn't mean there isn't violence. It doesn't mean there isn't criminality. But in the numbers that we track, that number has come down.

It has gone up, however, in RC East, and that's, I think, to be expected. That's a different kind of insurgency in some respects, and it is one that's going to require some significant combat power to come.

MR. O'HANLON: So, I could focus on the east, and, again, congratulations, and I know you and your troopers have made huge headway in the south, and I guess now the hope is, as you say, to make the transition to Afghan lead and hold onto the gains and keep building on them.

GENERAL ALLEN: You're exactly right.

MR. O'HANLON: But in the east, as you've underscored today and last week, there's still a big problem. There are a number of big problems. And I guess I'd like to talk about the sanctuaries in Pakistan, but before I do that, ask you to explain how we can do a robust counterinsurgency in the east with the number of forces that you're going

to have available? Obviously, fewer than some previous commanders had once expected or hoped, and in a population that's much larger in the east than the total Afghan population in Kandahar and Helmand combined?

So, just to give us a bit of an intuitive feel for how you can do counterinsurgency in that kind of a challenging situation, and certainly the topography is no easier in the east than it is in the south either.

GENERAL ALLEN: Sure.

MR. O'HANLON: So, how do you even conceptualize a robust counterinsurgency campaign for the east that I guess you're going to be conducting this year or next?

GENERAL ALLEN: Well, it's multifaceted, obviously, as any counterinsurgency would be, and it's a variety of a number of things. We are able now to have the kind of conversation with General Karimi within the context of the ANSF, and the ANA in particular, to talk about the reinforcement and ultimately to take advantage of improved capabilities of the 201st and 203rd Corps. They have matured, and the intention is ultimately -- without getting into too much specificity on operational detail -- the intention will be to beef up their capabilities so that theirs is the first bit of force increase that we'll need. They will be paying some particular attention to Nuristan and Kunar east of Kabul along the Route 7 economic corridor that we hope will ultimately begin to take hold. And then south of

Kabul we'll ask for some additional assistance in the Wardak, Logar, and Ghazni area. In fact, we'll be bringing in some additional U.S. combat power in the time remaining for the troops available that I have this coming summer to do some specific work in Ghazni. So, it's not just a function of the ISAF troop strength in a general term.

It is also going to be, for the first time, our ability really to partner with the ANSF at a campaign level. And this year the Naweed campaign, which we're undertaking now basically from January through June of 2013, was very much a bilateral campaign where we sought to harmonize the placement, employment and ultimately the deployment of Afghan forces in a way that could augment our forces in the East. The terrain is very different, as you say. The insurgency is a different kind of insurgency than our forces encountered in the south, in RC South, and RC Southwest. But our intention this year is to work very closely with the Afghans in the 201st and 203rd Corps, anticipating some additional increase in combat power.

Also, it's my intention that of the forces that we will have, both in terms of the drawdown period and the period remaining thereafter, that I'll leave a greater density of those forces in RC East to work in partnership with the 201st and 203rd Corps.

As well, there are a number of other resources that we have

available to us. The Afghan local police have turned out to be extraordinarily valuable for us in a number of areas. And if you were to plot on the map where these Afghan local police or these village stability operations are occurring, what you find is that they are going in and they're anticipated to be emplaced in areas that specifically support the counterinsurgency in the east.

As well, over the last year or so, particularly in the last year, we've had some pretty significant success with the Afghans in the development of their nine commando *kandaks*, their nine commando battalions. And we anticipate employing those units, as well, for focused operations both for disruption and as an augmentation for our general-purpose operations. But also I fully intend or fully expect that our special operators, in the terms of our task force ops, will also be going in simultaneously.

So, it's a combination of what will remain in RC East of the ISAF forces, what will be brought in to bear in augmentation in terms of a combined campaign, what additional forces will be brought in from the ANSF, continued operations with the *kandaks*, additional placement of village stability operations platforms and ALP units, as well as focused task force operations. And the combination of all of that we anticipate will give us a good launching pad for the operations in RC East this coming

summer and in the fall and into next year.

