

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH COLONEL DANIEL ROPER,
DIRECTOR, U.S. ARMY AND MARINE CORPS COUNTERINSURGENCY CENTER VIA
TELECONFERENCE SUBJECT: THE U.S. ARMY APPROACH TOWARD PREPARING FOR
COUNTERINSURGENCY CHALLENGES IN CURRENT OPERATIONAL THEATERS TIME:
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LIEUTENANT JENNIFER CRAGG, (Office of the Secretary of
Defense for Public Affairs): (In progress) -- welcome you all to the
Department of Defense's Bloggers Roundtable for Thursday, September --
already can't believe it, September 17, 2009. Thank you again for all
your patience. My name is Lt. Jennifer Craig with the Office of the
Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, and I'll be moderating the
call today.

A note to the bloggers on the line -- please clearly state
your name and organization you're with prior to asking your questions.

Today, our guest is Colonel Daniel Roper. He's the director
of U.S. Army and Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Center at Fort
Leavenworth, Kansas. He'll be discussing the U.S. Army approach
toward preparing for counterinsurgency challenges in current
operational theaters.

Without going further, what I'm going to do is turn the floor
back over to Colonel Roper so he can deliver a quick topic statement.
And then, we'll go and proceed to questions.

Sir, the floor is yours.

COL. ROPER: Thank you, Jennifer. I appreciate everybody's
interest and participation in this --in something that we obviously
all think is very important. Very quickly, the Counterinsurgency
Center here was put together by General Petraeus when he was a
commander at Fort Leavenworth a couple of years ago, in conjunction
with General Mattis at the Marine Corps at that time, to help connect
the dots between the many different initiatives that are ongoing with
respect to preparing our forces for operations in a counterinsurgency
environment.

And as you may have seen from the notice that was sent out, we've had a number of recent engagements with senior leaders from the ministerial and ambassador level, as well as senior general officers from a number of countries, including the United Kingdom, Turkey, Egypt, Pakistan, Canada, India, Australia. And we've got a number of other upcoming engagements and, you know, they're all talking about some things that we're struggling with as well.

And, you know, without any further adieu, I'd be glad to take your questions and take this in whatever direction you'd like it to go.

LT. CRAGG: Okay, before I begin, who's joining us please? Someone just came on the line.

Okay, let's got to Andrew first. Please go ahead, Andrew.

Q Colonel, Andrew Lubin. How are you today, sir?

COL. ROPER: Great to talk to you, Andrew.

Q Good, thanks for joining us today. Colonel, I've got a relatively easy question, I think. With the major part of counterinsurgency operations being both politics and economics, how do we succeed in Afghanistan without a series of small scale Sheikh Sattars.

COL. ROPER: I mean, that's obviously a big question that I think a lot of people are struggling with right now. And from our perspective, you know, representing the military, our efforts are to help support the political and economic process that is necessary to move us forward. And again, with the case of Sheikh Sattar, we didn't necessarily know he was coming, but we had the right people in the right places that were able to take advantage of an opportunity and help to reinforce success.

And I think there's -- you know, people are looking and hoping to culture and nurture in counterinsurgency theory -- you know, the ink spot strategy where we find success, we reinforce it and we help address the conditions that will help make it successful. But as you all fully understand, there are no direct guarantees and there may be many indirect paths forward as we get to where we want to go.

Q Okay, thank you.

LT. CRAGG: We'll come back around, Andrew.

Q Right.

LT. CRAGG: Let's go to Troy.

Q Hey, sir, how are you doing? This is Troy Steward from bouhammer.com.

COL. ROPER: Glad you could make it, Troy.

Q Oh thank you, sir. Glad you could make it. And I'm glad we're going to come back around, because I have a lot of questions for you. But we'll start with just this one for now.

Exactly how are you tied into the COIN Academy in Kabul with Troy Ageillo (ph)? Are you working hand-in-hand with them? Are you feeding them information? Are they feeding you back information on what's happening down range? I guess -- can you kind of highlight if there is a relationship there at all? And if so, what that relationship consists of.

COL. ROPER: You've asked a great question. We have a very close working relationship with the COIN Training Center in Kabul, and we push information there. They push information back to us. I'm getting ready to send somebody out next week to spend about a month with them to make sure that, obviously -- well, we can push stuff, e-mail or through video teleconferences. You get a much better appreciation for it while you're on the ground.

