

HEARING TO RECEIVE A BRIEFING ON OPERATION MOSHTARAK IN HELMAND PROVINCE, AFGHANISTAN

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2010

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:31 p.m. in room SD-106, Russell Senate Office Building, Senator Carl Levin (chairman) presiding.

Committee members present: Senators Levin, Lieberman, E. Benjamin Nelson, Hagan, McCain, and LeMieux.

Committee staff members present: Richard D. DeBobes, staff director; and Leah C. Brewer, nominations and hearings clerk.

Majority staff members present: Michael J. Kuiken, professional staff member; William G.P. Monahan, counsel; and William K. Sutey, professional staff member.

Minority staff members present: Joseph W. Bowab, Republican staff director; Adam J. Barker, research assistant; Christian D. Brose, professional staff member; and David M. Morriss, minority counsel.

Staff assistants present: Kevin A. Cronin, Paul J. Hubbard, and Jennifer R. Knowles.

Committee members' assistants present: Vance Serchuk, assistant to Senator Lieberman; Greta Lundeberg, assistant to Senator Bill Nelson; Ann Premer, assistant to Senator Ben Nelson; Patrick Hayes and Mike Pevzner, assistants to Senator Bayh; Tyler Smith, assistant to Senator McCaskill; Jennifer Barrett, assistant to Senator Udall; Perrin Cooke, assistant to Senator Hagan; Roger Pena, assistant to Senator Begich; Jason Van Beek, assistant to Senator Thune; Brian W. Walsh, assistant to Senator LeMieux; and Chip Kennett, assistant to Senator Collins.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR CARL LEVIN, CHAIRMAN

Chairman LEVIN. Good afternoon, everybody. First let us welcome our briefers this afternoon, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Michele Flournoy and Lieutenant General John Paxton, Director for Operations, J-3, the Joint Staff. They will be providing the committee an update on Operation Moshtarak—is that the way it's pronounced?

General PAXTON. Yes.

Chairman LEVIN.—in Helmand Province, Afghanistan, which is named for the Dari word that means “together.” This operation is

being conducted by a combined International Security Assistance Force, ISAF, and Afghan forces of around totaling 15,000, deployed side by side to the central Helmand River Valley, including the former Taliban stronghold of Marjah, to support extending the authority of the Government of Afghanistan to the Afghan population there.

It represents the most significant campaign since President Obama concluded his strategy review in December and it is a critical test of the counterinsurgency strategy announced by the President and implemented by General Stanley McChrystal.

While much of America is watching the Olympics and the daring of our athletes, we must keep a constant eye on the extraordinary bravery and skill of our troops and their allies. An important component of General McChrystal's campaign plan is the emphasis on putting the government of Afghanistan and the Afghan security forces in charge of their country's security. Afghan government officials, including President Karzai, Defense Minister Wardak, and Interior Minister Atmar have played active roles, apparently, in planning and approving operations.

And, according to Marine Brigadier General Larry Nicholson, Afghan forces are partnered at every level with the Marines. He says these Afghan forces are not "cosmetic," but are in the fight. News reports have also said that the ratio of Afghan to U.S. troops in Marjah is almost one to two, one Afghan soldier to two coalition troops. Now, that's considerable progress from the one to five ratio which was the case when I visited the Marines in Helmand Province last September.

I'm particularly interested in hearing this afternoon about the performance of Afghan security forces, including the extent to which they are in the lead in operations.

It appears that ISAF and Afghan forces have made steady progress in removing the Taliban and restoring security to Marjah and central Helmand. But this has come at a very heavy price. 12 NATO soldiers, including at least 8 Americans and 3 British, have died in the offensive so far. Many more have been wounded.

The cause they fight for is a vital one to our security. It is also far more complex than many military operations, because a key aspect of the counterinsurgency plan is to provide governance. It has been reported that the Afghans have prepared a "government in a box" to quickly begin providing services to the Afghan people once security has been reestablished. General David Petraeus, commander of U.S. Central Command, has called this operation the "initial salvo of a 12 to 18-month military campaign."

Ultimately, as General McChrystal has said, this is a war of perceptions, which will be measured by whether the Afghan government, with our support, succeeds in gaining the trust of local Afghan people.

Finally, I hope our briefers will address the plans for providing incentives to low-level Taliban fighters to renounce violence and reintegrate with Afghan society. Also of interest would be any developments in the reconciliation process between the Afghan government and senior-level Taliban leaders. As General Petraeus has noted, reconciliation is not done with one's friends, but with one's enemies.

I want to thank again our briefers for coming this afternoon. We look forward to hearing from them, and our thoughts and our prayers are with the men and women who, again putting on the uniform of this great Nation, are in harm's way as we meet here this afternoon.

Senator McCain.

STATEMENT OF SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN

Senator MCCAIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Let me thank our distinguished witnesses for briefing us today on Operation Moshtarak in Afghanistan. I join you in honoring the brave Americans, along with our NATO and Afghan allies, who are now serving and sacrificing in this consequential operation.

The most important thing I think we should remember today is that the campaign in and around Marjah remains a work in progress, just like the broader strategy of which it is a part. There's much work yet to be done. So we should refrain from drawing firm conclusions at this time, either overly optimistic or overly pessimistic ones.

First, the effectiveness of Afghan security forces. There have already been press release reports about how much the Marjah operation has been NATO-led rather than Afghan-led, and this raises concerns about the ability of the Afghan forces to operate effectively and professionally on their own one day. We should remember, I think, that the early operations of the surge in Iraq were nearly all U.S.-planned, U.S.-led, and U.S.-fought. It was only by living and fighting and sacrificing together with American troops over time that Iraq security forces grew more effective. We should work urgently to foster a similar development with the Afghan forces, but I don't think we should expect to see the results that we need overnight.

The same goes for the Afghan government. A key pillar of the Marjah campaign plan is the "hold" and the "build," the civilian effort to help Afghans deliver better governance and economic opportunity once the Taliban is cleared out. Indeed, this effort will largely determine the overall success of the operation itself. We should expect this process of the Afghan government reform and capacity-building to be one step forward and two steps back, and two steps forward and one step back. I'm eager to hear how our civilian agencies plan over the coming months to support the Afghan authorities and the success of Operation Moshtarak.

Finally, Pakistan. The recent capture of Mullah Baradar and other high-value Afghan Taliban leaders is obviously a good news story. The question is what does this imply about Pakistan's strategic orientation. Are the Pakistani Army and ISI taking a more aggressive stance towards the Afghan Taliban? I'd be cautious about reading too much into these positive recent developments, but we certainly are pleased to hear it.

I'm eager to hear how our distinguished witnesses assess Pakistan's recent success, as well as many others surrounding our campaign in Afghanistan. I thank the witnesses.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Senator McCain follows:]

[COMMITTEE INSERT]

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you very much, Senator McCain.
After we conclude our hearing here, we will move to a closed session, which will be in the Visitors Center Room No. 217.
Again, with thanks, we will call first on you, Secretary Flournoy.

**STATEMENT OF HON. MICHÈLE A. FLOURNOY, UNDER
SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR POLICY**

Ms. FLOURNOY. Senator Levin, distinguished members of the committee: Thank you very much for giving us the opportunity to give you an update on our ongoing efforts in Afghanistan. You all understand the importance of the challenges that we face there, the depth of our commitment to meeting those challenges.

When President Obama first took office just over a year ago, we confronted a pretty bleak situation in Afghanistan. Many of our early gains had eroded, the Taliban was re-ascendant in many parts of the country, and Afghan confidence in the coalition was in decline. President Obama ordered an immediate strategy review and in the course of that preliminary review we made a number of changes. The United States added about 30,000 troops last spring and NATO appointed General McChrystal as the commander of ISAF.

General McChrystal immediately began to emphasize the importance of counterinsurgency as a strategy and prioritized protecting the Afghan people over killing the enemy. He issued a series of new tactical directives for ISAF forces, everything from partnering with the Afghans to convoy driving behavior.