MR. O'HANLON: Now, when we see that operations in the east and violence in the east have continued to go up over the last year, I realize that a lot of what you're talking about is a general sense of your plan for 2012 that you haven't yet carried out. So, clearly, you're hoping to be in a better place in six or nine months than you are now. But to what extent does it gnaw at you that the strength of the Haqqani Network could even be growing with time? I know last week in testimony, I think in the Senate, you talked about your hope that even if Pakistan does not clamp down on the sanctuaries, we can still muddle our way to a decent outcome, not as good of a place as we'd like to be. But I'm wondering -- your level of confidence in that assessment -- if you've seen the violence keep going up and you know that these sanctuaries are so potent, do you worry that the uptick in violence is actually a sign of growing insurgency or is it more a sign of your intensification of operations and you're hopeful that it's going to trend down pretty soon?

GENERAL ALLEN: Well, I think it's a function of both. Did I actually use the word "muddle through" in my testimony?

MR. O'HANLON: I did. No, you did not.

GENERAL ALLEN: I couldn't quite remember. (Laughter)  
But if I did I probably need to rethink a bit of the testimony.

It's a function of a number of things, I believe. You know, the Haqqanis -- my sense is -- and of course we'd have to go to Miranshah and ask them, but if the ANSF continued to track, if the ANSF continued to build their capability, it's not going to spill -- it's not going to be good news for the Haqqanis. And as I think those of us who've been studying this and so many people in this room who I recognize who are real scholars of this recognize that for the Taliban and for the Haqqanis in particular, the sense is that now is their opportunity. It would appear that we are drawing down our strength, but the ANSF may not necessarily be ready. And so this could be their sense of the moment when they may be able to have significant or dramatic effect in the battle space.

We ran a couple of operations last year, frankly, and they were to do a couple of things. One was to respond to the Haqqanis' operations in Kabul. And if you've been tracking the numbers -- I know a number of you have in here -- there have been some significant high-profile attacks in Kabul. Virtually all of them were planned in the safe havens and, in particular, with the Haqqanis. Plus, there were significant operations in RC East, and we ran some focused operations against the Haqqani Network last year specifically to see two things: A, how we could affect their operational profile, but also to get a sense, in the context of a deep battle, how they reacted to it and how we could leverage that

reaction for further operations.

So, we learned a lot last year, actually, in dealing with them, in dealing with their network. We were able to, on a night operation, obtain their senior field commander, Haji Mali Khan, and we learned a great deal from him. And we learned a great deal from a number of the other senior Haqqanis that were detained in this operation.

So, our sense is that while it will be their intent, probably through the use of high-profile attacks, increased tempo for suicide attacks, assassination, that their intent is to continue to inflict as much damage as they can within inside RC East and to try to get inside Kabul again. Anticipating that, conducting operations throughout the winter, positioning and posturing our forces in anticipation of that, we're going to spend a good bit of time concentrating on that network this coming spring and summer.

MR. O'HANLON: It sounds like a corollary. Before I go and ask you a couple more questions about the Afghan army and police, a corollary to what you just said is that it would be fair to assume you may not get a lot of reconciliation done by the Haqqanis this year until they've decided whether or not they're going to be beaten, until they've decided just how effective ISAF and the ANSF are going to be at coming after them. You mentioned that a lot of the reintegrees are in the north and the

west so far. It would seem that a logical inference from what you've said is that if there's going to be reconciliation at a grand level or even reintegration at a local level in the east, it may have to wait a few more months of impressive combat by ISAF and the ANSF forces to show the enemy that there's no other way to get a good outcome. Is that a fair --

GENERAL ALLEN: It's fair. We are getting some reintegrees in the east, and we are getting some in the south and southwest. It's our desire to increase those in all three of those areas: RC East, South, and Southwest.

It's also not necessarily a function of the willingness of the foot soldiers to come over. The whole process of reintegration, the High Peace Council, the Afghan peace and reconciliation process, et cetera, that whole process is still unfolding. It's still gaining bureaucratic traction, if you will. And the support for the program is still growing at the provincial and district levels.

And as that process -- where we find it working the best is where a provincial governor, a provincial chief of police, working closely with the local ANA commanders and ISAF where they have cooperated very closely, is where we see the numbers improving. A, because we keep the pressure up, but, B, also as reintegrees come out of the battle space, they can reintegrate back into their villages safely and securely.

But for us, we'll continue to pressure the Haqqanis in the East throughout the fighting season of 2012.