So, the lieutenant colonel that I'm sending will be bringing the latest things that we're seeing from here and bringing back after he goes out -- both at the COIN Training Center and then out on the ground in RC South for a couple of weeks, the most recent insights and challenges. So, we've done that. We did that extensively with the COIN Center for Excellence in Iraq as well; which has now transitioned to the COIN Stability Operations Center.

So officially, to sum this up, there's no formal relationship in the sense that we all work for different bosses. However, that's the community of interest that we have to continually reinforce because it's only through the rapid, adaptive learning and adjusting to the environment that helps us stay ahead of the enemy's oodle loop.

Q Okay, good. Thank you, sir.

COL. ROPER: Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, Troy. Let's go to Nick.

Nick, you're next.

Q Yes, good morning. My name is Nick Mottern, I'm with ConsumersforPeace.org. And I wanted to ask overall in a conceptual way if you would look at the counterinsurgency activities by the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan, is there a model of previous counterinsurgencies that these U.S. efforts are following? If you look at, for instance, Vietnam or Malaya or Algeria or the Philippines, how would you -- what categories of counterinsurgency would you put these closest to? And is Afghanistan and Iraq's counterinsurgency strategy the same?

COL. ROPER: As a Ph.D. -- but then whoever can answer that question properly. But what I'd tell you is that as we look at what's in our doctrine, which is written -- you know, in Field Manual 3-24 about counterinsurgency, many of the lessons and insights and principles are derived from 20th Century counterinsurgency experience.

And obviously, that was done under a much different strategic context than that which we're operating under today and that we'll be operating under into the future.

So, the counterinsurgencies that were looked at and the lessons were drawn from were done in either a Colonial, a post-Colonial, or a Cold War context. None of those are directly applicable right now. We think the principles remain sound. We think the principles are -- you know, by the very nature of being principles, they've got a lasting, enduring effect to them.

But we have got to, as we continue to learn our way through this, adapt our understanding, our training and our education so people can recognize what -- you know, the challenges that confront them. So I wouldn't say there is any single, particular model. I think there are lessons learned and adapted on the ground. If you had to sum it up, you'd come to what General McCrystal was talking about now, what General Odierno had been talking about, what General Petraeus has been talking about -- that it's about the people.

And again, there are many dynamics, not many of which are obviously not even visible, that influence how the people view their overall governance and that which influences them. So they're all population-centric, however, it's got to be tailored and adapted to the local conditions that are susceptible to, you know, different regional dynamics, some of which we're just becoming aware of.

Q Well, I was just wondering if -- for instance, in Iraq where there was quite a large use of, you know, firepower and troops in urban areas -- (audio break) --

COL. ROPER: Nick, I just lost you.

Q -- as to where you can explain just what the difference is in the strategy might -- (audio break) --

COL. ROPER: Nick, I heard about half of your question. I think you were asking with Iraq being predominantly urban or where most of the people are, as opposed to a country to Afghanistan, does that explain the differences in the strategy. Is that your question?

Q I'm wondering what would be the key differences in your strategy there. I have another question, but we'll leave that for another round. That's what I'll -- (audio break) --

COL. ROPER: Yes, what I'll talk to you about is really the approach as opposed to the strategy. And again, the approach is focused on the people and their connection with their government --

the government that they perceive as legitimate. And it's working through the people and the population for them to be the decisive element that helps ultimately create an environment where the insurgent activity can't take place.

And again, the strategies are different depending on where an operational commander is on the ground. But I think everybody has come to the realization that it is not about simply going after people doing bad things, but while treating the symptoms addressing the underlying causes, to preclude those from occurring again.

Q Afghanistan has to be much more broadly spread into rural villages and whatever and maintaining control of them; so that the insurgency can exist. Is that the correct way to describe it?

COL. ROPER: It's clearly much more disbursed and things are obviously profoundly different from valley to valley and province to province. I would just slightly alter the supposition that we would take control. The goal is for the local security forces and a local governance to establish a sustainable system that works for the people. So our job is the ISAF coalition at this point -- is to help enable them to do that. So they've got to be able to generate capabilities, employ those capabilities; and then, most importantly, be able to sustain those on an enduring basis.

Q Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, Nick.

Let's go to Grim.

Q Good morning, Colonel.

COL. ROPER: Good morning.

Q I read your bio -- very impressive, nuclear physicist. So I'm going to ask you kind of a tough question.

