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WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION:

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JOHN HAMRE: I'll ask General Abizaid to come up here for his open remarks. Let me just first say, thank you all for coming. I was talking to General Abizaid before, and he said, who is going to be at this thing? And I said, oh it's your standard group of policy wonks and maybe a few hippies. Well, it doesn't look like your normal CSIS crowd. It's a pretty establishment bunch. But I'm really delighted you could all come and I'm glad you're here. I don't need to introduce John Abizaid to you all. So, I think I'll do it for everyone who is behind those TV cameras back there. And that's just to say, we have the privilege this afternoon of listening to one of the most thoughtful general officers that I know.

I've had the privilege of seeing and working with John Abizaid for about 10 years, always really from a distance; we never really had the chance to be close. But I must say, I marveled at his leadership and his ability in every position he was in, and he's just done a superb job. And of course you all know that he most recently was our combatant commander in charge of the Central Command. I say this for a very important reason. My one strategic goal is we not let this meeting deteriorate into a discussion about Iraq. I'm going to do everything I can to keep this discussion in a broader frame of reference than just Iraq. Because one thing that's happening is that it's sucking the oxygen out of too many other discussions and conversations we need to have in America.

John is a gifted linguist, a gifted general officer. You know of his leadership in many different domains. He's got some former army general officer friends of longstanding who are here today. I want to thank you, Gordon, thank you for coming. You and Ted, we're delighted to have you here. And we're going to make this a very vivid dialogue between you and the general. He's going to offer some preliminary observations and then I'm going to start off with a couple of questions and then I want to pull on all of you to make this a lively afternoon. So let me say thank you to you, Tom, thank you for coming, and I introduce and welcome the General John Abizaid to this debate. Thank you. (Applause.)

GENERAL JOHN ABIZAID: Thank you, sir. I guess we're okay with this. I need to adjust my mike some? You all right? Testing. Turn this one off? What do you want me to do? You have to understand that the technical matters that 2,000 of my staff used to work on are now handled by me alone, and my wife. And my wife is really not too impressed with what I do these days. (Laughter.)

So, first of all, it's great to be here. Thank you, sir, for the invitation to be here. It's good to see an awful lot of people I know in the audience, and I'm happy to have the opportunity to come here and talk about some very interesting things that are going on in the Central Command area of responsibility. I am not here to critique or offer any sort of observations about what my colleague Dave Petraeus is doing, or Ryan Crocker. I am here to talk about broad strategic trends in the region and I look forward to do that.

Earlier today, I was at the Defense Intelligence Agency. I had a chance to go over there and see the young folks that are in the Defense Intelligence College working towards the important things that they're doing, primarily majors, lieutenant colonels in the armed forces of the United States, plus senior civilians in the Defense Intelligence Agency. And we had a very spirited discussion about where things are headed, what's going on strategically. And whenever I talk to a group like that, I always come away most impressed, just like whenever I deal with members of our own armed forces; they are confident; they are competent, and they know what they are all about and the nation is lucky to have them.

The Central Command area of operations, as many of you know, goes from Kazakhstan up in the north, made famous by Borat so everybody can readily identify with where that is and what's going on there, come on down through Central Asia to include Afghanistan, Pakistan, cross Iran into the heart of the Middle East, Saudi Arabia, skip on over to the African side where you have Egypt, Sudan, Somalia, Kenya, et cetera. Twenty-five countries used to be in it, and then 27 countries became in it. And I served in this region for about five years as both a deputy commander and a commander. And before that, I served in the region a lot, so I have great respect for the people in the region and I think I have a pretty good understanding of what's going on.

Before I really get into the meat of my presentation, I want to tell you how we went from 25 countries to 27 countries. And back in, I don't know, maybe three years ago, Secretary Rumsfeld called me up and he said, John, I'm – or maybe he said, General Abizaid, I can't recall – but he said, I'm thinking about giving you Lebanon and Syria, which were in the European Command area of responsibility and what do you think about that? So, those of you who think there's no dialogue, you're absolutely wrong.

I said, well, Mr. Secretary, thanks for this discussion. I'm of the opinion that there's a war in Iraq, a war in Afghanistan, a lot of activity in the horn of Africa, terrorism endemic throughout the region, a lot of other problems, and all things being equal, I'd just as soon not have them transferred to my area. And he said, well, thanks very much, you've got them. (Laughter.)

And, you know, I said, okay, I understand. While you're at it, why don't you give me North Korea? And he did not do that, but I just wanted to make sure you understand that between senior level people at the highest levels of our military and political interface areas, there's a lot of dialogue that goes on. (Laughter.) And it's important for you to understand that.

The Middle East today is, in Central Asia, the horn of Africa, the world that we have to deal with on a daily basis, has a lot of interesting things happening in it, and I believe what we're seeing in the Middle East today, in many respects, is the first conflict of a globalizing planet. It's about the integrators who want to be part of the globalizing economy, the globalizing information grid, all sorts of other globalizing events that are taking place, versus the disintegrators, who don't want that to happen. And it's important

for us to put in context what's going on in the region so that we can understand what challenges the future may hold for the United States of America, regardless of what happens in Iraq or Afghanistan.

Now, I believe there are four really broad strategic challenges in the region that deserve our attention. And these broad challenges I'm going to outline are going to be with us no matter who gets elected in 2008; as a matter of fact, no matter who gets elected in 2012. These are long-term geo-strategic challenges that we all have to pay attention to. They are movements; they are imperatives or ideas, but they are problems that have national security implications for us that really deserve our special attention.

And the first one is – and in my mind the most dangerous one – is the rise of Sunni Islamic extremism as exemplified by bin Laden and associated groups. And we are foolish to think that this is not a challenge. They managed to figure out how to attack us here. They've managed to figure out how to attack on a broad scale. They threaten nearly every legitimate government in the region. They are global. They have organized virtually. They are networked. They are dangerous. And this strategic imperative deserves our great vigilance and our careful concern.

The second big issue is equally interesting, perhaps less dangerous, in at least the short term, but one that we've got to consider. And it's the rise of Shi'a extremist revolutionary power as exemplified by the role played by the state of Iran: their development of nuclear weapons, their use of intelligence power, their meddling in Afghanistan and Iraq, their desire to be a hegemon in the Persian Gulf region. Iranian Shi'a revolutionary power deserves our concern. And both these movements, Sunni extremism, as evidenced by al Qaeda, and Iranian extremism, as evidenced by the current regime of Iran, are not friendly to the United States and will not be friendly to the United States, and desire to up-end us from the region for different reasons, but that's certainly what they desire.