MR. O'HANLON: One question, just so I get a good geographic picture of how the campaign plan is affecting life in Afghanistan and the economy in Afghanistan, if we were to look at the Ring Road at this point, how far are you from at least having made substantial progress towards securing most of it? Obviously, it's never going to be perfectly safe, at least not for a long time. But I know that the campaign plan was anticipating working more on the Kabul-Kandahar piece of it. Where do we stand in the overall process with the Ring Road?

GENERAL ALLEN: Well, it still remains -- a substantial amount of it still remains to be paved in the Northwest. And those contracts are largely complete at this point and we would anticipate the activity associated with the paving of the final portion of Route 1 or the Ring Road to start this year. It is an explicit part of the campaign for this coming year to try to create through the connectivity from the Kabul security zone down to Kandahar the kind of interaction as necessary. A freedom of movement is necessary so that commerce can open up between the two population centers. And that is a key outcome that I hope to achieve in this year's campaign.

MR. O'HANLON: In this year's campaign. A couple of

questions on the ANSF and then I'll go to all of you. And I hope you're passing your cards to the outside, please, because in a couple of minutes we're going to come and collect them.

But if I could, General, let me ask you a little bit more about Afghan security forces, and this has certainly been very welcome news to hear how you've been talking about them the last week. And you're not the first one to speak more favorably of them than sort of the common conventional wisdom. But you still use some fairly, you know, inspiring words, and I wonder if you could just say a little bit more to give us a bit more of an -- maybe an anecdotal feel or a soldier or a Marine's feel for why they are, as you put it, better than we thought.

You've quoted some of the statistics, that they're involved in about 90 percent of all the operations, they're leading 40 percent of them, they've got 138 out of 167 *kandaks* that are at least in the top 3 tiers of readiness.

GENERAL ALLEN: That's right.

MR. O'HANLON: Those are all encouraging, but of course they're also, as Peter was pointing out earlier, statistics of the type that are hard to integrate into a net assessment. What makes you feel overall pretty good about them?

GENERAL ALLEN: Sure. And so much of this is the human

feel, the sense that we have as our ISAF commanders continue to interact with the ANSF elements. And as you might imagine, it's different in different places. We've had some success in some areas, but we've had less success in others.

Where we have found that the *kandak* and brigade commanders are competent, where they are not corrupt, what we find is that from that echelon of command down, we can get some pretty good battlefield performance out of them. And that should be a surprise to no one. Where we find that either there is an absence of competence or there could even, in fact, be corruption, that has a tendency to chill all of the echelons below it, so whether it's at the *kandak* or the *toolay* level or down at the foot soldier level, and that varies from place to place. I was down in Kandahar recently with General Huggins, who is the commander of the great 82nd Airborne Division, and his relationship with the 205th Corps commander is extraordinarily good. And it starts with him, and his leadership is very strong.

He holds his brigade commanders to a high standard of performance, and, in fact, has said to General Huggins on 1 July, I got it. You know, we're going to be working together, but I got it. I'm going to take charge of this battle space. I mean, that's exactly the kind of enthusiasm, that's exactly the kind of assertiveness that we need to see

out of the ANSF. The units Task Force Helmand, Task Force Leatherneck, and RC Southwest, they began pretty extensive partnered operations, although as you pointed out, correctly partnered operations are occurring across Afghanistan. They began partnered operations last year extensively. And it was from them that I picked up the terms, "They're better than we thought they would be," because in partnership they were enthusiastic about the mission, they were aggressive in execution, but they also turned out to be better than they thought they would be. And that played out at the *kandak* and brigade level as they became more competent in planning operations.

You know, there is the sense that the Afghan is not a reluctant soldier, and he is not a reluctant soldier. In fact, the Afghans are some of the greatest individual fighters going, frankly, from their history and from their recent experience. But what makes the difference between one army to the next is not necessarily the ferocity of the individual fighter, and that, of course, does play out in important places and important ways. It's how well the planning can ultimately go forward. And a commander who is able to lead a coherent planning program -- planning effort to bring his staff together to go through the process of anticipating, planning, and executing an operation, that is the commander who is the commander of the future.

And as you pointed out, it's about 89 percent of our operations now are partnered, and about 40 percent of those operations are Afghan-led. And when they're Afghan-led, although we may offer our advice, sometimes it's very strong advice with respect to the trajectory of the planning, the development of the plan itself, and ultimately the execution of the plan, they are doing it in about 40 percent of those operations. And increasingly, those operations are occurring in RC East, which is really important because it is there that we have to build both a strong partnership and the willingness of the Afghans to lead because it's going to be there where the fight will probably be the longest in this insurgency and will be the most complicated.