So far, the evidence suggests that this fundamental shift in approach has been extremely successful. The percentage of Afghan civilian casualties caused by coalition actions has dropped substantially. This has produced significant shifts in the Afghan people in terms of their attitudes towards ISAF. Compared to a year ago, Afghans today report that they are far more optimistic about the future and have far more confidence in our ability to prevail over the Taliban and other violent extremists.

We've seen other positive indications in the last year as well. Although the Afghan elections in August were certainly marred by electoral fraud, the government, the new government, was ultimately formed and, despite serious issues such as corruption that remain, most Afghans have a degree of confidence in their new government.

In his December speech at West Point, the President announced a number of refinements to our strategy, which you're familiar with: the addition of 30,000 additional troops in places where they're needed most by the summer of 2010, supplemented by several thousand additional NATO and non-NATO troops. This strategy refinement focuses on reversing the insurgency's momentum and accelerating the ANSF growth, while also improving their quality.

We are also surging civilian assistance to develop both national and sub-national governance capacity, using economic development to enhance government legitimacy. We've also ensured—assured our Afghan partners that this kind of assistance will be enduring.

Our refined strategy has received very strong support from our allies and partners. Our NATO allies and non-NATO partners have already pledged more than 9,000 additional troops to our efforts and we have another force generation conference at the end of this month.

We've also seen some positive steps taken by the Karzai government. At the July 28th London conference, President Karzai reaffirmed his government's commitment to peace, reconciliation, reintegration, developing its security forces, good governance, fighting corruption, and so forth. So he has said all the right things.

The London conference also produced a renewed international commitment to strengthen civil-military cooperation in Afghanistan. This was reflected in part by the announcement of a new NATO senior civilian representative, who will be General McChrystal's civilian counterpart to coordinate things on the civilian side, as well as a new UN special representative, Stefan de Mistura, representing the Secretary General in Afghanistan.

Now, of course none of these steps by themselves guarantees success. As Senator McCain said, this is a work in progress. But we are seeing conditions begin to develop that we believe will ultimately be necessary for success, and for the first time we believe we have the right mission, the right strategy, the right leadership, and the right level of resources in support of the mission.

Our efforts to build the capacity of the Afghan National Security Forces are again a work in progress, but showing some progress. We believe we're on track to meet our end strength goals for fiscal year 2010 and that would be 134,000 for the army and about 109,000 for the police. We recognize, however, serious challenges related to recruiting, retention, and attrition. But we do see our Afghan partners beginning to take steps to address issues of pay and benefits to raise both the retention of the force and the quality of the force. We have set targets for fiscal year 2011 that we believe are both achievable and sustainable and we will continue working towards those.

We're also seeing some signs, positive signs, in terms of using or leveraging our development assistance in support of building governance capacity. Here I'll just share with you, last week I had the chance to visit the Arghandab Valley in Regional Command South, which many used to call the heart of darkness. This is a place with a storied history, a place where the Soviets never managed to achieve their goals. It is a place where now, after very serious fighting in the summer and fall, we now have U.S. infantry soldiers working with a Canadian civil-military detachment, working with an operational mentor and liaison team, along with civilians from State Department, U.S. Agency for International Development, Department of Agriculture, partnering very closely with a Afghan district governor, local tribal leadership, an ANA kandak, local Afghan police, to really begin to develop programs that will provide the foundation for governance and economic development.

What's there are the seeds of transforming a very tough environment into what we're trying to achieve in Afghanistan more broadly. By using development to support Afghan governance, we see a district governor that's now become an energetic ally and who's

working overtime to resolve disputes and jump-start projects with the local community.

I don't want to—again, I don't want to suggest that achieving success will be simple or easy. Far from it. We have many challenges as we move forward. We're still struggling to improve retention and decrease attrition with the ANSF. We're still doing—have a lot to do to improve the quality of the training that we offer our Afghan partners. But we are engaged in very aggressive diplomatic efforts to get our partners to provide additional trainers and mentoring teams for the ANSF and we believe we will be successful there.

Inevitably, we will face some setbacks as we—even as we make progress. We need to prepare for the possibility that things may get harder before they get better. As additional U.S. and coalition forces flow in to key geographic areas where we have not had an ISAF presence before, we may well see increases in violence, increases in attacks on our forces. Our adversaries are cunning, they are adaptable, they are tenacious, and we will need to continually reaffirm our commitment and refine our tactics in response.

As all of you know, the operation in Helmand are going well so far. I will leave the specifics to Lieutenant General Paxton, but I do want to emphasize that this really is the first large-scale effort to fundamentally change how we are doing business, to protect the population as the top priority, to work very closely with our Afghan partners, to ensure that the clear operations that we're conducting actually pave the way for the hold and build with regard to governance and economic development.

I think you've seen an extraordinary level of civil- military planning and engagement with Afghan partners in the preparing of this operation, not only the government, but also local tribes and populations. But again, it's early days, too soon to draw any firm conclusions.

Let me just say, however, in conclusion that at this point in time I am cautiously optimistic. I do believe, as I said, we have the right mission, the right strategy, the right leadership, and the right resources. As we move forward, there will be challenges, but we will continue to adjust and ultimately I believe we will make progress towards our objectives.

So let me conclude there and turn it over to General Paxton to provide you more detail on the operations themselves. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Flournoy follows:]

[COMMITTEE INSERT]

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Secretary Flournoy.

General PAXTON..

**STATEMENT OF LT. GEN. JOHN M. PAXTON, JR., USMC,
DIRECTOR FOR OPERATIONS, J-3, THE JOINT STAFF**

General PAXTON. Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman, Senator McCain, and distinguished members of the committee. Thank you for your time today. As Secretary Flournoy noted, my remarks will focus on the current operations in the Central Helmand River Valley and I'd like to explain how these operations will fit into General McChrystal's overall context. That would be the first point. From there I'd like to move to how the operations were planned. The

third point would be how we work with our Afghan partners, and from there I'll take a look at where the operations are in their current phase of execution and then explain where we expect them to go.

In June of 2009, after assuming command of ISAF, General McChrystal embarked on an assessment of the situation in Afghanistan. He developed the campaign plan to provide a secure environment that would enable improved governance and development in all of Afghanistan. At the heart of the campaign plan were the requirements to: A, protect the Afghan people; B, enable the Afghan Security Forces; C, neutralize the malign influences; and then, D, support the extension of governance. Our operations today in the Central Helmand River Valley are directly tied to all four of those objectives.

In his assessment, General McChrystal identified southern Afghanistan as the main effort for the campaign. In southern Afghanistan, we intend to clear high population areas like the Central Helmand River Valley that are threatened by the insurgency. Right now our two largest points are to separate the insurgents from the population and then to demonstrate our resolve and our commitment to stay, as Senator McCain talked about earlier, so that we can gain credibility with the people of Afghanistan.

More importantly, our efforts are trying to build on the capabilities of the Afghan National Security Force and the legitimacy of the Afghan government. General McChrystal views these operations as essential to enable ISAF to seize the overall initiative in the campaign nationwide, to reverse the momentum of the insurgency, and to demonstrate resolve to the international community and, most importantly, to the people of Afghanistan.

The operation being executed, as noted by Senator Levin, Moshtarak, which means "together," is an accurate description of how the operation was planned and, most importantly, how it's being conducted today. Operation Moshtarak is the first operation in Afghanistan where coalition planning has been fully integrated with our Afghan partners from the very start. This planning has been integrated at all levels, from the provincial government, led by Governor Mangal, all the way up to the National level in Kabul.

It should be noted that the planning was not confined to just Afghan Security Forces. Planning for Operation Moshtarak was integrated with other efforts throughout the Afghan government. President Karzai was briefed himself on these operations and now has cabinet-level ownership of the operation itself.

Moshtarak is being executed in the four traditional phases of the COIN operation: the shape, the clear, the hold, and the build. Extensive shaping operations over the last several months were executed prior to the start of the clear operation. As noted before, these were done at not only the army level, but at the police level and the special operations forces level. So we were partnered in all three of those evolutions.