COL. ROPER: Okay. (Chuckles.)

Q I'd like to ask you about one of the sort of basic principles you were talking about earlier, which is the generation of security forces, local security forces as a long-term solution. You probably saw Fareed Zakaria's piece pointing out earlier this week that the level of force security that's being projected is going to cost about three times the gross domestic product of Afghanistan. Now, that's a problem we could address in the short term with subsidies, but it does raise some sustainability issues. But the second part of the problem is kind of the Pakistan example across the border. They're fighting the same insurgency on the other side. But they actually have a massive security apparatus, which includes some COIN-specific elements like the Pakistani Rangers, which are a paramilitary force, kind of based on the old black watch model, from the Scottish insurgencies of the 18th Century.

It's the sixth largest military in the world. It's sustainable for their economy. It's not a force that Western powers built to quote-unquote "look like us," which is one of the, you know, things that we're always advised not to do. So it kind of looks to me like pretty much a best case scenario for Third World force generation. But they're not having a lot of luck with the insurgency on their side either. So doesn't that kind of raise some questions as to whether the basic model is really going to be adequate for the particular challenges of this particular region?

COL. ROPER: I'll take your first question first on the -- I did see Fareed's piece and thought that was very interesting. And, again, the fact that to sustain that local security, it's three times the gross domestic product, which is obviously not sustainable internally under any projected economic conditions. But as we look at the numbers of what we think and what we assess are adequate or required numbers of security forces -- whether they be Army, Afghan Army, Afghan Police, Border Police, or other elements that may be proving security.

There are numbers that are drawn from, you know, historical studies on supposedly 20 counterinsurgents per thousand of the population. But again, it's very contextual and any generalization is not going to be precisely adequate for the environment in which it's in. So they've got to bring that back to the numbers, and what is the right number of local security forces, you know, you would say it would be local security that's adequate to meet the needs of that locality. And just like it's different in the United States in different cities, even if they have the same size population, there may be significant differences in their police forces. The same thing may occur in Afghanistan.

So, it's obviously related to the quality of governance. It's related to the confidence that the people have in their governance. It's related to the confidence that people have in their police forces so that they trust them, exchange intelligence with them, and know that they're going to be protected. And again, all those factors play off of each other in second, third, fourth order effects that are not visible and they're not necessarily controllable.

So, to sum that up, you know, the projected numbers are not sustainable and will require external support for a long period of time. But the security is not just about the number of security forces. Your discussion on Pakistan and is the situation with Pakistan, you know, a so-called good case or best case scenario simply because you've got a large, well-trained, professional military it's got paramilitary forces to deal with hostile actors and does that call into question the basic model of insurgency.

What I'd share with you is we've had a number of interactions recently with a number of Pakistani officers that have served recently in SWAT, North Waziristan, South Waziristan, as well as previous engagements that they've had. And the conditions under which they are

operating I would not say are ideal. And once again, the size of the military is relevant, but it's not necessarily decisive.

And counterinsurgency -- or more broadly addressing the root causes and underlying unrest is not a function of how well you can shoot and how good your infantry maneuvers, it's a function of the governance and how the people -- the level of attachment that the people feel with their government. And obviously, the history of the federally-administrated tribal areas does not suggest any great affinity for the national government. And there are just a number of strategic factors that would not suggest to me that Pakistan has got the best of all conditions. And they're not all externally generated -- I mean, there's internally-generated challenges as well.

But I think we're watching something going on right now with the clearance of SWAT that's really the test of, okay, is the Pakistan government adapting to its environment. They were fairly successful in clearing SWAT. They wound up clearing a number of -- you know, all the population as well, which is a technique, not necessarily an optimal one, but clearing is only, again, the first phase. It's now are they able to maintain control, are they able to build or reestablish the institutions that people are confident in. So just coming back to your basic question, I'm not certain that Pakistan may have more challenges facing it than most of us fully understand. And again, many of them are internally generated and there's still a long way to go to tamp down the real underlying causes of the militant behavior.

Q All right, thank you, Colonel. We'll talk further when we come back around.

COL. ROPER: Great.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, Grim.

Now, I know Shawn had joined us. Shawn, are you still on the call?

Q Yes, I am.

LT. CRAGG: Go ahead, please.

Q Good morning, Colonel. I wanted to ask you if you could talk about the role of Human Terrain data in counterinsurgency operations in terms of the impact of the kinds of information you're getting from Human Terrain Teams and how that assists in the mission in Afghanistan, especially in contrast to how it worked in Iraq.