MR. O'HANLON: So my last question then would be, and it's a way to link a topic I haven't really gotten into very much today because Ambassador Crocker is not here and we haven't talked a whole lot about Kabul politics or the anti-corruption campaign there, and you did touch on it, a number of senators and congressmen asked you about it last week, but let me ask in a very operational sense the kind of things that you're trying to do in the field with the commanders that you say are good, are competent, are not corrupt.

To what extent do you get help from Kabul in at least trying to improve the average quality of these commanders? To what extent are

you able to work, I realize often quietly, with Minister Wardak, Minister Mohammadi, President Karzai, anyone else you need to, to try to encourage a higher level -- a higher quality of leadership in the ANSF? Do you get cooperation from them at least at that level, even if in some of the broader anti-corruption efforts we're still finding it pretty slow going.

GENERAL ALLEN: The answer is -- it's a really important question. We have used the close cooperation that we have with Minister Wardak, Minister Mohammadi, with General Karimi; we have used that close cooperation to try to identify those commanders at a variety of levels, who we think are actually a risk to the campaign. Not just our campaign, but the combined Campaign Naweed.

We have pointed out a number of those individuals to the senior leadership. Some of those have been removed and in a manner in which we would like to see them be removed, which means basically in an expeditious manner, move them out of command. The other thing we would like to not have happen is for them to resurface somewhere else where they could be, yet again, part of the problem.

That's been mixed. Some have been moved quickly, some have taken a long time, some haven't moved. That's the reality of the environment of which we're in. Some have been moved and resurfaced, we've had to deal with them again. Some have not come back. Last year,

when General Petraeus and H.R. McMaster pointed out the problems with the National Military Hospital, that commander was fired I think by the time the sun went down that day.

So there are sometimes very aggressive, very immediate actions, there are some times when we'll point out the need for someone to go, and there will be agreement, but it won't -- it'll take a long time or it won't happen. So the intent is to help in this regard. It is a mixed result.

Now, the other side of the leadership coin, though, I think is beyond our support for the many who are doing well and our request for the some who need to go through MTMA, through the great work that Bill Caldwell and his predecessors had put in place, and now Dan Bolger is undertaking. There's an institutional emphasis on leadership which I think is really important. The Afghan Military Academy, their version of West Point in actually many ways, has just graduated its fourth class. That's a very important outcome. This is a class where the individuals are assigned by lottery, not by who they know.

The education of the staff NCOs and NCOs is well in hand. The numbers of service branch schools, if you will, that have come into effect in the last year that give us the level of specialty training at a quality level have come online and have improved the human capital in many ways. So it isn't just about getting after individuals who create difficulty

across the broad spectrum of capacity.

It is that, but it's also incentivizing and reinforcing the positive leadership that we see out there in many of these formations, but also a complementary and aggressive institutional development as well of leadership that can ultimately step in and assume those positions at the captain *kandak* level, battalion level, and more senior as time goes on.

MR. O'HANLON: As I ask for the index cards to be walked up -- oh, that was quick. I was going to steal time for one last question, but I'll do it anyway. Is it fair to conclude if you're saying that 138 of the *kandaks* are at least sort of you know, level 1, 2, or 3 out of 167, that most of the force at least has leaders that you work with? They may not yet be quite as good in all cases as you'd like, but the most problematic presumably would not score one of those top three ratings, or am I inferring too far?

GENERAL ALLEN: That may be a bit too far, but the overall formation might still be capable, but the commander may not be as aggressive as we might like or we're having to resupply on fuel more frequently than we might have thought we needed to, that sort of thing. But it does certainly play into the overall assessment.

MR. O'HANLON: I've got a question here about civilian population, safety, and security in Afghanistan. And one thing we saw in

the last year or two is that some of the statistics on enemy-initiated attacks that you gathered were headed in a favorable direction, downward.

Whereas some of the U.N.'s statistics, largely because of Taliban action obviously, were headed in the wrong direction and, as a result, overall civilian sense of security was not always in polling data and survey quite as optimal as it might have been or headed in the right direction.

What sense do you have about how the Afghan population is feeling these days about their own security as another important metric to consider?