The third big problem in the region in my mind, and, of course, it's always difficult to try to condense big problems in a region as diverse and as wonderful as the Middle East, Central Asia, and the horn of Africa. But the third issue that I think we have to pay attention to is the continuing, corrosive effect of the Arab-Israeli conflict. It drives people towards extremism, whether we like it or not. And we've got to figure out how we will protect our ally and good friends, the Israelis, and at the same time move towards a solution that allow the Palestinians an opportunity to exist the way a free people should exist in that part of the world. It's a terrible challenge. It's a difficult challenge. But the continued, corrosive nature of it drives people in a direction that makes solution to these other two problems very, very difficult.

And the fourth big strategic issue in the region is the necessity for the global economy to rely upon the movement of oil from the Middle East. It's just not our economy; it's all of the economy of developed nations; it's all of the economy of every nation in the region. But the movement of oil through the region, to the region, that fuels this great globalizing movement that is going on, is absolutely imperative to maintain.

And it's an imperative under the current circumstances, in my mind, for United States military power to be part of all that.

These four problems: rise of Sunni extremism, rise of Shi'a extremism, the continued, corrosive effect of the Arab-Israeli problem, and the requirement of the world economy to deal with oil mean that this part of the world will draw our attention from a security standpoint – not just our attention, but everybody's attention – for a long time. And the challenge for us is how to shape the outcome for the good of the integrators and the globalizers, and at the same time, not give credence to these ideas and ideologies that seek to dominate the region and impose a dark vision of what's going on out there.

There are two interesting problems that are associated with all of this that I think are somewhat different from the way things were 10 or 15 years ago. I mean, Sunni extremism has existed before, Shi'a extremism has existed before, the Arab-Israeli conflict has been going on for a long time, the flow of oil and the requirement to protect – all of these continue. But there is an ideology, especially in the form of al Qaeda, that if it ever goes mainstream, will drive us towards a very, very difficult choice about how much we have to be involved in there.

And it's absolutely essential that we understand that the vast majority of people in the region do not want al Qaeda extremism to become mainstream. They don't regard it even as being Islamic. But it's still resilient' it's dangerous; it's difficult, and it's managed to figure out how to dominate the virtual space in a way that all of us need to contemplate and figure how to contest.

These movements, these problems, are accelerated by the problem associated with the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. And it's a very interesting problem when we think about it, because we discredited the argument as a result of going into Iraq and really not finding the amount of weapons of mass destruction that we thought were there. Yet, there is absolutely clear evidence that al Qaeda, Iran, and other groups in the region seek to acquire or develop a weapon of mass destruction. And it's absolutely essential that everybody understand that if they do, especially al Qaeda, they will move to bring it here.

And while people say, this is certainly not something that can happen easily, I would say if there is a general security problem associated with events in Pakistan, which I don't anticipate, but could happen, and the army tends to have a problem with the security of their nuclear devices, it's not out of the realm of possible that such a device could find its way into the hands of extremists. And the extremists have said on I don't know how many different occasions that they intend to bring a weapon of mass destruction our way, whether it's direct, to try to bring it in within our borders, or indirect, to try to bring it where it would influence the movement of oil in the region or would have a big impact in Europe, remains to be seen.

The virtual space and the development and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, mean to me, whether we like it or not, that there is a long struggle ahead in

the region against extremism; not just for our good, but for the good of the people in the region. And what we need to do is figure out how to move forward in a way where we gain partners that allow us to enable the people in the region to help themselves against this threat as, over time, we diminish some of our operating requirements. Iraq and Afghanistan are undoubtedly our most immediate problems in the region; we've got to do everything we can to stabilize Iraq. We've got to do everything we can to stabilize Afghanistan. We've got to contest the safe haven that exists on the Afghan-Pakistan border area. We've got to prevent the spread of extremism down into the horn of Africa and elsewhere.

But you also have to understand that as a group such as al Qaeda becomes pressured in one particular area, it's like water and it seeks to move to the lowest area; it seeks to move to an area where there are no obstacles to dominate safe havens. And, while we have the five-second sound bite mentality of our own history, they have a 500-year sound bite mentality that gives them a lot of patience and a lot of resiliency that we need to pay attention to. So, I believe that we are in for a long struggle; but I believe that we are in for a long struggle in which we have a golden opportunity before us.

If we had had the chance to organize ourselves in the late 1920s or the early 1930s against fascism, after having read *Mein Kampf*, just think of the problem we would have saved ourselves. We do have the chance today, in my mind, to organize ourselves with the people in the region to provide a bulwark against the ideology of Sunni and Shi'a extremism in a way that will allow this greater good of globalization to take place in the region.

Now, I want to talk about five different things that I think are important to talk about from a military perspective that we need to be thinking about, and then we'll go into the question and answers, and have an opportunity for the dialogue that everybody desires. First and foremost, in today's environment, counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations will be the norm, although you can envision a problem developing with Iraq that causes, or with Iran, excuse me, that causes a state-to-state war. I think it is more likely that counterinsurgency and counterterrorism is the norm for military operations.

It's important that we understand that these four problems that I talked about are going to require us to confront al Qaeda wherever we find it, either directly or indirectly with the help of our friends, allies, and partners in the region, to contain Iranian power, to move towards a solution of the Arab-Israeli problem, and to keep the flow of oil moving. That's all going to require some form of American military power, but what this type of warfare will mean for us is that the 360-degree war is with us.

There are no front lines; there are no rear lines. The 360-degree war that our forces are facing in Iraq and are facing in Afghanistan is with us and it's not a temporary condition. And our tactics, techniques, procedures, and equipment must reflect the fact that the 360-degree war is with us. Now we talked about it from 1991 until the current conflicts, but we really didn't design the force to be able to fight 360, but we have to

understand that there are no front lines anymore. We've got to protect ourselves. We've got to have a well-integrated system of military equipment, tactics, techniques, and procedures that is first and foremost joint – that means all of the armed services operating together – and secondly, well integrated from a command and control point of view.

The second point I want to make is that precision matters. And believe it or not, it's the precision of weapons today that has kept the cost of this war from being much higher than it has been. The precision that we are able to achieve with precise weaponry, coupled with good intelligence, is actually a thing to behold, if you're a military professional. But I would tell you that the precision enabled by the intelligence community is not yet precise enough. We went through a period where we essentially gutted our human intelligence capabilities. We have increased those human intelligence capabilities. They're probably twice as good now than they were at the beginning of the current conflict. But they're not as good as they need to be. And so, as we move forward, precision intelligence has to coupled with precision weaponry in order to be able to get at these targets without turning people in the target areas completely against us.