COL. ROPER: Yeah, I think -- I mean, again, the Human Terrain System and the Human Terrain Teams, just for everybody's point of reference, the small teams, you know, may be five to seven or eight people of sociologists, anthropologists, people that have historical understanding of the human dynamics in a particular area. And as a matter of fact, this week we were conducting counterinsurgency

training and education as part of the pre-deployment course for the Human Terrain Teams as they prepare for their particular area of operations.

It's better -- if we go to the basic understanding and something we alluded to before -- that the challenges we're in are about the people. The better you understand the people and the dynamics, the better prepared you are to operate in that environment. And that's not just for counterinsurgency, I mean, any political venture, it's based -- successful politics is based on understanding the needs, desires and wants of a particular population group.

So, from a pure academic standpoint, it's tough to argue that better understanding the people would not be of greater value. Again, a relatively new concept and we do not necessarily have people that are world-class experts on every particular valley in Afghanistan, or on any particular province in Iraq. We do have some people that have tremendous expertise, but being able to access those people, have them volunteer to participate in this type of endeavor and then have a sustainable rotational pool of those people is something we're still growing into.

So, I think right now the number is up to 29 Human Terrain Teams that are deployed -- that's both Iraq and Afghanistan. And we had a meeting about -- I think it was about a month-and-a-half ago with one of the senior members and they are working to build that up to even be larger and more sustainable. So it's one of those things quite frankly that I think it will take a long period of time to quantify the benefits of having that expertise. But I think it's unquestionable that that is benefitting us right now.

Q Are you -- I understand that the Human Terrain System, the technology that is associated with what is going on with Human Terrain Teams is also getting pushed out with some of the civil-action teams that are going over.

COL. ROPER: I can't talk to that specifically. I know amongst the concerns are being able to exchange information. So, whether it's with provincial-reconstruction teams, whether it's with host-nation security forces and other institutions, understanding the operational environment is really an inter-disciplinary problem. It requires interoperable people so somebody's expertise can help benefit somebody else. And we can put the different pieces of the puzzle together. But I can't speak specifically to which box or which piece of equipment is connected to another one.

Q All right, thank you, sir. I'll save my next question for the next time around.

COL. ROPER: Great.

LT. CRAGG: Thanks, Shawn.

Let's go back around the horn. And let's go to Andrew.

Q Great. Colonel, Andrew Lubin again. I want to follow-up on Grim's question about Pakistan and kind of segue that into Afghanistan. With such a big part of COIN being the whole nation approach, can you talk to us about what kind of support you're getting from State and SBN (ph) Commerce, and are they getting their people down range where they're really needed?

COL. ROPER: I can talk to you -- I mean, it's absolutely a great question because again, the integrated approach with Pakistan and Afghanistan is absolutely huge. And having the whole of government or a comprehensive approach just even within the U.S. is tremendously difficult. Two weeks ago, at Fort Leavenworth, the commanding general of the Combined Arms Center hosted a combat training center conference, where he brought in the head trainers from each of the Combat Training Centers that the U.S. Army uses to prepare its units for, really, their final graduation exercise before they deploy.

And one of the main topics of discussion was having appropriate representation in the training environment, so the first time that a uniformed military leader interfaces with a Foreign Service Officer is not when he meets them at a jirga or a Shura someplace in Afghanistan. The numbers are increasing. They are not enough, it's not fast enough; and there is not a mature system that's able to provide the right people on a sustainable basis.

So the U.S. government has got a long way to go. The U.S. government may never achieve the goals that we all would agree are something that are necessary. And the way that the military -- all the military services are working to address that is to better prepare their troops to be able to operate in that environment. It's not an optimal solution, but at the end of the day, it's the guy and gal on the ground -- soldier, marine, P.R.T. member, or just an AID worker or whoever it is. They are the face of the coalition. They are the face of the government.

And they're going to make it work with the tools they've got. The institutions have got to be a lot more agile and flexible to empower them with the right training and access to the right expertise earlier. As opposed to just putting great individuals out on the ground, we need to put great teams out on the ground. And we've still got a long way to go on that.

Q Guys, if I can follow0up. Since it has taken the State Department a year and a half or more -- and I don't even think they've got the qualifications set down yet for who they want to hire for this -- wouldn't it be worth getting some the kids at Leavenworth or down at Quantico -- giving them a couple of courses in economics and governance, since they're in the field any way. Yet, when they roll in they're the face. Why not just use them to begin with?