GENERAL ALLEN: Well, I think the Asia Foundation did some very important polling last year. And I think their sense is that there is still a security problem, and I don't recall the numbers exactly. It's probably worth pointing them out at some point to an august group like this. But I would say that while they felt that there was still a security problem, the sense was it was a security problem in the next village, not necessarily a security problem in their own village.

There's also some important polling data which has indicated that the sense amongst the Afghans for the quality of their police is rising pretty significantly, as is the sense among the Afghans for the quality of their army. And so if your sense is that while there is still a security problem, but it may be in the next village over and that you're relatively

confident in the capabilities and the “noncorruption” of the police and the capabilities of the army is growing, then I think that there is hope that the population will be on the right trajectory ultimately to accept the credibility of the security services and, of course, augers well for the acceptance of governance by extension. There is much work to be done in that regard, particularly in terms of lowering civilian casualties. We’ve worked very hard at that. I’m not satisfied that we are where we need to be, although in roughly the same 12 weeks of last year measured this year, the numbers of civilian casualties that were inflicted by ISAF are down pretty dramatically, about 60 to 70 percent. But that’s still too many in my mind. And we work very, very hard to ensure that when we deliver supporting arms, in particular air fires, that we try to do so with the maximum precision that we can, and that we adhere as closely as we can to the rules of engagement. As well, we have retrained the force a couple of times on escalation of force, the employment of supporting arms. I’ve reissued virtually all of my tactical directives, which continue the process of emphasizing that commanders at all levels really need to do all they possibly can to ensure that target identification is solid before we deliver any fires, with the idea of reducing to the maximum extent possible the casualties among the civilians.

Now the other side of the same coin is we need to do what

we can to protect the civilians from the Taliban and from the insurgency, and those numbers are up. Well over 80 percent of the civilian casualties are inflicted by the Taliban. So protecting the population in a population-based counterinsurgency isn't just the combat operations against the insurgency. It's doing all that you can to protect the population from the attacks of the enemy, and we're seeking all that we can to do that.

We're also running a series of quarterly and semiannual conferences with the Afghans, joint conferences, to bring in NGOs, Afghan influencers, anyone who wants to attend, to talk about how we can all as a group do more to reduce the civilian casualties and increase -- to your question -- the sense of security. And the very next conference -- because the ANSF has, in fact, become sufficiently pervasive and capable, they now have to worry about civilian casualties. The very next conference will be jointly hosted by ISAF and the ANSF with the Afghan population on how we'll continue the process of reducing civilian casualties.

MR. O'HANLON: I've got a question about the difficult matter of so-called green-on-blue attacks, Afghan security forces turning their weapons on your soldiers and all of our soldiers. And the question I think has two parts: One is -- and you got at this with your testimony a bit, but to briefly review -- which of the new procedures for vetting do you think

are most hopeful? Recognizing that it's still hard to prove that there's a favorable trend in the number of these incidents, but also to what extent is this eroding morale and eroding trust and eroding the ability of ISAF forces and Afghan forces to work together?

GENERAL ALLEN: Well, the new eight-step vetting process has an important role played in it by the NDS, which is going to be important to us. As well, we'll continue the process of requiring village elders to vouch for those who would like to enlist, and that permits us to have a direct line relationship back into the villages when the time comes.

MR. O'HANLON: The NDS being the intelligence services?

GENERAL ALLEN: Yes, the national director for security. I apologize, yes. The NDS is going to become extensively involved both in the vetting, but also in the day-to-day work with the ANA and the ANP on helping them to ferret out what could be the appearance of extremism or radicalism inside the ranks, to help them to spot an assassin, and even investigate and take actions against them. So the NDS will be very helpful.

There is an erosion of trust that has emerged from this, but I believe that the relationship is very strong nonetheless. We just had tragically 2 more troops killed overnight in what is now about the 40th of these events that has happened. I think the relationship is very strong on

the whole. For every one of these that occurs -- and I don't want to diminish the importance or the tragedy of any one of them -- but for every one of these that occurs, the numbers of interactions that our troops have every single day with ANA and ANP forces can be measured in the tens of thousands. And so while, yes, we are having them, they are elevated a bit now.

We are going to see, I think, soon measures that we are taking on the ISAF side, measures that have been taken on the ANSF side, and then measures that we're taking together. I hope we'll begin to see that those actions, really unprecedented if you will, interagency and national actions will begin to have a benefit in driving those numbers down. But the Taliban has made no secret about a desire to infiltrate the ranks of the ANSF. And, indeed, if you look at the numbers -- and it's probably worth Peter getting those numbers as well -- the numbers of Afghan forces that are also preyed upon, what we'll call green-on-green, those numbers are high as well. So it is time for all of us together to look at this.