The third point I'd like to make on things that we need to do differently have to do with the need to establish interagency commands that are empowered to take action. This war will not be won by military means alone. Every military commander who has been in the region has said that. They're not saying that because they don't think that they can win. They're saying that because they want help. They need to have help from the diplomatic, the political, economic, informational, and intelligence parts of the United States government in order to put it all together in a way that allows for unity of action, yet unity of action in a de-centralized way.

Now currently in the field, military commanders have the authority to act locally. But most of the other agencies of the U.S. government tend to go back through Washington to discuss how they should operate, get their instructions, et cetera, et cetera. And so, while you may have a military commander who's not stovepiped for authorities, you do have the rest of the government. And this creates a dynamic where things have to come together in Washington and then filter back on down for action to take place in a proper manner out in the field.

International and interagency commands empowered to act regionally are going to have to be the way we go to fight this threat in the 21st century. It requires linked and shared intelligence -- in an unprecedented degree, as a matter of fact. We've done pretty well in that regard but we need to do better. We need to be able to get the intelligence information to the Iraqi Army or the Afghan Army or the Pakistani Army or the Saudi Army that's fighting opponents that we oppose. We've got to get it to them in a way that they can use in a timely manner and we're going to have to break through that particular problem that we have.

The fourth point I'll make is that we've got to contest the virtual space. In the Napoleonic era, war was land and sea. Those were the two domains of war. Then we went into the World War I area and we added air; land, sea and air. Then we graduated

into the Korean area and gradually space became a domain in which we had to operate. Today, we have to operate, not only land, sea, air, and space, but we have to understand that the virtual domain is a domain of war that requires our constant attention and vigilance and it's just not an area to be watched. It's an area in which to fight.

Al Qaeda gains great strength from its ability to organize, proselytize, equip, train – you name it – within the virtual space. And they often do it sometimes with servers and Internet providers that are right here in our own country that are unwittingly acting as gateways to this enemy. This virtual space is a tough area for us to operate in because we understand we've got to protect the privacy of our own citizens as they do their legitimate business there. But on the other hand, it just has to be a matter of national priority to figure out how we can test the enemies where I consider to be uninterrupted space or uninterrupted presence in that space. It gives them an organizing ability and a strength that is unprecedented in any terrorist organization's history.

Finally, we have got to figure out how to empower our friends and allies in the region to help themselves. We've got to have authorities to give commanders, State Department officers, CIA people -- to have authority to give them a piece of equipment that a friendly nation might need in order to fight a common enemy. It shouldn't take us six months to a year to get night-vision devices to key allies that may need them in the fight against Al Qaeda.

We have to have authorities for action, not legislation for inaction. It's important that we look to see what we need in the 21st century to allow people on the ground to take action to help our friends and allies in a way that allows them to be successful on the battlefield. And today, you see our special operation forces, both in Iraq and Afghanistan, operating with great speed, great precision, and great effect. They have done a wonderful job. They have set the model for many of these things I have talked about.

Yet on the other hand, they do that on a big architectural footprint established by a large American presence, and it is absolutely essential that as we move forward in this long conflict that's ahead that we figure out how to empower our counterterrorist and counterinsurgency forces and methods and techniques and procedures from an architecture that's established by friendly host nations, cooperative governments, and like-minded individuals who do not want the extremists to win.

I am absolutely confident that the United States of America can lead this fight in a cooperative and collaborative manner with the vast majority of people who don't want Bin Ladenism to become the ideology of the Middle East or of the world. I'm absolutely confident that we can stop Iranian expansionism. I'm confident that a solution can be found to the Arab-Israeli Conflict and I'm also confident that over time, we'll figure out how to wean ourselves off of Middle Eastern oil. Sooner or later but probably not sooner.

So, my confidence, my optimism are such that I believe these things can be done. I don't think they'll be easy. I think 21st century warfare is unlike that which we have fought before. It's borderless. Nation-states are less relevant today than they used to be. It requires a different way of doing business, but if we fail to adapt our national security structures to deal with the 21st century problems that we're facing today, we could inadvertently move into a period of a major conflict in the middle of the 21st century that none of us would want or could afford.

I believe that just as in 1947, we were able to reform our national security structures to deal with the emerging problems of a bipolar world and our struggle against international Communism, so can we adopt and adapt and reform new structures that will deal with these very, very significant problems and keep our country and our kids safe.

I want to close by saying that over the past nearly five years in the middle of the Middle East, I have just had great, enormous faith and confidence in our young men and women that have been over there fighting. They are brave. They are courageous. They deserve your continued support regardless of what you may think of the politics. We sent them there to do the nation's job. Please make sure you understand how much they're giving of themselves and of their family to get the job done for us.

We need to adapt our tools to make them more successful. We can do that but it's time that we start the debate. Thanks.

(Applause.)

MR. HAMRE: John, thank you very much. Let me, as I said, I'm going to fight to try to keep this from becoming a press conference. But I can see we're going to probably move that way at some point. Let me ask a couple of questions to begin with and then I'll open it up.

First, you basically said we need to mobilize ourselves to fight this global campaign against Islamic extremism. My question to you is it doesn't seem -- from what I hear, the people in the Middle East don't think that we're fighting extremism. They feel we're fighting mainline Islam. Is that a misperception on our part? If not, how did we get there? What do we do about it? Can you expand on that?

GEN. ABIZOID: Yes. I mean, even adding the word Islamic extremism or qualifying it to Sunni Islamic extremism or qualifying it further to Sunni Islamic extremism as exemplified by governments such as Bin Laden all make it very, very difficult because the battle of words is meaningful, especially in the Middle East to people.

And so, I do think -- and I had a chance to get to know many of the regional leaders out there -- that they clearly understand that we, collectively, are fighting a problem that they don't want to win and we don't want to win. The problem that we

have to face is how are we going to work together to keep this problem from becoming mainstream.

You know, it was mainstream once before. It was mainstream down in Afghanistan or up in Afghanistan. They used soccer stadiums for execution, all sorts of problems associated with women participating in societies.

You know, you just look at this joyless kind of a world. People have experienced that. They don't want it to win.

I think I saw in the Washington Post today, an article about what Hamas is doing with people in Gaza. People don't want to live that way. They have the windows opened caused by the information revolution and they want to figure out how, within their own cultural context, they join that. And I'm absolutely convinced that the vast majority of the people don't want the extremists to win. They don't want them to win in Al Anbar Province. They don't want them to win in the Pashtun areas of Pakistan. They don't want them to win in Saudi Arabia. But the key is to figure out how we don't turn this into Samuel Huntington's battle of civilizations and we work towards an area where we respect mainstream Islam.

There's nothing Islamic about Bin Laden's philosophy. There's nothing Islamic about suicide bombing. I mean, you know, I believe that, you know, these are huge difficulties that we need to overcome. This notion of Christianity versus Islam. It's not that. It doesn't need to be that but if this ideology becomes mainstream, just as if Fascism became mainstream in Nazi Germany, it could prevent or provide us with, you know, our worst nightmare.