COL. ROPER: What you described is happening in a somewhat ad hoc manner in many of the units that are deploying. There are dozens

of stories of U.S. Army battalions and brigades and Marine Corps battalions that in their preparation for deployment, in their training will get what local cities -- you know, get with the mayor or the city administrators or the schools. Those who run the sewage systems, or those who run any of the other things that are normally civilian apparatus of government. And really get a self-education with the benefit of those individual Americans on how it is supposed to work, or how it works in Houston, or how it works in Los Angeles or something to that effect.

So there is unquestionably a gap. There is a vacuum of the appropriate civilian expertise and the appropriate quantities to ultimately -- at the end of the day, the troops on the ground are providing the security and the military component to support a whole of government effect on the ground. And it's not just security. It's not just people with guns.

And really what we have to do is look backwards from the objective in military speak and say what effect is it that the coalition needs to provide in a particular valley. And then, what expertise is required to deliver that effect. And what actions are required to operationalize that. And there is absolutely no question there is a delta on what we're providing versus what's really required.

Q Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, Andrew.

If I may -- instead of going straight to Troy, I'm going to go to Greg. Greg came on to the call, and I want to make sure he gets his question. And I'm noticing some interference on this phone.

Can you all hear that?

Q I can hear it, yes.

Q I can hear it.

Q Yes.

LT. CRAGG: Okay, it went away. Okay, let's see -- if I say a problem it will just miraculously go away. So, I will keep that thought.

So let's go to Greg, okay. Thanks, Greg.

Q Thanks. Colonel Greg Graham, from DOD Buzz. I wanted to ask you a question, the SEALs got an al Qaeda operative in Somalia the other day, and that's always a good thing, but it seems as if the timing on it may be a bit problematic. I was at the Senate Foreign Relations Committee yesterday and a number of the senators pointed to that example and asked -- it was on our strategy in Afghanistan, and they asked why can't we apply a similar-type strategy in Afghanistan -

- an offshore balancing, as they're calling it -- a counterterrorist versus a counterinsurgency strategy.

And an individual I'm sure you know well, Dr. John Nagl was there, kind of defending the counterinsurgency position. But I'd like to hear from you why that approach, that counterterrorism approach would not work in a place like Afghanistan and why we would need to apply the counterinsurgency approach.

COL. ROPER: That question brings to light some of the broader dynamics that are influenced here because there's been a lot of discussion lately both from the SFRCs -- some things that Admiral Mullen recently said in some transcripts that I've had access to see on that. Simply addressing terrorism is missing the cause of terrorism. And what sometimes we fail to -- I guess we have walked into Afghanistan with a mental model that suggests that the political boundaries of Afghanistan are the same as the political boundaries of another state. And it does not work that way.

There are profoundly transnational dynamics as I alluded to before. And it's really not possible to have a coherent discussion about Afghanistan without considering the dynamics with Pakistan. And you cannot talk about Pakistan without talking about their dynamics with India, with Saudi Arabia. And what is happening with the terrorists or the militants that we're going after right now. So whether it's increased activity in Regional Command South in Afghanistan, you know, Hellmand in particular, that's driving militants either north or west or driving them south across the border, the increased attacks -- the increasingly successful attacks of drones that are killing militants, not civilians.

The militants -- some of them are not from Afghanistan or Pakistan. They may be going back home. They may be going to Yemen, they may be going to Somalia, they may be going many other places. So what that describes is at best is an incredibly complex regional problem. And that's probably the best case scenario.

So, simply going after bad guys after they've done something incredibly bad is really treating the illness after the patient is already incredibly sick. And what we're talking about is, you know, political disenfranchisement of certain groups and groups that exploit weaknesses whether it's ungoverned states or whether it's something that they were able to wrap religion around. And I would just suggest that counterterrorism techniques and approaches are subordinate to a counterinsurgency approach, which is again addressing the political dynamics at the local level through existing or adapting governance structures. And if we focus solely on the symptoms, we'll never address the causes.

Q Great. Thank you. And another issue that's come up in the debate over Afghanistan is the footprint. You know, there are those who talk about a light footprint versus a heavy footprint. And I just wonder from a historical and doctrinal perspective, what you

could say about that. Is there any yardstick to go by when you're trying to inform this debate?