Shaping efforts involved Afghan and coalition forces. Most importantly, these shaping operations involved extensive interaction with local tribal leaders to ensure that their concerns were addressed before the start of the clearing operations as well as the current phase in the operation.

The clear phase was embarked upon last Saturday on the 13th of February. The clearing operations are being conducted with five Afghan National Army kandaks, roughly battalion-sized units, and three Afghan commando companies. In addition to the Afghan Army units, the operation will make use of about 1,000 Afghan National Civil Order Police, or ANCOPs, the Afghan special police that is nationally recruited. We are also in the process of training approximately a thousand new Afghan National Policemen who will reinforce Nad'Ali and Marjah later in the operation.

If I can at this time, I'd just like to draw your attention to the map here to my left and to your right, which shows you the geographic boundaries of the upper Central Helmand River Valley. It's a triangular area. It's roughly bordered by Garmser on the south, Lashkar Gah on the northeast, Marjah on the west, and Nad'Ali in the north. So that's the area where the operations are currently being confined to.

In order to meet the coalition force requirements for Operation Moshtarak, we accelerated the deployment of two Marine battalions from Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, which were made available by President Obama's decision to increase the force levels in Afghanistan. British forces have also been brought in, to bring the total size of the force to between 8 and 10,000 ISAF and Afghan National Security Forces combined troops.

Prior media announcements of the operation likely persuaded some of the Taliban leaders to flee the area, which has decreased the morale of those fighters who have remained. Within the first days of the clearing operations, the insurgents appeared to be in disarray. ISAF and Afghan National Security Forces encountered only sporadic insurgent contact or organized resistance. The insurgents appear to be focused on self-preservation rather than on an organized defense of the Central Helmand River Valley.

Pockets of resistance, however, still remain in Nad'Ali district. In Marjah there is stiff resistance from the remaining insurgents. The U.S. Marines, in partnership with the Afghan National Security Forces, are still fighting a series of intense actions in that area. Understanding how effective our forces are, the insurgents will continue to use IEDs as their primary weapon system. As many of you know, between 65 and 70 percent of our casualties continue to come from the IEDs.

There are encouraging signs that parts of Marjah are now starting to clear, that the ANCOP forces have been introduced into the area, and that it's now secure enough, as we noted last weekend, to even bring Governor Mangal back into Marjah for a series of successful meetings with the tribal elders. Ground commanders assess that the population is broadly on our side and are likely to remain so as long as they can be persuaded that we're making a genuine commitment to ensure their long-term security.

We are satisfied with the pace of operations so far and have decided to take a very deliberate approach to the continued clearing operations in order to protect the population. Although there have been isolated incidents of regrettable civilian casualties, we have seen the Taliban use the civilians as human shields in some cases.

In the weeks ahead, when conditions are appropriate—and I stress there again the conditions-based aspect of the operation—we

will transition to the hold and build phases of Operation Moshtarak. Our efforts during these two phases will focus on quickly rebuilding damaged infrastructure, on offering support to local communities, and supporting the reconstitution of the Afghan government and all institutions in Helmand. During the hold and build phases of the operations, the Afghan Security Forces on the ground will demonstrate the presence and resolve of the central Afghan government.

As I conclude my remarks, I would like to reiterate what both Senator McCain and Secretary Flournoy said, that, in spite of recent successes, we know this is going to be a hard fight. We know there are going to be pockets of intense resistance and there will be, as you said, Senator, perhaps one step forward, two steps back, for a while. But we're committed to the process and the work that lies ahead in partnership with our Afghan partners and coalition partners.

Thank you for your time.

[The prepared statement of General Paxton follows:]

[COMMITTEE INSERT]

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you very much, General.

Why don't we try an 8-minute first round.

We've read various reports as to how the Afghan forces are doing. Some reports are they're doing very well, they are in the fight, they are brave, they are doing everything which we would hope that they would do. Other reports are less positive. A report I believe in the New York Times yesterday was fairly negative, saying that it's mixed at best, that they're rarely in the lead, that they wait to be led, that they have not yet led one effort.

General, can you give us your assessment as to how the Afghan forces are doing. I'm going to ask you about the planning of the operation in a moment and the equipping, if you could get to that as well, whether they're adequately equipped. But most importantly is their willingness to engage.

General PAXTON. Thank you, sir. All indications are that they have been every bit as present as U.S. and coalition forces and every bit as engaged as U.S. and coalition forces. They're standards of operation and their training, of course, are much different than ours and I'm sure that leads to the wealth of discussions about how effective they have been. But if you go by the metric, sir, of have they been with us lockstep from the beginning, the answer is yes in terms of not only the planning, but the execution. I think the visibility of the Afghan national forces in the operation is what's going to lend credence and credibility to a partnered operation and start to build the confidence of the local population that this is not just coalition forces in there, sir.

Chairman LEVIN. Are we predominant, would you say—

General PAXTON. No, sir.

Chairman LEVIN.—in terms of numbers and in terms of taking the lead?

General PAXTON. We are certainly not predominant in terms of numbers, sir. The number of Afghan kandaks and commandos is larger than the number of U.S. and coalition forces by perhaps 1500 to 2,000. So their physical presence on the ground is more than ours. Having not been there myself, sir, the indications are

that it's been partnered every step of the way, sometimes them in the lead, sometimes us. Obviously, the face that we would like to put forward during the clear operations is the Afghan in the lead, because they have the cultural awareness and the ability to work with the population.

Chairman LEVIN. Well, that's good to hear. I think when we visited Afghanistan, as we have on a number of occasions, our leaders and our troops tell us that they have a lot of confidence in the Afghan forces. There have been some exceptions to that, but for the most part we were reassured that they have the willpower, they have the bravery, the willingness to engage. So your report is a good one and is reassuring. It's important that that be the case and the American people hear that that's the case, and equally important that the Afghan people hear that that's the case.

One of the issues which I have focused on, a number of us have here, is the question of the Afghan units, how many, what is their capability, the shortfalls that we have in their numbers, what the goals are in terms of numbers. But on our last visit we were given some pretty startling news, that the number of trainers of Afghan forces was only at about 37 percent of what was necessary. That came as a very disturbing bit of news to us, because there's so little excuse for there not being adequate trainers.

On February 19th, our supreme allied commander, Admiral Stavridis, said that NATO remains 2,000 trainers short of the number needed and he was hopeful that NATO would meet those levels when defense ministers meet, I think in Belgium, this week for a force generation conference.

I believe, Secretary, you indicated that there were 9,000 troops that had been forthcoming altogether from NATO allies and others. Where are we on the trainers issue?

Ms. FLOURNOY. We are still trying to fill a shortfall of about 2,000 trainers. That is the target going into the force generation conference on February 23. We are working very actively with our allies. I was on the phone myself with two ministers of defense this morning and we are making calls, really trying to put as much emphasis on contributions of institutional trainers as well as OMLTs and PMLTs as possible.

Training, as you know, training and developing the ANSF is the long pole in the tent in Afghanistan, and we have to support that effort with a fully resourced force. So we are pulling out all the stops to work towards that. We are also reexamining our own contributions to make sure that we're doing everything we can to fill that gap.

Chairman LEVIN. I think we've added a thousand trainers already, have we not? The first of the 30,000 have arrived and were put right into the training issue.

Ms. FLOURNOY. Yes.

Chairman LEVIN. The training, as I use the term, really includes three pieces, right? One is the first kind of 8-week basic training. Then we have the mentors who are OMLTs, as you call them, who are with their units. This would be just a handful of our people with each of the Afghan units. Then the perhaps most important part of the training is that partnering, that in-the-fight togetherness which you have described, which is probably the most signifi-

cant part of it. But unless you have that first 8- week basic training—and we're a thousand short of trainers that are not in combat; they are separated from combat. The idea that NATO has not carried out their commitments and they've only fulfilled 10 percent of their commitment as of the time we were there is, frankly, startling, shocking, and unacceptable to me.