MR. HAMRE: Could I press, though? Have we worked out the national narrative?

GEN ABIZAID: You can press but I've been pressed by people harder than you. (Laughter.) You know, in the Senate and elsewhere, you know. No, I'm sorry. I'm sorry. (Laughter.)

MR. HAMRE: Yes, but have we worked out the national narrative? I mean, during the Cold War, we all knew what we were doing and the whole world had a clearer conception of it. Have we got that here and does it connect?

GEN. ABIZAID: No. Yes, it's a great question. I'm sorry.

MR. HAMRE: Does it connect with average citizens in the Middle East? I have a feeling we haven't found that national narrative yet.

GEN. ABIZAID: We haven't found the national narrative. They haven't found the national narrative but there are points of commonality, and we need to start talking

about how we're going to solve the common problem. There's clear recognition that there's a common problem. People in Dubai do not want to live under Sharia law.

MR. HAMRE: John, you said that, you know, the world is now divided between integrator and disintegrators. This might be a bit too provocative but did America move from being an integrator to a disintegrator after 9/11?

GEN. ABIZOID: America moved to protect its vital interest as it saw it was threatened. And I, again, you know, as a soldier, I'm not going to comment on how we got to where we got but I will comment on the clear fact that we have a broad global problem, not only for us, but for our European friends, for our East Asian friends.

It's really – this problem of a very, very deadly ideology continuing to stay alive in a way that could gain adherence or gain mainstream credibility somewhere is one that we all need to pay attention to. We let it happen when the Bolsheviks came to power; we let it happen when the fascists came to power in the 21st century, and we can't let it happen now, especially when we have the opportunity to bond with the people in the region to work together to prevent it. It requires a lot more bridging of the cultural gap, and today I was really gratified talking to the young officers at the Defense Intelligence Agency, both civilian and military, on how much work they're doing to try to understand the culture.

And it's kind of like that movie "Cool Hand Luke." What we have here is a failure to communicate. Well, what we need to do, in the 21st century, is figure out how we're going to bridge the cultural and communication gap, and there's no reason why we can't. But this isn't World War II. The idea that there is some army or capital to capture or destroy in the Middle East is wrong. There is an ideology to face and defeat. And that's what we need to get on with. We need to get on with the battle of ideas, and it requires more application of national soft power, international soft power than has come to bear so far.

MR. HAMRE: Okay, colleagues, let me open up a – open up for some – the microphone's just coming please.

Q: The challenge of fighting extremism requires two other variables that you didn't mention. One is how to create jobs, how to create prosperity. The Middle East is full of young people, so one way of winning against extremists, one way of wiping out al Qaeda is how do you create jobs.

Secondly, we need to create a liberal political environment in the Middle East. And these are two factors that are crucial to winning the battle against radicalism and extremism.

(Cross talk.)

GEN. ABIZAID: Oh, that's a real -- you're lining up the next question. I think I am overpowering the system again. Okay, I apologize. No, it's okay it's probably just -- ever since I've been to Nevada, I've been talking louder. I'm living in Nevada. It's a lot like the Afghan-Pakistan border area. (Laughter.) And it's a very good area. I like it -- wonderful people, et cetera.

Sir, thanks for the question. Every commander in Iraq, down to the lieutenant level, has probably said it one time or another: You've got to get the angry young men off the streets. Not only did they say that in Iraq, they said it in Bosnia. They said it in Kosovo. Wherever we've been, whatever failed state we've been to, since the end of the Cold War, we've said that. And that's absolutely essential. And you know, there's an idea out there and it's debatable, and I understand it's debatable. The idea is: first, you must establish security, then economic activity can take place, then political activity can take place, and that these things are sequential. I think that's not true in the 21st century, especially in this type of war. You've got to come to a solution that allows for economic activity to take place even though there's huge risks associated with it.

We can't wait for things to get better; we need to invest in Iraq now. We can't just invest in Kurdistan. We've got to invest in Kurdistan, in the Sunni areas, we've got to get people to work and it can't just be by having them join the army or the police force.

So, if you go around the Middle East today -- I think those of you and many of you in the room have -- it's booming. In most places, it's booming. Even in parts of Iraq, it's booming. How do we convince our friends and partners in the region to invest in what might be a bad investment, but what ultimately will be a good investment? And by the way, that only doesn't apply to Iraq. It applies to most of Africa, and it applies to other places as well. As the world globalizes, it's my opinion we have no choice but to invest in areas that are dangerous and difficult. And we need to figure out how to help business do that in a way that allows them to share some of the risk.

The second point on liberalizing governments -- now, perhaps I'm being too optimistic here. I believe the world is liberalizing whether we like it or not. And one of the reasons it's liberalizing is because the openness of the virtual world and the international communications revolution has created an area where even the most distant person in the mountains of Yemen can somehow or other get information that allows them to see how other people are living. And they've come to the conclusion that they don't want to be disadvantaged. And I believe that there is a bottoms-up sort of pressure developing on political classes and elites not only in very highly sophisticated places where there's a lot of resources in the Persian Gulf, but also elsewhere in the region. And while this degree of political liberalization is slow by our terms, if we compare it to our own political liberalization that we went through, we should understand that it takes an awful lot of time.

So the question for us isn't whether or not democracy can be achieved tomorrow. It's whether or not governments will become accountable, people will have an opportunity for more prosperity, and terrorism will not become endemic in the region,

and I believe that that's happening slowly, but surely. And in many respects, I believe that's probably the centerpiece of the battle.

Q: General, is this on? General Abizaid, as you know, aside from the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, a major source of irritation for people in the Arab world is the large U.S. military presence in the region. So I'm wondering if you can address the issue of how the United States can secure its vital national security interests in the region without maintaining such a large – for lack of a better term – imperial footprint in the region – 170,000 troops in Iraq, large installations in Kuwait, UAE, Bahrain, Qatar, et cetera.

GEN ABIZAID: Look, I think I've said for a long time that I think our footprint is too large there. So I don't disagree with the premise that we have too many forces in the region. But I also believe that there are many places in the region where there is a need for American military power in collaborative manner to cooperate with the vast majority of nations that are out there. And so, while you have to understand that I also said Iraq has got to stabilize, and Afghanistan has got to stabilize, these are two very, very hard and difficult tasks obviously that will take a lot of time. But I do believe that over time, those numbers of American forces can come down.