COL. ROPER: That's something we were just discussing earlier this week. It's not -- in general, as you look through history, it's not the numbers, it's exactly as General McCrystal is saying, it's how they're employed. So more soldiers there, you know, that may be operating out of ignorance is not a good thing. Fewer soldiers or fewer troops -- you know, a smaller footprint that's adapted to the operational environment understands the complexity and can influence it, than that is a tremendous force multiplier.

So there are examples, you know, from the Philippines and the Huk insurrection in the late '40s and '50s where the U.S. footprint was about one person; and in El Salvador where, you know, the footprint was less than 100. And, again, it's not the number per se; it's how that is done in context with the operational environment. And again, it depends on the quality of the national and local leaders. It depends on the people's confidence in those leaders. And it depends on the different things that are fueling the insurgency. So again, quality is more important than quantity, but there's a proper proportion for both that may change over time. COL. GRAHAM: Great, thank you.

LT. CRAGG: And just to let Troy know, I will call on you Troy next. I just wanted to make sure I get Spencer's first question. Spencer you joined us, please go ahead.

Q Hi, Colonel. I was covering the same hearing that Greg did and wanted to get you too to expand on that a bit. Are there operational circumstances aside from the root cause issues that you mentioned with counterinsurgency in Afghanistan and Pakistan that allow for a strike of this sort of success to occur in Somalia with, for instance, you know, the acquisition of obviously sufficient intelligence for the strike to succeed that don't exist in Afghanistan and Pakistan that would require the counterinsurgency operational approach that some have advocated and that those on the counterterrorism side find problematic.

COL. ROPER: I want to make sure I understand the gist of the question. Are the circumstances that would make those strikes a little bit --

Q Successful in Somalia where you can get the intelligence apparently it perhaps isn't the most permissive environment, but it was permissive enough for us to get the intelligence necessary to execute the strike in Somalia. Do those circumstances just not apply? Because that was one of the questions that came up in yesterday's hearing -- that Dr. Biddle and Dr. Nagl made the point of saying that if you have these safe havens it becomes just an impermissible environment to acquire the intelligence necessary for successful counterterrorism strikes.

COL. ROPER: Yeah, I have not had a chance yet to read the transcript, but I think again, it's completely contextual and it's kind of hard to extrapolate from a particular event. If it's successful clearly at the tactical level, you know, from the perspective of just a day or two after the fact, I think within the borders of Afghanistan for what that means, there are places where, again, they are inaccessible. And for whatever reason, we collectively are either unable to get the intelligence that we need to have sufficient confidence to conduct an operation or we may not have resources postured to take advantage of that.

So again, I'm not sure it's an either/or proposition. I think that there has got to be an appropriate combination of a raid-type activity, which again, is a tactical operation that's got obviously profound operational and potential strategic effect to complement some long-term dynamics that ultimately enable us to be successful in the long term and achieve national goals and objectives.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, Spencer.

Let's go over to Troy for a second question. Q All right, thank you.

Sir, Troy Steward again. My question is going to be kind of focus on the Reserve component aspect of this. I know you guys are -- at the COIN Academy is doing their thing, you guys are teaching stuff up at Leavenworth. But as National Guard units, especially those involved with the Task Force Phoenix Mission, so they are truly the tip of the spear -- small teams embedded with local forces, ANSF forces in Afghanistan working a lot more with the local populace than just about anyone else. Even the operators and the ODA teams are doing more kinetic door kicking operations than they are the training and mentoring, except for the commander of the units.

What is being done to train the National Guard units that are now only going in for country nine or 10 months? What's being done to teach them what true COIN is, what true stability operations are in one to two months of post -- (inaudible) -- because they're still getting training on high call, low call, three second rush and throwing hand grenades. They're not really being trained on what's most important for them to be effective.

COL. ROPER: Yes, I mean, that's a significant challenge. And when we talk about -- you know, just from my perspective, if we're talking about the Army, we need to be talking about the total force, the active Guard and Reserve because again, we've got Reserve component soldiers doing incredibly important missions. And you just described the challenges -- they don't have 12 months boots on the ground because of the mobilization limitations.

I can only give you a perspective from what we've seen here at the COIN Center.