I just hope that when our NATO allies are talked to and when we have these discussions that you can report two things, at least. One is we're grateful for those NATO allies who are there in the fight and who have given so much. We have a number of NATO allies who have done even more than their share. But many of our NATO allies have not stepped up as they have committed to, and it is that group of NATO allies that I'm particularly unhappy about.

My next question has to do with the "government in the box." Let me skip that because I think I only have a minute or 2 left. That has to do with the re-integration and reconciliation piece and as to whether or not we are involved already in a re-integration program in Central Helmand as part of Operation Moshtarak, first on the low- level Taliban fighters, whether we've seen any effort there to provide some incentives there, including amnesty and a job, and try to get them to renounce violence and switch their support from the Taliban to the Afghan government.

Has that begun? Is it too early because we're right in the middle of a fight, or where are we on that?

Ms. FLOURNOY. I think, first of all, let me say thank you to this committee and you all for demonstrating leadership in getting us the authorities to actually use some of our CERP funding for re-integration. We are putting the mechanisms to enable that in place. It's very much anticipated to be part of the operation, operations in Helmand and other parts of Afghanistan as the momentum shifts and as re-integration becomes more attractive to some of the low-level fighters who are willing to put down their weapons.

I think it's early days. I think there has been some small indications of interest, but that part of the program is definitely expected. It has yet to take off, I would say.

Chairman LEVIN. Just to wind that up, there's a loya jirga in March as I understand it. Do we expect that there will be a jointly approved re-integration plan between the Afghan government and we and our allies by that March loya jirga?

Ms. FLOURNOY. I would certainly hope so. That's something that we set ourselves as a goal coming out of the London conference, certainly for re-integration. We hope to have a full plan in place very soon.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you.

Senator McCain.

Senator McCAIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank the witnesses again for being here.

As you know, Secretary Flournoy—and please correct me if I'm wrong—General McChrystal's initial request for troop increase was about 40,000. The number of 30,000 I believe was arrived on counting on significant makeup of those shortfalls by additional contributions from our allies; is that correct?

Ms. FLOURNOY. Yes, sir.

Senator MCCAIN. Now, over the weekend the Dutch government just collapsed and they announced that they will be withdrawing, I think they said in August. That's 2,000 troops. The Canadians will be withdrawing. What are the prospects of us getting sufficient number of troops to make up that difference between the 40,000 that General McChrystal recommended and the 30,000 that are actually being deployed?

Ms. FLOURNOY. Well, I think that we are seeing NATO allies step up. The initial estimate was 7,000. It's now up to 9,000. We continue to have force generation conversations—

Senator MCCAIN. Are you taking into consideration the Dutch decision just to pull out?

Ms. FLOURNOY. Well, again, that is something that we will have to see once they form a new government, what the decision of that new government—

Senator MCCAIN. Well, they've announced that they are withdrawing, Madam Secretary. That's a matter of record.

Ms. FLOURNOY. That is the government that—that is the government's plan that just fell, but there will be a new government and we will see—

Senator MCCAIN. Do you have any prospect that they will remain in Afghanistan?

Ms. FLOURNOY. I think there are prospects that some form of some contribution from the Dutch, significant contribution, will—

Senator MCCAIN. Anywhere near the 2,000 they have there now?

Ms. FLOURNOY. Again, I don't think we can expect—

Senator MCCAIN. I think we all know what's reported in the media, Madam Secretary, and I think we ought to plan for it.

Now, the Canadians are leaving as well, is that correct?

Ms. FLOURNOY. I think not until 2011, is it?

General PAXTON. Yes, sir. What we have done is endeavor for those nations that we have a reasonable expectation are leaving to see if they would pony up folks for trainers and then we would take the U.S. or the other coalition and allied nations that are still there and we would do the differential by moving some of the existing forces into combat forces, but we would ask them to maintain on the training side, sir. Some have indicated that they would do that.

Senator MCCAIN. Well, I say with great respect you are getting different information than I am, including conversations that I had in Munich with our allies, our NATO allies. I believe that Senator Lieberman got the same impression.

Look, we might as well face up to the fact—and I don't want to spend all my time on this—that the Dutch are leaving. That's why their government collapsed. And to somehow hope that they will—I'm grateful for their participation and I have great sympathy for the losses they sustained. But we have to deal with realities of what the actual allied contribution is going to be and, very frankly, Madam Secretary, to somehow believe they're going to make up that difference I think is very different from the realities of their domestic political situation.

But, switching gears, Steven Coll wrote an article on the 15th of February in The New Yorker where he talks about that the key area in Afghanistan is Kandahar. Obviously, it's a historical seat of power, it's the birthplace of the Taliban. I think obviously you

know all those reasons. And he questions whether Kandahar shouldn't have been the focus of our offensive as opposed to the present one. General, maybe you can respond to that.

General PAXTON. Yes, sir. Since General McChrystal started his assessment last July, he had broken the country down into five potential areas for operations, sir. Some of this we can get to in the subsequent discussions in the closed session afterwards. But he divided those five areas into three groups: one where there was a focus of operations that we needed to initially go after a main effort; then there would be a supporting effort; and then the third group would be the economy of force effort.

Kandahar area was in that first large group of a main effort and a place we would go. But the General's assessment, and based on briefs through the Joint Chiefs and Chairman Levin, was that the Central Helmand River Valley was where the insurgency had the most safe havens, the most succor, the area that we really needed to go after first if we were to open up the freedom of movement throughout RC South. So I think you'll see, sir, that Kandahar will closely follow, but it just was not the preference for the initial attack, sir.

Senator MCCAIN. I keep hearing reports, General, that the rules of engagement are overly restrictive. Can you clear that up a little bit for us?

General PAXTON. Yes, sir. Thank you.

Senator MCCAIN. In other words, we're hearing reports they can't—even if they see an armed enemy, they can't fire unless they are fired upon. I don't know if that's true or not, but maybe you could clear that up.

General PAXTON. Yes, sir. Thanks. There has been much discussion on this in open sources here. There have been no changes to the rules of engagement, starting at the baseline for self-defense and then the rules for actually engaging an armed combatant. What General McChrystal has done through a series of at least three major tactical directives is give all his subordinate commanders litmus tests to look at to make sure that the administration of those fires, in the execution of the mission, you are not taking undue risk about putting civilian casualties in the equation or aggravating the mind set of the population by killing innocents that don't need to be engaged at that time.

Senator MCCAIN. So it's a careful balance between trying to reduce or eliminate civilian casualties and at the same time allow the military to defend themselves.

General PAXTON. That's correct.

Senator MCCAIN. You think they have the right balance?

General PAXTON. I think they do, sir. And I think, given the education of the force and the experience through many years now in both Afghanistan and Iraq, that our subordinate commanders can exercise that judgment call and use that litmus test properly, given the situation that they face, sir.

Senator MCCAIN. Secretary Flournoy, there are press reports that the Taliban have been able to build up their strength by about 35 percent over the past 2 years in the Afghan-Pakistan border, up by 7,000 more than in 2008 to about 27,000. Are those reports accurate and what do you attribute it to if they are?

Ms. FLOURNOY. Sir, I'd rather answer that in closed session if we could.

Senator MCCAIN. Okay. But it is an area of concern.

General, are we capturing significant numbers of Taliban fighters?

General PAXTON. Mr. Senator, we have captured some. I wouldn't classify it right now as significant. There have been some killed and some captured, and some have fled the area, if you will, sir. But we're waiting to assess how many and of what intelligence value they are, sir.

Senator MCCAIN. But the NATO forces are operating under the so-called 96-hour rule. They can only be detained for 96 hours and then they have to be released. Is that a problem?

General PAXTON. Sir, I'd have to get out to talk to the commanders on the ground and go back through General McChrystal to see if in the last 10 days that has posed a problem over there. None that I have heard of, sir.