And the reason I say that is, first of all, for the cultural reasons that all of us know. As a matter of fact, it's not just cultural in the Middle East; it's cultural anywhere. If there were a bunch of tanks in downtown Washington, D.C., people would get tired of it really quickly. Well, the same sort of problem exists. And we've got to work overtime to get the force presence down, turn over more and more responsibility to the good people of the region that are interested in fighting for their own good, for their own reasons, collaboratively work with them in a way that allows us to share resources and capabilities, tactics, techniques, and procedures.

It means that it's got to be easier to train their forces. It's got to be easier to deal with counterinsurgency and counterterrorist forces. It means that we've got to be able to not have a foreign military sales program that is so bureaucratic that it's almost impossible to sell anybody anything that they need to defend themselves. So I think that there are collaborative ways that we can work with the people in the region. And the vast majority of them want to work with us if we can just keep, over time, reducing the footprint from what it is now.

And remember, on the 10th of September, 2001, we had about 25,000 forces in the region. The question is how do we start moving back down in that direction? And I believe that we can; I believe people want us to. But I also say that even in places where people consistently say they want us out, when you say, do you want us out tomorrow, they don't want us out tomorrow. They want us out when they're able to take more control of themselves. I mean, it's kind of the central challenge.

It's not really – the argument about whether we stay or whether we go is really a false argument. First of all, it's a tactical argument about Iraq only. The truth of the

matter is, we have got to find a way to stabilize Iraq and Afghanistan in a way that our resources can last, that our Army can hold together, that the people in the region take more responsibility.

But if we think we can control the Middle East, we're wrong. We can't control it; we shouldn't try to. Any great power that has ever tried to control the Middle East, from the Romans through the British to many other great powers, have all found – to their great peril – that control is not the operative word. Shape – now there's a word that I think we might all be able to live with. And that requires a sense of mutual shared interest common enemies.

MR. HAMRE: Lloyd Hand? Right here.

GEN. ABIZOID: And if I just may, sir, just one other point. I'd also say that air and naval power, they have a way of being less intrusive. And there's this other power known as the power of our Special Operations forces that trains people. That's also very unobtrusive. But we have to enable those collaborative efforts and not get in the way of them. We have to make them happen as opposed to what we've done in the past, which is prevent them from happening.

Q: General, first, thank you for your leadership at CENTCOM and for the country and for sharing your views with us. Going to your second strategic concern, Iran, I'm sure you're aware of the proliferations of articles leading to the effect that we are poised to attack Iran. Would you comment what your assessment is of the likelihood and the consequences of that occurring?

GEN. ABIZOID: Certainly I am not going to talk about any contingency plans that I was involved in; nothing I'm going to say here is going to be classified. And I want to give you my opinion, which should not be construed to any longer represent an official source. I'm very unofficial. I believe that we can contain Iran. I believe that Iran is a dangerous power with a government that is in control that happens to be dangerous, that seeks weapons of mass destruction, that is reckless in the way that they use their intelligence service, that has caused casualties to numerous forces besides our own in the region, and it's also a nation that seeks to dominate their neighbors.

And I believe that the United States, with our great military power, can contain Iran, that the United States can deliver clear messages to the Iranians that makes it clear to them that while they may develop one or two nuclear weapons, they'll never be able to compete with us in our true military might and power, and they should underestimate either our resolve or our ability to deal with them in the event of war. We need to understand that war in the state-to-state sense in that part of the region would be devastating for everybody, and we should avoid it, in my mind, to every extent that we can.

On the other hand, we can't allow the Iranians to continue to push in ways that are injurious to our vital interest, which is a very, very tough thing to do, both diplomatically

and militarily. I can assure you, however, that the vast strength of the United States of America can deal with an Iranian challenge. I can assure you that while the vast majority of the government is hostile – maybe even the word vast majority is not a good term – it's clear to me from looking at an awful lot of different open sources that people in Iran are open to the idea of joining the rest of the world, and we should contain this government while giving the people in Iran the opportunity to move in a direction that will eventually not only free themselves, but allow them to be a member of a vital part of the globalizing economy.

And I think they're moving in that direction. I hate to urge patience, but we should be patient.

MR. HAMRE: Arnaud de Borchgrave, up here. Just a second, Arnaud, the microphone.

Q: General, in relation to your reply to this last question, I assume that what you mean to say is that we have to learn to live with an Iranian bomb. As the French foreign minister was saying yesterday, there are two options – learn to live with the bomb or bomb Iran.

GEN. ABIZAID: I would not assume that I assumed to say that. (Laughter.) I think it is not inevitable that Iran will make a breakthrough. It's likely, but it's not inevitable. We should not endorse any sort of a development of a nuclear weapon; not only for Iran, but for anybody else. This problem with weapons of mass destruction is going to be all of our new worst nightmare if we keep allowing it to move in the proliferating directions that it's moving. More and more irresponsible people having access to the weapon of mass destruction is not what any of us need. Clearly, a development of the bomb in Iranian hands will cause other nations in the region to move in a like direction. And in a very unstable region like that, that is not good news.

We need to press the international community as hard as we possibly can and the Iranians to cease and desist on the development of a nuclear weapon. And we should not preclude any option that we may have to deal with it. And so, I think there are ways to live, as the French president probably meant. There are ways to live with a nuclear Iran. Let's face it, we lived with a nuclear Soviet Union; we've lived with a nuclear China; we're living with nuclear other powers as well. But I would tell you, I think it's very, very important that we do what we can to prevent that from happening. And we should not underestimate our ability to do that.

MR. HAMRE: In the back, below the cameras, last row.

Q: George Devendorf with Mercy Corps, an international relief and development organization. General, you mentioned the importance of soft power in your remarks, presumably how best to blend soft power with the harder elements at the U.S.' disposal. I'm curious, as some of your former colleagues are busy today establishing a new regional command in Africa, what sort of advice would you offer them – or perhaps

maybe you are offering them – as they wrestle with the challenges of trying to combine those various elements in pursuing U.S. national interests in Africa?

GEN. ABIZAIID: Well, as the Africa command steps up, I'd say it's absolutely essential that the other agencies of the U.S. government empower their senior people to make decisions at the regional level. So the CIA person should not have to go to Washington to make decisions, should have authority over station chiefs, as should the senior ambassador in that command. And ultimately, it's not out of the realm of possible to think of that command being a command that doesn't necessarily need to be commanded by an American general, but could be commanded by a senior State Department officer.

I mean, we need to think differently about how the job gets done in the 21st century. And if we think it's primarily a diplomatic theatre, we should empower the diplomats. But if we're going to do something like that, we need to take all those people that are going to go into that business, and we need to say, forget everything you've learned over the past 25 years of your careers that has told you to protect your turf and your agency and your bureaucracy, and think now about how we're going to make this command work for the good of the nation, and at the same time work within the strength of your agencies. The bureaucracies need to be force providers. The joint commands need to be empowered; not only militarily, but with the people that are in the region, or with the other agencies of the U.S. government.