But this is part of an insurgency. It is inherent in an insurgency to seek to disrupt that indigenous force, which ultimately is the great threat to the insurgency. So we shouldn't be surprised that the Taliban are calling for the infiltration of the ranks. We also shouldn't be

surprised that every single one of these, when it occurs and is successful, the Taliban take credit for it. And the reality, of course, is from our investigations, they have accounted for less than 50 percent of the infiltrations. These are generally self-radicalized or -- well, that's the term I will use, they're self-radicalized. They become focused on a particular issue: The urination video for one thing attracted a great deal of attention, the burning of the Koran, the recent activities at Panjwai. Those are all potential factors in the decision making of a single person ultimately to take action and so we're very careful about that. And the measure that we are taking within the force, the measures of the Afghans are taking to protect themselves, and in combination, we hope will first reduce vulnerabilities and begin to solve the problems.

And I would also add that the Afghans on their own, but also some in partnership with us, have had success in their investigations in apprehending a number of individuals who they detected because of the measures that they put in place, they detected that they were in the ranks. They detected that they were planning some form of an attack. And they have arrested a number of people already in this process. So we hope to continue that momentum.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you for a thoughtful answer. And while we're on tough subjects, there's a card with a question about

Pakistan's motives and the ISI's motives in tolerating or even at time perhaps condoning the sanctuaries for the Quetta Shura and for the Haqqani network. And the question is to the effect of do you agree with Admiral Mullen in his last congressional testimony in September that one can also view the Haqqani network as a venerable arm of the ISI? And more broadly, do you feel there's any way to persuade Pakistan's army and intelligence services, to the extent they are more tolerant or even supportive of these groups than they should be from our vantage point, is there a way to persuade them to rethink that? We've been trying for a couple of years, if not longer, with little success it appears.

GENERAL ALLEN: Well, in this forum I can't really speculate on why the ISI does anything with respect to the Haqqanis. I don't think we should be surprised that they have a relationship with them. That relationship between the ISI and a number of these organizations goes back a very long time. So we shouldn't be surprised they have a relationship with them, but I would not speculate on what specific operational support they have or whether they're an action arm. I would just say that the relationship potentially is unhelpful in that regard.

But I would say there is, I think, opportunities for us with Pakistan to increase our cooperation. The 26th of November cross-border incident set back the relationship that we had across the board. And I

have sought in the aftermath of the investigation to put in a number of control measures and to revamp a number of processes and procedures which will reduce to the maximum extent possible the recurrence of something like that. But in the process of doing that, we've also been able to, I think in helpful and useful ways, restore the cross border relationship with Pakistan's senior military leadership. And to that extent there have been several meetings, three in the last couple of months, where ISAF general officers, ANSF general officers, and Pakistani general officers have met to begin the process of restoring that border relationship.

But it was actually even more than that. The border relationship was important to the overarching trilateral relationship -- ISAF, ANSF, and PAKMIL -- which would culminate ultimately in a tripartite relationship where we could even do campaign planning so that we had complementary effects across the border. Those had on a previous occasion -- I'd say probably some of you here were involved in the operations themselves -- but there were operations that have been run in the last couple of years on both sides of the border, often called a hammer-and-anvil type operation where one side or the other would flush the enemy out of a safe haven on one side or the other, drive it across the border into the operational forces on the other side. And we'd like to get back to that level.

Right now, of course, much of the relationship is subject ultimately to the outcome of the debate that is occurring in the Pakistani Parliament where I think the parliamentary committee on national security has been chartered to review the relationship between the United States and Pakistan and then make a series of recommendations. So we're not to the point with the Pakistanis that we can have that kind of a conversation about complementary or cooperative operations across the border, but I'd sure like to get there again. And we actually were on the 25th of November, the day before, when I was meeting with General Kayani talking about the potential for complementary operations.

It was a strength prior to that event. It held great opportunity, I think, to give substance to the commitment of Pakistan, ultimately to dealing with insurgents and dealing with the safe haven issue. Safe havens have been no value really to the Pakistanis either. They've had more than 2,000 killed in their own counterinsurgency operations in the last couple of years. They've paid a price for PACMIL operations.