Senator MCCAIN. Has this operation gone pretty much as you had thought that it would? Have there been any surprises?

General PAXTON. No, sir. I would characterize the operation—and you hate to say go according to plan. But the type—

Senator MCCAIN. As you expected?

General PAXTON. Yes, sir. The expectation that there would be a large amount of IEDs, that there would be bands to try and restrict our movement, that there would be focused complex attacks, all of that was exactly as we anticipated, sir. The fact that local nationals have and the civilian populace have started to identify to us where those IEDs are, the fact that some Taliban have departed the area, and the fact that we have already seen some markets and bazaars start to open as people entrust their livelihood and their security and safety to the Afghan forces and the coalition, that's heartening to us, but we just don't want to put too much stock in it right away. But we have seen some of that, sir.

Senator MCCAIN. Is there a significant presence of foreign fighters?

General PAXTON. I can't answer that right off the top of my head, sir. I'll go back and get that answer to find out, of those that we have killed or captured, what the percentage would be of foreign fighters as opposed to Taliban or Pashtu or Dari, sir.

Senator MCCAIN. Thank you. I thank the witness.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator McCain.

Senator Lieberman.

Senator LIEBERMAN. Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

Madam Secretary, General Paxton, thanks very much for being here. Secretary Flournoy, I wanted to ask you, in some sense following up on a question that Senator McCain asked about Kandahar, if you could explain how our operations in Marjah fit into the broader offensive to retake southern Afghanistan from the Taliban that I know will unfold as this year goes on.

I begin by asking if I'm correct in thinking that this—these activities, our operations in Marjah, are just a first step in a broader campaign to break the Taliban's momentum, and that the next step after Marjah is likely to be to focus on Kandahar?

Ms. FLOURNOY. General McChrystal has talked about this being a war of perceptions, and I think Marjah is an opening salvo. It is a first step. It is designed to create—to begin to create that shift in momentum. I think once we have that in Helmand the focus will very much shift to Kandahar Province.

That said, I want to, again just having come from the Arghandab, there are pockets where that shift is already taking place in Kandahar Province. So I think there is some positive momentum in areas there already.

Senator LIEBERMAN. Let me ask this question and invite General Paxton to get in, as well as a follow-up. My understanding is at this point the lion's share of the surge forces that have arrived in Afghanistan are in Helmand, where the population is smaller than in Kandahar, and Kandahar, as you well know, has a historic significance to the Taliban as a center of their operations.

So I wanted to ask you if you feel that we have enough forces, basically, to handle both? Can we fulfil General McChrystal's role or purpose of not just taking a town and then leaving it, in other words keeping some presence in Marjah and Helmand generally, and also have enough forces to move into the larger area of Kandahar? General, do you want to start?

General PAXTON. Thank you, Mr. Senator. I think your assessment's correct, sir. Part of this is—to your first part, we do believe, General McChrystal and then the assessment thereafter, that Marjah, Nad'Ali, and the Helmand River Valley was the place to start, again because of sanctuary and safe haven and the fact that we needed to crack the insurgent stronghold there, to open the freedom of movement, with a reasonable expectation that Kandahar was still going to be one of those cities that was part of the main effort, that we would have to go there.

But then to your second point, sir, you're absolutely right. There is a commitment on both the Afghan National Security and the coalition forces that we have to already lean into the hold and build phase while we're doing the clear phase. So consequently we can't outrun either our capacity or the limited numeric capability of the Afghan National Security.

So we are partnered with them with the expectation that they will stay in the Marjah-Nad'Ali area. Then some operations will have an overlap, but I wouldn't say they will be simultaneously. Some of them are going to be more sequential, sir.

Senator LIEBERMAN. So do you think we have enough troops there to do both, to both hold and build in Helmand and move on to take Kandahar City?

General PAXTON. Yes, sir, that is the plan. I'm sure again, because General McChrystal's assessment was that it would be conditions-based, I think we will be very careful and deliberate not to overstretch ourselves by moving on to another area before we've completely cleared or we have enough resident capacity to hold that area before we step off and go somewhere else, sir.

Senator LIEBERMAN. Secretary Flournoy, in this regard I remember when President Obama announced his decision to surge our forces, new strategy, etcetera, which I appreciated greatly, there was indication beyond the 30,000 American troops that were committed and the hope for 10,000 more, which we hope is realized,

but obviously developments in The Netherlands are of concern, that Secretary Gates would be given the latitude to increase the American presence, I believe it was, by 3 or 4,000 more, but anyway to increase the American presence beyond the 30,000.

Just remind me if I've got that correct, and if so is there any contemplation at this point, because of the resource-intensive nature of these drives, particularly if, as seems to be, and we're all thrilled to see it, we seem to be breaking the Taliban momentum in Marjah and perhaps have an opportunity to move on to Kandahar? My question really is, does Secretary Gates have that authority, and if so is he prepared to use it to seize the moment as we regain the momentum against the Taliban in Afghanistan to make sure we have enough troops on the ground?

Ms. FLOURNOY. When the President approved the additional forces for Afghanistan, he did give the Secretary of Defense the flexibility of about 10 percent to request additional troops should they be required. I think in the Secretary's mind, given his experience of the last couple of years, he anticipates that will most likely come in the form of critical enablers that have to do with force protection, lifesaving, mobility, and so forth. So I think that he's very much interested in seeing the force flow continue through the summer and then have that bit of flexibility to adjust should urgent needs emerge at that time.

Senator LIEBERMAN. Good. That's reassuring to hear.

Let me go to the capture of Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, top Taliban military commander in the Quetta shura Taliban, who was seized in the Pakistani city of Karachi. I wonder if either or both of you could assess for us what you think the operational impact of the capture of Mullah Baradar will be on the ability of the Taliban to wage its insurgency in Afghanistan?

Ms. FLOURNOY. Senator, I would be more comfortable answering this in closed session if that's all right with you.

Senator LIEBERMAN. Okay, that's okay with me. Perhaps the next one I was going to ask you'll feel the same way. But it's rare that we hear anything positive said in this country about the ISI, the Pakistani Intelligence Service, but it is true, I gather, that they participated, they were perhaps in the lead, in the capture of Mullah Baradar; is that correct?

Ms. FLOURNOY. Again, I would refer any details to the closed session. But what I would say is that the ISI has in many cases of counterterrorism operations been a very important partner for our intelligence agencies and actually contributed substantially to the capture of a number of high-level people from terrorist organizations. But I will Reserve comment on any specifics.

Senator LIEBERMAN. I appreciate that, and I appreciate your answer. I think, as we've learned as we've gone to Pakistan a lot and talked to our people there, that this is a mixed picture with the ISI. And that's saying something positive. In other words, it's not all negative.

Ms. FLOURNOY. It's not all negative.

Senator LIEBERMAN. Yes, the negative obviously is our concern that there continue to be contacts between some elements of the ISI and Lashkar-e-Taiba and other terrorist groups. But on the other hand, it is reassuring to note that in this action and others

that they have contributed significantly to counterterrorist actions by our own intelligence or military forces.

My time is up. Thank you very much. Thanks to General McChrystal and the troops. My own sense from here, and it's validated by what you've said, is that it's early, but we've begun a turnaround, and that's very significant.

Thank you.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Lieberman.

Senator LeMieux.

Senator LEMIEUX. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Secretary and General, for being here to answer our questions today. General Paxton, the news reports indicate that this effort could take a month or more. Do you have a time frame when you think that our troops will have achieved the mission in Marjah?

General PAXTON. I do not, Mr. Senator. Again, based on my earlier comments, it will largely be conditions-based and we'll have to see how these initial operations, particularly in Marjah and Nad'Ali and Garmser, turn out. But we're going to continue to press forward in partnership with the Afghans and with a high degree of energy there.

Again, the critical phase here of the four is actually the hold phase. So the clearing is what gets all the attention because of the casualties, because of the destruction, because of the kinetics involved. But it's going to be the transition from the clear to the hold that will be the most important, and that will be the condition that will allow us to know when it's time, as Senator Lieberman said, to perhaps look at another objective.