And, we need to ask for allies to come in; not with red cards to play, but to fully come in and to fully participate without red cards, so that we can achieve the unity and synchronization and the cooperation of effort necessary to win in the 21st century. In other words, we need to become as networked as al Qaeda. It takes a network to beat a network, and we're going to have to figure out how to do that.

The final thing I'd say on this is, I don't know that I'd necessarily be worried about one other imperial power being in the region. I'm not so sure that I necessary agree that the world is going to be a contest of nation-states. I think it's going to be a contest of globalizing ideologies and movements that may somehow or other be attached to the nation-state, and that requires a different approach to the way things go. And in that sense, borders are less important.

And finally, I'd say, I'd also tell the guys in that command and the gals in that command, you need to tell the non-governmental organizations that they can't operate on a neutral battlefield anymore, because the enemy won't let them be neutral. The enemy has decided that there are no neutral forces in the field. Al Qaeda doesn't recognize the Red Cross. Al Qaeda doesn't recognize Doctors without Borders. We all need to say, look, within an established framework, how are we all going to pull together to do what has to be done, which is to make these areas more resilient against extremism and more capable of joining the 21st century. And I think that's something we can do, and I would hope that the Africa Command gives us that opportunity.

I would actually hope that we can reorganize our national security structures to empower that; not just in the Africa Command, but everywhere. We can't keep going through a battle of the epic proportion with an awful lot of bureaucratic walls and turf issues getting in the way of what needs to be done. And most of us that have been out there fighting, I think we have a pretty good idea of what needs to be done. Getting our hands around the tools is something else.

And also, there needs to be legislation that doesn't prevent commanders in these interagency commands from taking action, but actually empowers them. Let's let them take action first before we stop it. That's hard to do in the 24/7 news cycle, I understand.

MR. HAMRE: This lady right here and then up to Gordon. (Inaudible.)

Q Sir, you've spent your professional career in the military, and you cherish its traditions and its heritage. I wonder what you can share with us about how to prevent the Abu Ghirabs of the future. What can be done proactively to ensure that the kind of abuses that the world has been shocked to see don't recur?

GEN. ABIZAIID: Look we have to fight this war without walking away from our own values. That has to do with the United States armed forces; it has to do with every one of us. It has to do with the Central Intelligence Agency; it has to do with every one of our operating establishments that is in the field of action. I think there is always room for a legitimate debate. But we know when we've crossed the line. We crossed the line in Abu Ghirab. We can't put up with it. We have to do everything we can to prevent it from happening. But we also have to understand in war, terrible things happen. And when they happen, we've got to take action necessary.

And so, the most important thing that officers in the field, whether they're State Department officers, DEA officers, American officers of the military, have got to face is that when the time comes to choose between doing the wrong thing and the right thing, the nation expects them to do the right thing, even though it may be more dangerous to them. And that's what we believe in; that's what we've got to do. And that's what we commanders – not we anymore, but that's what those commanders – must continue to do. So it's a tough thing; terrible things happen in war; soldiers hate war precisely because of that. But discipline is more than just staying within some rule of engagement. Discipline is doing the right thing when you know the difference between right and wrong.

MR. HAMRE: General Sullivan, right down here in the very front.

Q: John, what are your thoughts on Europe, Central Europe and this ideological movement to the West? I know it wasn't your most recent area of interest, but you did serve in the Balkans and elsewhere, which I think everybody knows. You have any thoughts for us with this group?

GEN. ABIZAIID: Yeah, well, now that I'm a civilian, I have all sorts of interesting opinions, some of which are based on fact, and others based on something

else. But with regard to al Qaeda and the move of extremism as exemplified by al Qaeda and the groups associated with them, I think that the Western Europeans should be extremely concerned. I think al Qaeda has an intellectual safe haven that allows them to operate with a greater degree of impunity there than in the heart of the Middle East. As a matter of fact, in the heart of the Middle East, nearly every single country is in some way or another operating against al Qaeda, either openly or through their intelligence services. And they contest that battlefield pretty strenuously for all the reasons we've talked about here today.

In Europe, there is this mistaken belief that these ideas pervaded by al Qaeda might somehow or other fit within the framework of something that we can live with. They can't live with it. People in the region can't live with it. And I think that our European friends and allies need to understand that this enemy intends for them the same thing they do for everybody else. And they've got to get with it.

Now, you know, I went to Britain, our best ally in this effort thus far, and I talked to them. And I talked to members of the cabinet many years ago about what I considered to be a long war. And after I said that, somebody said, well, I agreed with what you said, but your terminology is bad. I said, well, what don't you like? Long and war. I said, okay, but the enemy has a say. And the enemy tends to want it to be long and war.

And the question for us is let's call it something, and let's pull together internationally in a way that allows us to fight this struggle with concerted global action that protects our values, that allows people in the region to develop politically in a way that is I think inevitable in the global environment and devote national resources to that. It's not about a particular street in downtown Baghdad; it's about a global problem and phenomenon that needs to be confronted.

Q: Thank you, General Abizaid. Of the four items you mentioned and for U.S. interests in general, Turkey remains a crucial ally. But there remains one particular thorn on the side of U.S.-Turkish relations, which was in your area of responsibility. It was the PKK presence in Northern Iraq. Can I have some insight on this issue, and why do you think that the U.S. hasn't been able to satisfy Turkey's requests in battling the PKK?

GEN. ABIZAID: Why do I think that the U.S. is unmindful of Turkish requests? I guess it depends upon your point of view.

Q: No, the operable word is to Turkey's satisfaction, I suppose.

GEN. ABIZAID: Yeah, look, I understand there is a lot of dissatisfaction. I understand. And by the way, I have great respect for our Turkish allies and I certainly have worked very closely with the Turkish military. I respect the secular republic that they have built. And I respect just the great nation and all that we have done together. But this point of conflict over the PKK and what's going on with the Kurds is a point that we're going to have to continue to talk about. And threats, I think, only make the

situation worse, especially when you understand how much other work has to be done inside of Iraq. You can only do so much.

And I believe that we can find a way with our Turkish friends, President Talabani, President Barzani, that will allow the PKK problems from within Iraq to diminish. And I believe that they think it's in their interest to do so, and we've just got to figure out how to do it. I'm not saying it's an easy thing to do. I think we all agree that the PKK is a terrorist organization. We agree that it can't be allowed to operate. But there is also something that I would tell you that we all need to understand. We don't know everything, nor do the Turks about where they are, where they operate, how they operate. And so, just like the targeting issue on Osama bin Laden and Zawahiri is difficult, so is it on other things. So it's a very, very complex and difficult problem to solve, but I think a good strong dialogue like that, which General Ralston has committed to is the best way ahead and we should pursue it.