We have been involved fairly frequently with providing counterinsurgency instruction or training the different elements within the Reserve component. What I don't have a full picture for you on is the comprehensive, you know, what do they get from beginning to end; and where does it fit in their training module. We continually try to develop and nurture those contacts, so ultimately, from within the U.S. Army perspective, first Army -- a forces-command unit has oversight of that training.

We're in contact with the 189th training brigade out of Fort Bragg, which focuses more on the provincial reconstruction teams. And again, I can't give you the full answer. All I can tell you is I agree with your premise that there is some -- a little bit random, less than fully systemic preparation for some key soldiers that are doing some things on the ground that are very important to us. From the Afghanistan perspective, I understand but I don't have the details on it. That there are right now U.S. Forces Afghanistan -- is looking at a potentially different relationship with Task Force Phoenix and potentially realigning them to better enable them to do their important job.

Q Okay, thank you, sir.

COL. ROPER: Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Thanks, Troy. Let's go to Nick. We have time for Nick, Grim and Shawn to ask one quick question each. Okay.

Q Thank you, I'll be very brief. I have to leave for a medical appointment in a few minutes. I wanted to ask, if I could, just two questions briefly. One is, there has been an agreement signed to run a oil or a gas pipeline through Afghanistan from Turkmenistan -- (audio break) -- through Kandahar. Is there any effort being made to stabilize that region for that pipeline as something that I guess would also generate income for the Afghan government.

And the second question is detention seems to be a part of any kind of counterinsurgency policy. I wonder if there are detention sites throughout Afghanistan as well as at Bahgram. Thank you.

COL. ROPER: On the first question on the gas lines running south from Turkmenistan. I'm not aware of specific details of a stabilization effort, but if you've read anything that has occurred throughout the '90s, that is a critical area that can potentially be exploited both in a positive and negative manner by many different parties in that part of the country, in that part of South Asia. So again, if there is an effort to get the gas line through, there will be a lot of people that have a vested interest in protecting it and there will be some other people that have a vested interest in destroying and disrupting it. So, I would assume the commanders on the ground know that, but thanks for bringing that to my attention.

On your question of detention, I can talk to you more about what went on in Iraq versus what went on in Afghanistan in the sense that, A, detention is incredibly important. It's something that we didn't go into with our eyes fully open. What it meant both separating reconcilables from irreconcilables inside the wire, you know, known as counterinsurgency inside the wire. And then, just as importantly, the process by which people who are reconcilable and can go back to being productive members of the society are released back into the population through the hands and control of tribal leaders, sheikhs, other elders who can look after them and vouch for them.

Some of the same people who are working on that in Iraq in Task Force 134 have gone to Afghanistan. I spoke with a colleague of mine about two months ago, who had spent a fair amount of time -- a former member of 134, who had gone with an assessment team into Afghanistan to bring those best practices. And the last thing I'll tell you is, when I was in Iraq about a year ago, I met with a commander of Task Force 134; and was so impressed with what they were doing with the detention operations that we requested; and were fortunate enough to have them send us one of their officers to spend four or five months with us to really help us bring that to the fore in the next version of our counterinsurgency doctrine. So again, an absolutely critical function that we need to get better on.

Q Those people being detained in Afghanistan at this point?

COL. ROPER: Excuse me?

Q Do you know the numbers of people who are now being detained in Afghanistan?

COL. ROPER: No, I don't.

Q Okay. All right, thanks so much.

COL. ROPER: Thank you.

Q I'll have to leave; and thank you Jennifer, for setting this up.

LT. CRAGG: No problem, Nick.

Let's go to Grim and Shawn. If you could ask one quick question each before we wrap up today. Q Very well, I will ask a quick question. Colonel, I actually went through the Counterinsurgency Center for Excellence in Iraq Leaders Course. So some of these questions that you're getting, you kind of brought on yourselves. But I wanted to say that we talked about the fourth generation principle. The second kind of part of that is the good governance principle, which you referred to by saying that, you know, if adequate trust in the government can be created, you may need smaller forces in the long run.

And also, that on the Pakistan side, the lack of trust between the tribal regions and the government is the reason that their relatively large military isn't adequate to the task. So in terms of the logistical challenge of establishing good government in the far-flung and mountainous regions, in Iraq a lot of our good governance work was helping to build the economy so you could establish a better life for people; and they had a stake in preserving the peace.

That was possible mostly not so much because of Iraq's oil, although that could be used for large-scale capital products; but because of the railroads and the highways. So that things like agricultural goods could get to market; and because the population was fairly well educated; so you could help them set up small businesses or get them jobs in factories; if you could get the factories back on line.