Senator LEMIEUX. I think you said earlier that we have sufficient troops for the hold phase?

General PAXTON. We believe at this time that we do, both U.S., coalition, and Afghan.

Senator LEMIEUX. One concern that's been expressed in the past is that when we fight the Taliban that they sometimes just throw down their weapons and recede back into the local civilization and then come out and fight us later. Afghanistan has traditionally had a fighting season. I think we're earlier than that. This is still before the fighting season. Any concern that these folks are melting back into the civilization and are going to come back later?

General PAXTON. There is always, sir, a concern that they'll come back. For right now, though, the ability to reclaim key terrain, reclaim areas of population and have them throw down their arms and leave is perhaps a good thing. Then if we can demonstrate a commitment to stay, if the population can demonstrate a resilience and an agreement to work with the Afghan Security Forces, then those who have thrown down their arms and left may be faced with two opportunities, of either retreating further or starting to think about reconciliation, which is where we want to go.

Senator LEMIEUX. Based on the ratio of the number of folks that we're capturing or killing, is there anything that would lead you to think that it's out of the normal based upon our experience? In other words, are there more people—are we not capturing enough or killing enough? Could there be more melting back into civilization, or lack of civilization?

General PAXTON. I think, based on 9 or 10 days, it's probably a little bit premature to make any of those, although there are some things we can talk about in closed session that would give us an indication that this may be a good opportunity that presents itself.

Senator LEMIEUX. Senator McCain spoke about the rules of engagement. I have in front of me an L.A. Times article from February 19 that talks about the Marines being warned of rough treatment or even harsh language aimed at a detainee, that when making an arrest they are asked to instruct the subject if they will go voluntarily with them.

Having met with General McChrystal, I understand the need to handle this in the right way. But do you think that these rules of engagement are appropriate? Are we giving our men and women the appropriate tools to do the job?

General PAXTON. Yes, sir, I think not only the rules of engagement kinetically about direct fire and indirect fire, but certainly the rules in terms of handling detainees, there's a clear line and distinction between what's appropriate for sensitive site exploitation and handling detainees and what is not. Again, it's based on the concept that you want to gain a potential source of information or a potential ally, as opposed to alienate some of the population that you may not have sufficient intelligence or indication right now is truly an enemy. So discretion is the better part here.

Senator LEMIEUX. Secretary Flournoy, in the discussions about forces who are aiding us in the coalition, NATO forces, I wonder if there are other countries outside of NATO that would be willing to help. I was in Columbia last week and saw the special forces, I think there was about 38 of them, who are deploying to go over to fight with us in Afghanistan. Are you looking at countries outside of NATO to lend support to our war-fighting effort?

Ms. FLOURNOY. Absolutely. We have allies like Australia, others from Asia. The Koreans are putting in a PRT. Countries from South America, as well as some from the Middle East who are also offering their training facilities as potential training sites over time for the Afghan National Security Forces. So I think we have many non-NATO partners who are also contributing importantly.

Senator LEMIEUX. Can that help us make up the difference if we lose some of these NATO folks?

Ms. FLOURNOY. We are certainly moving in that direction, yes.

Senator LEMIEUX. The last thing I want to touch on, and Chairman Levin briefly referenced it, is this notion of "government in a box." Part of that strategy and part of this whole counterinsurgency strategy is the communications efforts that we do to win the war of the hearts and minds of the people who have been under Taliban rule and may wonder whether or not we're staying and whether or not the information they're receiving from us is accurate or the Taliban is accurate.

When I was in Afghanistan at the end of October, there was some concern that we weren't doing as good of a job as we could be in the information department. We had met with a Colonel Kraft who was working in Special Forces, who had done a good job of radio stations and other types of communication to make sure that the Taliban people know what's true and not true.

Are you implementing those efforts in this offensive?

General PAXTON. Yes, sir. There's a very conscious messaging piece to it, both preparatory—and some folks would say we're almost telegraphing our punch. But it was again to try and force people to make a conscious decision to either cooperate or to leave the area.

But again, thanks to the good efforts of the committee here with things like CERP and things like that, we—part of it is the messaging, but the other part is the actual delivery of goods and services so that the populace doesn't feel that they owe allegiance to a shadow government who provides something that the local government cannot. So with the help of this committee and the help of the forces over there, we're able to provide the rudimentary, the start to clinics, to schools, to local governance, which is what the people seek.

Ms. FLOURNOY. If I could just add, part of the civilian surge going into Afghanistan is building up the civilian side of our ability not only to do our own strategic communications, but also to help build Afghan capacity, Afghan radio stations, Afghan media, Afghan press, and so forth. We have some new leadership going into that effort, some new resources, and I think that will begin paying off over the coming year as well.

Senator LEMIEUX. I had a chance to go to CENTCOM not too long ago in my home State. I think there was some concern that in the current budget request that there's not enough funding for these efforts going forward. I don't know if you have an opportunity to review that or have an opinion about it, but if not today, it's something we could maybe talk about in the future.

Ms. FLOURNOY. We are actually writing a very detailed report to Congress, as requested, on the whole of information operations, including in Afghanistan, and we'd be happy to discuss details for ways we could augment that effort.

Senator LEMIEUX. Thank you.

One last question. General, these folks that we see retreating when we're fighting them, are they heading south into Pakistan or are they heading to Kandahar? Is there one central focus of their migration or are they just kind of fleeing everywhere?

General PAXTON. Because there's many areas of combat, they're moving in a lot of different areas. I would tell you that some of the trend seems that they may be moving north and east. But we can discuss more of that in the closed session, sir.

Senator LEMIEUX. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator LeMieux.

Senator Ben Nelson.

Senator BEN NELSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Madam Secretary and General, for your service and for being here today. Beyond the clearing of, let's say, Marjah, is there any expectation or have we anticipated how long the hold and build phase might last in terms of Marjah?

General PAXTON. I don't believe we have, sir, simply because again the hold phase is the critical one and until we can see the efficacy of the Afghan security and the Afghan local government, I'm not sure we can be able to safely predict that on a time line, sir.

Ms. FLOURNOY. If I could, Senator.

Senator BEN NELSON. Sure.

Ms. FLOURNOY. This is—one of the unique qualities of this was bringing in Afghan ministries from the ground up, if you will, in the planning of this operation. What we're doing is dovetailing this with their own district development program. So the Afghan ministries that will be coming in to Marjah to set up district offices are actually going to stay indefinitely.

Senator BEN NELSON. Is that the "government in a box"?

Ms. FLOURNOY. That is the reference. It's sort of the beginning of government of Afghanistan enduring presence in these areas, that we hope will endure indefinitely.

Senator BEN NELSON. Well, part of the plan then apparently is to use as much or as many of the Afghan Security Forces of one sort or another for the holding, as much as it is the ISAF troops; is that accurate?

Ms. FLOURNOY. Yes. Initially it will be the Afghan National Police and eventually it will become—the ANCP, and then it will become the local police over time.

Senator BEN NELSON. Is there anything in particular that makes us believe that the Afghans are ready for this role of their own self-governance within some reasonable period of time?

Ms. FLOURNOY. Again, I think that certainly at the sub-national level, I think there's a real eagerness on the part of many populations to see development, to see responsive governance. Again, what we're seeing now is some of the ministries, many of the ministries in Kabul, stepping up to build their capacity to be present at the provincial and now the district level. They need our help with that. They need resources for that. But there is certainly an interest and a willingness, and I think they see this as an opportunity to move down the road towards achieving that.

Senator BEN NELSON. Is there a sense of decentralization going on here in this process? I don't mean that in a pejorative sense as much as I do recognizing that the local control and local interests have to prevail for this to be successful.

Ms. FLOURNOY. I think there's a sense that most Afghans experience governance at the local and district level, and that's where you have to really create momentum, if you will. It's where the Afghan government interfaces with more traditional social structures, tribes and clan elders and so forth. So I do think that's where the emphasis is, or much of the emphasis is right now.