And I also believe that ultimately, it will be American and Turkish relationship that moves forward together to confront this very great danger; not only to us but to the Turkish Republic. And I think that we've had a temporary setback in our relationship, but I believe over time that our mutual common interests will move us together in a good way.

MR. HAMRE: (Off mike.)

Q: General, I'm wondering if, speaking as a civilian, you could give us your assessment of what's been accomplished with the strains in strategy in Iraq with the surge of additional forces and kind of look to the long term. What does the long-term military presence, in your view, need to be in Iraq? How long will it take before that stabilization you talked about is accomplished and we can have that kind of significantly smaller footprint you talked about?

GEN. ABIZOID: Well, thanks. I'm not going to comment on how the surge is working and how it's not working, primarily because when I was the commander of CENTCOM, I didn't appreciate it when retired generals helped me. They always helped me in a particularly negative way. (Laughter.)

But I would tell you that my vision of how things will go in Iraq, is that Iraq will begin to stabilize three to five years out. That doesn't mean that American forces need to stay there at the current level or increase. It could very well mean, and it should mean, that we require more of our Iraqi friends. We demand more of Iraqi friends. We adjust our operating procedures and we start to bring the force down over time, in order to have a less obtrusive footprint. And I believe that if you listen very closely to what people are saying today that there appears to be agreement.

You know, this notion of when you bring the force down is actually the issue, and it's a timing issue. And what we should watch out for is having discussions about numbers become hard numbers at the top or the bottom because military commanders

need flexibility to deal with current conditions. And sometimes, it might require that we have to reinforce, not just come down. Ultimately, the Iraqis want us out, and ultimately, we want to get out. But ultimately, both of us want us to leave Iraq in a stable enough condition that it can be a member of the responsible nations in the region that doesn't harbor terrorism and promises a better future for its people.

You know, I think that's a huge task, but I do think it's achievable. I believe, if I were to say anything about the current team over there, they're a good team and the team at CENTCOM is a good team. You know, this issue that we do in the United States about always pointing the finger at a particular person – and I don't know how many different articles I've read about how we lost Iraq where I've been named – you know, it's actually much, much more difficult than that. It's got to be a national – it's actually got to be an international effort to stabilize Iraq, and it requires just not one-sided input from the United States of America, but international input and input from the Iraqis as well. Complicated equation, but it can be done. And I understand that folks are tired of it. And I understand why.

MR. HAMRE: (Off mike.)

Q: General Abizaid, I'd like to ask, given that General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker said that the joint campaign plan that was concluded about a year ago indicated the military was failing to meet its goals on several fronts, and given that you did advocate against a major troop increase in Iraq, saying that the Army and Marine Corps couldn't sustain it and that the Iraqis needed to take charge, what would you have done in that situation?

GEN. ABIZAID: What would I have done in what situation?

Q: What would you have done when you had a joint campaign plan saying that the effort was failing?

GEN. ABIZAID: Well, I don't know of any joint campaign plan that said that an effort was failing. Look, I understand there have been huge difficulties in Iraq and it's very interesting about where the difficulties come from. If you think there's a military solution to the problem of Iraq, I would beg to differ with you. The problem of Iraq is more political than it is anything else. A national unity government after the elections at the end of '06 – '05 – the national unity government failed to materialize. From that point, things started moving in a very, very difficult direction and I think that things are moving in a way that should allow the country to stabilize over time.

But it can't be done with a surge of military forces only. It must be done with a surge of national and international power to bring the solution to the problem in a way that distributes effort as opposed to focuses it on an area that can only buy time. Military forces can gain time, but they can only gain time for other things to come to bear. And in particular, it has to do with governments.

MR. HAMRE: (Off mike.)

GEN. ABIZAIID: Now we're getting to the difficult questions of Iraq. Come on Tom, don't – you're not going to do that are you?

Q: It's about Iran, actually.

GEN. ABIZAIID: Oh, excellent.

Q: But first of all, Dr. Hamre, thanks to you and CSIS for hosting this and general, thanks for your time. A minute ago, you were talking about Iran, you said, there are ways to live with a nuclear Iran. Knowing what you know of that government, does standard deterrents theory work or in this environment would some new kind of deterrents regime have to be created? And to flip that on its head, should deterrents fail or should the commander-in-chief determine that a preemptive strike is required, what sorts of efforts in advance, both hard and soft power, would be required to mitigate what would be a possible catastrophic risk to our national security elsewhere by attacking another Islamic nation?

GEN. ABIZAIID: Well, look, we need to understand that I believe nuclear deterrence will work with the Iranians. That's my opinion. I mean, Iran is not a suicide nation. They may have some people in charge that don't appear to be rational, but I doubt that the Iranians intend to attack us with a nuclear weapon. And I can't speak for the president for the United States or any of our other national leaders about what they might do, but the Iranians should contemplate what a nuclear attack on the United States would mean. And so, I believe that we shouldn't throw deterrence theory out the window because of unstable leaders.

Just like the United States isn't subject to any one person doing any one particular thing with regard to our national security, neither is a giant country like Iran. There's an awful lot of people that want the Islamic Republic of Iran to continue to move forward in the modern world, including many, if not most of their people.

So I believe that we have the power to deter Iran, should it become nuclear. But I'll go back to my point that I made with Arnaud. I believe we should do everything in our power to prevent them from getting a nuclear weapon and that's a difficult road to move down.

MR. HAMRE: (Off mike.)

Q: Thank you. If you were asked to speak to a major western oil company on the challenge for the imperative to maintain the oil economy, could you give us some of your recommendations to that kind of group for maintaining the economy and with this pressure to drive us from the region?

GEN. ABIZAID: Well, I think those four imperatives that I talked about are not just imperatives for the United States, but they're imperatives for everybody. And so, those four imperatives, to me, mean that we're not going to be driven from the region. Number one, we're not going to leave and number two, our friends and allies in the region are not going to ask us to leave. They're going to ask us to do things differently. And therein lies the challenge.

And for me, I guess, I wouldn't be advising a national oil company about anything or an international oil company. I would say that we have to figure out how to diversify energy resources for our own good for a lot of reasons; environmental, international security, you name it. And the sooner we get on with it, the better. We just can't let the market take its course any more. We've got to figure out how to be less reliant, not only on Middle Eastern oil, but oil in general. And I believe it's a very important thing that has to be done. That's a personal belief.

MR. HAMRE: (Off mike.)