And so depending on the outcome of that debate in the parliament in Islamabad, it would be my desire -- I know General Mattis shares my views on it, General Karimi does as well -- it would be my desire that we began as soon as we can to talk about how we might combine our capabilities across the border to get after the safe havens in

general, but also to go after some of the insurgence.

MR. O'HANLON: The next question is about the strategic partnership agreement. And I know we don't want to talk about the specifics of what we're trying to negotiate with the Afghan government about a long-term relationship post 2014, but the question gets to the specific issue of whether there's a chance still that this could be concluded before the NATO Summit in May. But I'm going to take the prerogative of the moderator to ask an additional question, which is does it even matter?

Are we making too much of the time pressure in the sense that it would appear both sides have a pretty strong interest in making this happen someday. And if night raids and other such things that we have to, you know, maintain at an intense level for a few more months or a couple more years even, are an impediment in the short term, shouldn't we just be patient?

GENERAL ALLEN: Mm-hmm. The answer is yes. I don't think there's any absence of desire or commitment by either our President or President Karzai to have a strategic partnership. In fact, I know that they have both recently reaffirmed their respective desires that ultimately the United States and Afghanistan have a strategic partnership.

President Karzai convened at the *loya jirga* last year,

specifically with the intent that the 2,000 or so Afghans who were invited to participate in this paramount expression of Afghan will, if you will, the *loya jirga*, even within the context of the constitution, they gathered, they deliberated for several days, and ultimately returned a collective decision or a collective recommendation to President Karzai that Afghanistan's interests in the future were best served by a strong relationship with the international community in general, but a strategic partnership with the United States in particular.

I think that was very positive. In the course of the development of the strategic partnership itself, we have sought to address a couple of long-term issues that Afghanistan has been concerned about, and it's a function of sovereignty for them and we certainly understand that. And the first is the issue of the Afghans maintaining law of armed conflict attention, administrative attention, of insurgents who were picked up in the battlefield.

We successfully -- Administer Wardak and I signed the Memorandum of Understanding for that about three weeks ago; very successful event. It was a real affirmation of Afghan sovereignty. And I think for Afghanistan it was an important moment for them, in this insurgency, when you think about the fact that we will be transferring about 3,000 detainees that the U.S. has been holding in law, in

administrative detention under the law of armed conflict to the Afghans.

That's a big accomplishment for them.

The other issue that we're dealing with right now is an agreement on night operations and we're at a pretty critical moment in those discussions. Meanwhile, the strategic partnership itself goes forward and I believe that should we be successful in completing the night operations Memorandum of Understanding within the next couple of weeks or so, there is time, ultimately, for a strategic partnership to be concluded by the United States and Afghanistan. But more to follow on that.

But it is important. It would be good to have it done by Chicago, where the heads of state of the 50 ISAF nations will gather together. Many of those nations have concluded their own bilateral agreements with the Afghans to this point and NATO intends to have a strategic partnership with Afghanistan. So it would be, I think, a really important signal, both to the international community, to all of ISAF, and certainly to Afghanistan, if that other key strategic partnership is concluded by then as well.

MR. O'HANLON: Just two more questions, General, as we finish up, and thank you. A couple here that I'll synthesize into one and then I've got a final question. The couple on drug production, and opium

and poppy, are to the effect of do you see any continued progress in reducing the yield, especially in the South, but in general? And does it even matter in the short term for the counterinsurgency campaign?

We know there was a rethinking, certainly, of the sequencing of eradication, in particular by Ambassador Holbrooke and others two, three years ago. These questions are to the effect do you see progress in reducing poppy production and how worried are you about it even if you don't see such progress?

GENERAL ALLEN: I think right now, while that is important to us and we've had mixed success in the last couple of years in reduction of poppy growth and the harvest, what is really important to us right now is the development of the relationships necessary to undertake a systematic approach over the long term at a strategic level of getting after the poppy crop and the whole drug enterprise.

Afghanistan's efforts have come a long way in the last couple of years to include not just a national strategy, but the capabilities that have been built within the MOI in the special police units, both in terms of investigative capabilities, but also interdiction, have come a very long way. And it's here where a number of our partnership arrangements have really paid big dividends, especially where the Afghan CF-333, Commando Force 333, TS-444, the NIU, the Sensitive Investigative Unit,

all of these organizations, many of which are vetted, most of which are mentored or partnered, have really come a very long way.