A lot of that just doesn't exist in rural and mountainous Afghanistan. And it seems like that creates a fairly significant challenge for bringing that kind of strategic effect from good governments into reality there. Could you speak to that issue for a moment?

COL. ROPER: It's absolutely one of the most profound differences between Iraq and Afghanistan. And there is no question that at best Afghanistan has got prospects for economic and GDP that might be just enough to get by. So what I see -- and again, this isn't our main wane is there has got to be a long-term scenario for international support or enabling of their development. Things again that I can talk to you a little more about -- agricultural development teams that are coming out of our National Guard, that are trying to bring some of our more modern farming techniques; and seeing what works in that environment. And again, you just can't pick it up and overlay it on their environment, but trying to help come up with some counter to the narcotics economy.

And then, the question a few moments ago about the oil lines. There is potential in the region and it's a long-term effort to help foster that potential. But ultimately, what we can do is help set the conditions and enable others to do for themselves what they need to do. So there is a long road ahead before there is an economy that supports the Afghan peoples expectations of what they expect -- the opportunities that they expect out of their life. Q Very good, thank you, Colonel.

LT. CRAGG: Okay, the last question -- let's go to Shawn.

Q I'll make this really quick. Can you talk about the challenges of ISR data sharing that are presented in Afghanistan; and getting information down to the ground that is actionable, that can help with the counterinsurgents efforts in terms of -- being that it comes both from people you have in the field and what you're getting from the coalition. The problems with communications in Afghanistan being what they are, and the varied terrain of the place -- how easy is it to get data to them? And what are the challenges you're facing

from a counterinsurgency perspective in terms of getting the right information out to people in the field?

COL. ROPER: That question has got about five different dimensions to it. From the technical aspect, as you described, we work through challenges ensuring all our systems are interoperable within the U.S., within our joint partners and coalition partners. And then, you exacerbate that by the terrain challenges in Afghanistan; and you've got something that is again -- makes a hard challenge much more difficult. What's more profound is the security classifications and things that have to be worked through to exchange horizontally relevant information across, you know, 42 ISAF partners as well as our Afghan host-nation counterparts to make sure that we get relevant information to the people that need it. In some cases, relevant information is on the ground; and it needs to get back up to inform policymakers or decision makers of what the true reality is.

We've had a number of recent engagements with NATO and ISAF partners met with a commander of the NATO Lessons Learned Academy this week to discuss just that issue. And it's a multi-pronged approach on sharing information; and more importantly, having a common framework with which we're attempting to understand it.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you very much, sir. I wanted to say thank you for all the bloggers who came on today; and came on after we started. With that, I want to turn it back over to Colonel Roper; if you would like to end with any closing thoughts.

COL. ROPER: Thanks. First of all, I really appreciate this discussion and the interest of everybody that's on here and those with whom you communicate with your journalism. I'll just tell you the things that we're really trying -- to sum up what we are focusing on from this perspective is the understanding of the environment and the conditions is absolutely critical. It's an inter-disciplinary effort. It's not just troops with uniforms. They have got to tap into the expertise of military civilians and counterparts from again Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the private and public sector.

It's about constantly learning and adapting because as soon as we think we have the answer, I'd get very nervous. We need to continue to ask critically-tough questions of ourselves and of each other to ensure that we are seeing reality as it plays itself out.

At the end of the day, this is about us supporting the government of Afghanistan improving and increasing its legitimacy in the eyes of its people. So they have a sustainable relationship; and they are able to provide their people a more compelling and positive narrative than those in the Taliban and other actors that are attempting to defeat that. So again, I thank you for your time and your participation. And I look forward to continued dialogue with you in the future because again, the key to this for all of us is to ask tough, challenging questions and just let the answers take us where they may. So again, thank you for your time.

LT. CRAGG: Great. And if any of the bloggers who didn't come on the line today -- if they have any follow-on questions, I'll make sure to send them to you, Colonel Roper. And for any of the bloggers if there's any follow-on questions that you didn't get a chance to ask, please simply send it to me and I'll pass it to Colonel Roper.

With that, you've been listening to Colonel Daniel Roper, director, U.S. Army and Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Center at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

Thank you sir, for attending today's Bloggers Roundtable. And thank you very much, for all the bloggers' online journal who attended today. This ends today's roundtable.

END.