Q: General, could you talk a little bit about the mistakes that were made in both the planning and execution of the invasion? Secretary Gates brought it up at the press conference the other day. He kind of opened the door when he said we did make mistakes. General Pace was asked by a couple of us in the press and he acknowledged some of those. I'd like to get your perspective because you were there at the inception and well into it.

GEN. ABIZAID: I was there as the deputy commander at the earliest points. And look, I think I already alluded to many of them, you know, in my discussion about what we need to do differently and, you know, certainly the 360-degree tactics, techniques, procedures that we need to adopt. That wasn't in place when we crossed the berm in March of '03.

And again, I think I made the point in my talk that you have to ask yourself, when do we do what we say versus – because we said after the 1991 war that all war was going to be 360. Yet, we failed to harden up the force. All right, it has a lot to do with resources. Has a lot to do with different things but, you know, that's certainly a lesson that I think is very important.

Another lesson that's very important is to make sure that we understand what resources we're going to commit over time for stabilization. And I think if it ever again becomes necessary to take down a country that's for a national security reason that we think is essential in our national interest to go after, we better make sure that we know the direction that we're headed with regard to the building and establishment of their armed forces, police forces, and other security establishments and adopt timelines that are realistic in the nation-building concept.

You know, for so many years, we walked away from the term nation building. And I think we have to understand what's going on in Iraq and Afghanistan is nation building. What's going on Bosnia and Kosovo; it's nation building.

And, you know, there's a political context to it. I'm not giving it to you in the political context. I'm giving it to you in the context of bringing all of the assets to bear of the United States of America. And, again, that's just not military power. That's all the soft power that the national and the international community can bring to bear.

Some places, we do it well. But even when we do it well, like in Bosnia, people look to Bosnia and talk about, you know, what a great success it's been and it has been. But look how long it's been. And even today, there was an interesting article about police in Bosnia. So, you know, we need to walk away from these notions that these things happen easily because they don't.

MR. HAMRE: This lady standing in the corner – (inaudible.)

Q: Sir –

MR. HAMRE: It's on.

Q: Can you hear me? Yes. Sir, you and I have met a couple of times and discussed Iraq. And as you know, at your last meeting, I basically said, I had to rethink everything I thought about Iraq. I wouldn't have asked you a question, but you've just opened up the can of worms yourself. After three and a half years working in the field in Iraq for a non-profit in the Anbar Province, my work consisted of doing the civil-military relationship thing because I really did believe that we cannot be neutral over there.

However, the biggest problem for individuals like myself who work very closely with our Marines and or soldiers in places like Fallujah or Ramadi, Telafir, what have you, was having, you know, people who were in a somewhat better position to maybe be able to do something about what we were seeing on the ground, simply not having access to them and it's become even more difficult in Washington. How do we change that because I find even in the forum over here – and I have come to CSIS many times – civil-military relations in Washington seems, to me, interagency. Yet I am speaking operationally from the entities that actually work in the field. How are we going to change the mindset on all sides and get people to talking sooner rather than later?

GEN. ABIZOID: Well, of course, it's the toughest thing in the world to do, is get sides to talk that don't want to talk to one another because they think that they have reasons to kill one another that are more important than the reasons to cooperate. But, on the other hand, we know from our experience, again, go back to Bosnia and Kosovo, that it can be done and it must be done and we just got to keep walking down the road and helping people do it. But, you know, this notion of interagency support that I've talked about, I can't underestimate to you how important it is. And because we call everything a

war; the Iraq War, the Afghan War, et cetera – and of course it is war. But it's more than war with guns and bullets and high-flying aircraft dropping bombs.

One of the best moments I ever had in Afghanistan was going to a provincial reconstruction team. I think it was in Jalalabad maybe two or three years ago. And I went in there and there was an American lieutenant colonel MP, female, that is just doing a wonderful in running the PRT. She has a State Department junior officer with her that's working every day with the government; the DEA person that's talking about how you do drug eradication; a Department of Agriculture person that was there to talk to people about how you grow wheat; CIA guys that were bringing in intelligence that was vital to the protection and to the attacks against the terrorists that were operating in the region. I mean, this was a – and there were more than that. I mean, and there were some civilian volunteers in there as well.

About three months later, I went back there, and that lieutenant colonel was still there but none of her interagency companions were. So we have to be serious about what we're doing nationally in order to allow things to move forward. And, you know, those people that were out there doing it, from the other agencies of the U.S. government, they wanted to be there. They were doing a great job. They felt tremendous pride, but there was something about the prioritization of their agencies in Washington that didn't keep them in the field. And if I'm not mistaken, it's still going on and it's time it stops.

MR. HAMRE: Right here. (Off mike.) And that will be the last question

GEN. ABIZAID: Wow, the last question. Thank God. (Laughter.)

Q: General, in your list of challenges, you spoke about the virtual world as a battle space and also the need for more precise intelligence. Given budget constraints that we see now, do you see improvements in those areas coming at the expense of more traditional military programs, big ticket items, and if so, what does that do down the road when eventually we may have to face another nation-state opponent?

GEN ABIZAID: Yes, I think we have to maintain a balanced series of capabilities that allow us to deal with nation-states such as Iran or North Korea. You can look to the distant future and think of pure competitors rising. Although, I'm not necessarily there to the same extent as others might be. I think that's the distant future. So you have to maintain the ability to deal with a state competitor at those levels, at least for the next 10 to 20 years. You have to maintain overmatch in other areas. But you have to have the discussion, the national-level discussion, of how we're going to reform our national security apparatus so that it's more effective in dealing with the counterterrorists and the counterinsurgency and the helping people help themselves issues of the 21st century.

And I believe it's essential that we do that in a positive and an open manner and that we not – whatever happens in Iraq – that we not take this as an opportunity to get ready for things that don't really concern us securitywise – in other words, the big World War III idea within the next five years or so. We're going to need forces to deal with

these issues. We're going to need capabilities to deal with these issues. We're going to need intelligent services that are expanded. We need to have a State Department that is probably twice as big as it currently is with people that are empowered to take action in the field and not write reports.

I mean, we have wonderful, wonderful capabilities in this country with our young people. They can do anything. And they are doing anything. But we can't let bureaucratic turf insanity get in the way of the national good and it's going to require that we not only have the debate within the government, but external to the government. And I would hope that in the 2008 platforms of both parties, part of it happens to say we need to have a new blueprint for reform of our national security establishment to deal with the realities of the 21st century and not the Cold War. Thank you very much.

MR. HAMRE: It was a great way to wrap it up. Thank you very much, General.

(Applause.)

MR. : Thanks, General.

GEN. ABIZAIID: Thanks.

MR. HAMRE: Come on up and say hello if you have a minute – (inaudible.)

(END)