But we've also seen on the ISAF and international community side a substantial improvement, I think, in interagency and intergovernmental cooperation as well for the U.S., the role of the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Department of Justice, FBI. On the UK side, for example, there has been some superb partnership with SOCA with their intelligence organization that does multisource analysis for us.

All of that together has permitted us to get at what we consider to be nexus targets. Nexus targets are vexing for us and we can't ignore them. They have an important role for the insurgency and it is the relationship between the drug enterprise, the criminal patronage networks, and the insurgency. And where we saw some of this coming together, for example, in places like Colombia, for example, we see the nexus target as a means to place significant pressure, ultimately to get after the criminal patronage networks, and we are targeting kingpins now.

We're targeting the laboratory production and dissemination processes, but we're also going after the insurgents who provide protection and extortion and muscle for the whole enterprise. So that nexus target for us, in cooperation at an intergovernmental, interagency,

and bilateral relationship with the Afghans has been the process we have sought to get into place. And once we get it into place, then we can really get after the process, ultimately, of reducing the poppy crop.

As well the Food Zone Program has been very effective in RC Southwest. Governor Mangal has done terrific work in that regard and we'd like to see that replicated into other places in Afghanistan.

MR. O'HANLON: Before I ask the last question, I want to again thank everyone here. I don't think you've seen a person move, even though we're 15 minutes over time. It's a testament to your riveting presentation and how much we're all learning from you here today, General.

Also, as we finish, after he's given his last answer and we've all thanked him, please just give a minute for us to get offstage and remain in your seats, if you don't mind, for just a moment.

The final question today has to do with ethnic cooperation within Afghanistan itself. And again, there's a whole other level of this that we could talk about but I won't press you in terms of cabal politics, the post Karzai transition in 2014, Afghan political parties.

But I'd like to make it more specific to the kind of issues you're dealing with as COMISAF within the Afghan Security Forces themselves, and to what extent are you worried about this problem? To

put it bluntly, to what extent are you worried that Tajik Pashtun, or intra-Pashtun tensions, or anything else could, especially as the presidential race approaches in Afghanistan and our departure looms, or at least the majority of our troops strode out, that these could come to the surface? And to what extent do you think that you see harmony or greater cooperation, at least the common sense of purpose that gives you hope for the future?

GENERAL ALLEN: It's an important question because it has dominated both the interest in Afghanistan, but also the reality of Afghanistan for a long time. And so I will tell you that we watch the proportions closely within the ANSF.

But I say that carefully because the management of the proportions isn't a function of what we do, it's a function of what the Afghans are doing. And the Afghans recognize that an ANSF that is reflective of the population, that has the right kinds of proportions of the ethnicities, the confessions if you will, the ethnic minorities, it's in the interests of Afghanistan writ large.

We like to say that the ANSF, when it ultimately is built and fielded, when it is achieving on the battlefield what we hope it will, will become the symbol of national unity. Not just out to 2014, but beyond. And it'll become a symbol of national unity because we don't have Tajik

units. We don't have Pashtun units.

We have units where we have sought to create ethnic balance. Some are out of balance and, in fact, the entire force is slightly out of balance. But again, we watch the numbers and we seek to focus recruiting efforts in ways that can address, or redress, the potential imbalances.

But if we really believe, as the numbers would seem to imply, that the Afghan people have confidence in their ANSF, growing with the police, high with the army, and if that army is broadly representative of the many different ethnicities of Afghanistan, and it becomes, in essence, the shield of the state for the purposes of stability, then I think we will have created -- we, the Afghans themselves, will have created that really vital role for the military and the police, which is not just to fight, but to be the symbol of what Afghanistan can be in the future, which is a nation of many different kinds of people united in a common cause, and in this case the security of the state to permit the development of governance, to address the issues of corruption, to provide opportunity for economic development.

And if we're successful in this, if the Afghans are successful in continuing the forces, to have the face of all of Afghanistan and not the face of one particular ethnicity, then I think we'll have been successful.

MR. O'HANLON: Well, General, as you go and prepare to

head back, we certainly want to send our thoughts and prayers for you and your troopers from all of us.

GENERAL ALLEN: Thank you.

MR. O'HANLON: And we want to extend a very warm hand of applause and thanks and admiration for what you're doing.

GENERAL ALLEN: Thank you very much.

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