General PAXTON. Sir, if I could, I believe there's a sweet spot in there, because obviously you want the local governance, the flourish, you want the trust and confidence in the local governance. That's what General McChrystal and his staff have tried to do by bringing Governor Mangal in there for some local shuras and jirgas.

But part of the reason to go back and brief the entire operation to President Karzai and to get the ministries to buy in was to force that connective tissue between the local government and the National government, so that the local governance would not be on their own and then would die on the vine. So we're trying to force not only the security issue with the Afghan National Security Forces, but the governance between local and national as well, sir.

Senator BEN NELSON. Are we running into similar problems as we experienced in Iraq, sectarian differences creating a challenge to have local governance?

Ms. FLOURNOY. I guess I would say there are tribal dynamics at work and—

Senator BEN NELSON. But those are different than sectarian, religious sectarian.

Ms. FLOURNOY. Yes. And so I think that part of the challenge in Afghanistan is to seek governance processes that will enable balance at the local level with competing groups that have sometimes competing interests or histories of grievance. So that's one of the things where having Afghan partners really helps us to sort of work through those issues at the local level and make sure that there's a process for adjudicating those. That's part of what has given the Taliban traction, the absence of any kind of adjudication mechanism, any kind of justice. I think the more we restore that in terms of local governance, the less room for the Taliban.

Senator BEN NELSON. Well, we might learn a great deal about the Helmand Province area. Is that something that we can then as—an experience or an education that we receive there, will that help us in the other provinces? Because this isn't going to be limited to that central part of Afghanistan.

Ms. FLOURNOY. I think many of the players will change, but I think a lot of the lessons learned will translate.

General PAXTON. I was just going to say, sir, we're always looking to capture success stories, best of breed, and to see what is transferable. We have to be very cautious. Just as we didn't want to make sure everything was literally transferable from Iraq to Afghanistan, in the same way it may not be transferable between Helmand and Kunar or Kunduz or any of the other.

But we are looking for things that are transferable and, as Secretary Flournoy indicated, some of the indications in Afghanistan is it's more about intimidation and tribal dynamics and corruption and neglect than it is about sectarian issues, as it may have been in Iraq. But we're watching that, sir.

Senator BEN NELSON. Well, we're hopeful that the "government in a box" concept will be acceptable to those local tribal leaders. Will there be a general resistance to the central nature of that "government in a box"?

Ms. FLOURNOY. I think if—one of the things we're doing is using development to enhance the reach and legitimacy of the local government. So again I can draw on the example of what I saw in Arghandab. What you have is the development piece creating momentum that brings people to the district government to be able to participate in that. So it is really enabling the local government in a way that it hasn't been enabled before.

Senator BEN NELSON. One final question as it relates to counterinsurgency. Is the training that's under way for our troops in Afghanistan as well as for the Afghan forces sufficient for counterinsurgency? Are we closing the knowledge gap in Afghanistan, as we apparently were doing in Iraq, on counterinsurgency?

General PAXTON. Yes, sir. I think I can assure you that the training is adequate to the task. That doesn't mean it's perfect because we're always looking to improve it, sir, both the tactics, techniques,

and procedures we use best on best of breed and lessons learned, changes to the equipment, defining things that work better in certain conditions or environments. But we are capturing that, and all indications are from our National Training Center, our JRTC, and what we're doing here in the States, as well as what we do in Europe, that it's adequate to the task, sir.

Senator BEN NELSON. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Nelson.

Senator Hagan.

Senator HAGAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

As one of the Senators from North Carolina, I want to definitely give kudos to our Marines from Camp Lejeune that are leading these efforts in Afghanistan. The 2nd Marine Expeditionary Brigade of approximately 10,900 Marines, under the command of Brigadier General Nicholson, are doing an excellent job in Helmand Province and the current Marjah offensive. There are four Marine task forces under the 2nd MEB's operational structure and I'm proud to say that the 1st Battalion of the 6th Marine Regiment was the first unit deployed to Afghanistan as part of President Obama's decision to deploy the additional 30,000 troops. I'm also proud of the Marine Special Ops Command of approximately 300 Marines that's heading the Special Ops Task Force in Afghanistan.

One of the concerns that I continue to have is the maiming and killing of a number of our soldiers due to the IEDs. I know that in Afghanistan they are difficult to detect because of the small amount of metallic content. But I want to be sure that our service members have the best defense available to protect them against what I believe is the greatest source of combat casualties.

Several week ago I met with Lieutenant General Oates and we were talking about this and I was concerned that he stated that we were only able to detect about 50 percent, to detect and mitigate about 50 percent of the IEDs.

Lieutenant General Paxton, I know that Secretary Gates mentioned that you are chairing a counter-IED task force—I'm sorry, that Under Secretary Carter and you are chairing an IED task force. What are some of your observations regarding the types of intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, and human intelligence assets that we need to increase the IED detection and mitigation above this current 50 percent rate? And how can we better assist at the brigade and battalion levels?

General PAXTON. Thank you, Senator. I am indeed one of the co-chairs on the Secretary's counter-IED task force. We are looking at this through a technology aspect, a training aspect, and then an equipping aspect. So there's at least three component pieces to the way you defeat.

As I'm sure General Oates passed on to you, ma'am, there are three things that we look at: actually defeating the device, developing the network, and then building the intelligence that goes behind that. So we are looking at best of breed from technology across the United States, whether it's soil conditions and IR and EO and different types of photographs that we can take, take a look about how we can work with local nationals to tell us where they have been.

I think the operations in Marjah so far will tell us that about 65 or 70 percent of the IEDs that we do detect are being passed on to us by word of mouth from local nationals. That's a good sign because they watch and they know where they are, and they will tell us things that we cannot necessarily pick up from technology. That goes to the heart of the very reason that population-centric COIN and the deliberate piece of the shaping and clear is so important here, because that cuts down on the number of IEDs present or at least it improves the opportunity to find IEDs.

So we'll have the opportunity here over the next 3 or 4 months, ma'am, to come back with the IED task force and to further elaborate both technologically and in training about where we're going, and the good things that are resident in our capabilities that we want to capitalize on, either get more of or get into the fight or pass off to the Afghan National Security. That's one of our components, is to see what kind of things the U.S. forces have that we may be able to share with coalition partners and allies, ma'am.

Senator HAGAN. So the human intelligence asset is a great contributor in this endeavor right now?

General PAXTON. Yes, Senator. The human aspect is probably the most important right now. You always think that you can rely on technology and there will be a better type of photograph or a better type of sensor. But eyes on target or somebody who watched it get emplaced is still the most positive and most reliable indicator.

Senator HAGAN. You mentioned "EO". I'm not familiar with that.

General PAXTON. Electro-optical or infrared, all the different types of photographs and scanning capability we may have, either from an elevated line of sight platform or something in the air.

Senator HAGAN. Also, I know that in Afghanistan the ammonium nitrate is part of the component parts. I was curious, has the Pakistan military taken an active role in countering the smuggling of this ammonium nitrate into Afghanistan, and if not how can we engage them to address this important factor?

Ms. FLOURNOY. We did succeed in working with the Afghan government to ban ammonium nitrate on their side of the border, and we have raised this issue with the Pakistani government in hopes that they will also assist. But we have yet—this has just come about, so we have yet to hear back from them their position on this issue.

General PAXTON. If I may, Senator, obviously there are legitimate uses for it for agriculture and legitimate uses for it for cratering and quarrying and road construction and things that they need for infrastructure and development. So we are now in the process of trying to work with the two governments, Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as with our intelligence detection sources, to figure out where it's produced, how much is necessary, and then how much of it is above and beyond that. A lot of that may go to the heart of import-export controls and how those local governments track how much they bring in, how much they make, how much they export. There's where I know Secretary Flournoy, Secretary Carter, and I will continue to work on that, ma'am.

Senator HAGAN. Thank you.

Reportedly, elements of the Afghan Taliban high command are beginning to relocate from the city of Quetta in Pakistan's Balu-

chistan Province to the city of Karachi, due in large part to drone attacks. Obviously, this makes it more difficult to locate and apprehend the senior Taliban leadership because Karachi is a major metropolitan city with over 3 million Pashtuns.

How will the Afghan Taliban high command's relocation to Karachi impact the U.S.-Pakistani intelligence efforts to apprehend them?

Ms. FLOURNOY. I'm not sure I'm the right person to answer that, because it may be more for some of our intelligence agency brethren. But we could certainly talk about it more in a closed session.

Senator HAGAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Hagan.

Let's just try a fairly brief second round. We'll start with 5 minutes.

You indicated, General, there were five kandaks, five battalions, of the Afghans. Do you know offhand and could you tell us in open session if you do, whether or not those units are at the highest level of capability, CM-1, or whether they're CM-2, or whether these are new troops that are coming in straight from basic training?

General PAXTON. Sir, I cannot right now. I think I can get that answer for you and perhaps in closed session I could pass that, sir.

Chairman LEVIN. All right, thank you.

There is an integrated decisionmaking process there between us and the Afghans, I understand, within that operational command. Does the Afghan commander approve all aspects of the operations? Is that a joint decision?

General PAXTON. Sir, I know there is an Afghan corps who developed the concept of operations in parallel with the MEB commander, with the force commander there, and then briefed it and did what we call the ROC drill, the rehearsal of combat drill, with RC South. So I know they have been intimately involved in the collaborative planning.

I do not know, in terms of the command and control relationships, who has the final say and whether it is single, collaborative, how they work that, sir. My estimate is, based on military experiences, that you can only have one commander at one time. So they will partner in terms of who controls which piece of the battle space and who is making a decision on a clear piece and who on a hold or who on a maneuver and who on a fire. So they're probably doing that collaboratively, sir.

Chairman LEVIN. Would you let us know for the record—

General PAXTON. Yes, sir.

Chairman LEVIN.—the answer to that question?

[The information referred to follows:]

[COMMITTEE INSERT]

Chairman LEVIN. There was a very strong surge in recruiting in the Afghan Army and it came right after the President made it clear in his West Point speech that he was serious in terms of not being an open-ended commitment, not being an occupation army, by the way in which he framed the beginning of the drawdown. Our general there who's in charge of training of the Afghans was very specific about the surge that came at the end of 2009 in the Afghan recruits.

Do we know whether or not that recruitment has continued to be strong through January?

General PAXTON. Yes, sir, it has. Both the recruitment has continued and the retention and reenlistment has continued, sir. So they are—although we are still behind our fiscal year 2010 goal, we are still continuing to see increases in recruiting, and I think we're up between 57 and 60 percent on retention, which is below the 65 percent goal, but it's going well, sir.

Chairman LEVIN. Well, that's great news. Thank you.

Secretary Flournoy, can you give us an idea as to the role of President Karzai and his cabinet in the run-up to this operation? How involved were they, including the minister of defense, Minister Atmar, other ministers, as well as obviously the president?

But then I also want to give you the other straw, kind of the village elders, as to how much consultation was there with them prior to this operation, the villages in Helmand Province?

Ms. FLOURNOY. Consultation with both was extensive. I think on the Afghan government side in Kabul, in addition to the National security ministries, defense, interior, NDS, and so forth, you also had the ministries that would really have lead responsibility in the hold and build phase also brought into the planning from the start. So you have a very high level of ownership and involvement at the cabinet level.

I think President Karzai—General McChrystal briefed President Karzai several times. The final time it was really engaging him to approve the operation and the start time. At the local level, they had—

Chairman LEVIN. Was that approval forthcoming?

Ms. FLOURNOY. Yes.

Chairman LEVIN. Was President Karzai accurately quoted when he said that that was the first time that he had been asked to make that kind of decision?

Ms. FLOURNOY. I think it was the first time he had ever been asked, yes.

At the local level, there were multiple shuras with the local community, really talking to them about the situation on the ground, whether they wanted their area to be cleared, whether they wanted to be rid of the Taliban, whether they wanted Afghan and coalition forces to come in, and sort of working through with them what it would look like and are they prepared for the risk that would be involved.

So I think that also very much set the conditions for the local population to have real buy-in into the operation. This wasn't just something happening to them. This is something that they actually asked for.

Chairman LEVIN. Can you generalize, characterize the response of the village elders at those shuras, as to whether they generally were supportive, whether they were kind of neutral, critical?

Ms. FLOURNOY. I think initially there was probably some skepticism, but I think in conversation the vast majority of them became very supportive. But they were also very clear that they wanted not just a clearing, they wanted the hold and the build, and they wanted legitimate and responsive governance at the end of the day when it was all over.

Chairman LEVIN. When you say shape, clear, hold, build, I've had some conversations where I've suggested we add the word "transfer."

Ms. FLOURNOY. Transfer or transition, I think that is very much part of the plan.

Chairman LEVIN. I think it was—I've forgot who it was, whether it was Admiral Mullen or who it was that said that they were going to add that fifth stage of transition or transfer.

Ms. FLOURNOY. It may take our doctrine a while to catch up, but that is the idea.

Chairman LEVIN. I think it's really important to everybody. It's important to us, it's important to our people, it's important to the Afghans, that that be seen as a goal of this mission, not just to shape, clear, hold, build, but the transition. So I hope, General, you'd add that to your sequence there.

Thank you.

General PAXTON. Yes, sir.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you.

Senator Lieberman.

Senator LIEBERMAN. Mr. Chairman, I think it's best I save my questions for the closed session, though I'm trying to play Scrabble in my mind with what word I can come up with with "Shape, Clear, Hold, Build, and Transition." I don't have one yet, but there's an acronym there somewhere.

Thank you.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Lieberman.

My final question here for the open session is the question of metrics or milestones. Senator Nelson, among others, has been one of the members of the committee who's put a lot of focus on this. We have been given—and I misspoke the other day when I said we were not given milestones, because apparently we had been given milestones. But they were classified milestones.

So if we haven't already made the request for unclassified milestones, we would make that request now. That would include kind of the metrics here. I don't know if metrics and milestones are synonymous. But if you could give us some metrics, not today, as to how we would judge the Afghan people's trust. It may be impossible. You know, it's not just public opinion polls. Is there any other way that you can gauge that, and if there is it would be welcome along with those unclassified milestones.

Finally, for both of you, we've worked on a chart which I think both of you have, which is a matter of milestones. It's a chart which shows the end strength currently of the Afghan Army, the objective in October, October 2010, and July of 2011, the capability status of the Afghan battalions starting with the baseline being last December for all of these, this chart of progress, call it a progress chart. Battalions that are partnered, this is something which is extremely important here, in RC South and RC East. How many of those partnered battalions are fully integrated? Lieutenant General Rodriguez gave us some numbers or is giving us numbers in terms of full integration, not just the partnering but fully integrated using, I believe his words. And the trainers, which we here call "initial trainers," which is the first 8 weeks of training, so he

would give us what is the requirement, how many are assigned, what the shortfall is.

I think we will add—my staff is hearing this for the first time. This is a work in progress, as you would say. We're adding recruiters and retention to that: What was the number of recruiters we already got with the initial trainers column, but what is the retention as well, if you can give us numbers on that.

I'm pretty sure in your offices you will have that chart, but we will give you an up-to-date one.

Ms. FLOURNOY. I have not yet seen it, sir, but I will be happy to help you fill it out.

Chairman LEVIN. I'm pretty sure that in your office, General, you do—

General PAXTON. Yes, sir. I just saw the most recent version just this morning, sir.

Chairman LEVIN. And I know you've probably been working on it, and you've been helpful in getting us those numbers.

We thank you again and we will see you over at the Visitors Center.

[Whereupon, at 3:56 p.m., the committee adjourned.]