

THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

MCCLOSKEY SPEAKER SERIES 2012

AT THE POINT OF THE SPEAR:
THE ROLE OF SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES IN AMERICA'S POST-
9/11, POST-IRAQ/AFGHANISTAN DEFENSE STRATEGY

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LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

WOLF BLITZER

Host of *CNN's The Situation Room*

ADMIRAL WILLIAM McRAVEN

Commander, U.S. Special Operations Command

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1 P R O C E E D I N G S

2 (6:00 p.m.)

3 MR. ERWIN: I am Clark Erwin, the director of
4 the Homeland Security Counterterrorism Program here at the
5 Aspen Institute, and as such, I am the organizer of the
6 annual summer Aspen Security Forum. Welcome to our third
7 annual forum, which as you know, brings to Aspen each
8 summer top-level, president and former government
9 officials, industry leaders, financiers, think tank and
10 academic experts, nationally noted print and broadcast
11 journalists and concerned citizens to discuss and debate
12 the major issues of the day in the field of national
13 security with a particular focus on homeland security and
14 counterterrorism.

15 We are enormously grateful to our sponsors, AGT
16 International, IBM, the Robert R. McCormick Foundation,
17 HFRX, The CELL and Target, and we thank Target especially
18 for underwriting tonight's reception. We're grateful also
19 to our many supporters listed in the program. Our thanks
20 go to our two media partners, the *New York Times* and this
21 year as well, *CNN*. And finally I thank Tom and Bonnie
22 McCloskey whose support makes tonight's opening session as

1 part of the McCloskey Speaker Series possible.

2 As we gather tonight, as we all know, our nation
3 faces a host of national security challenges and I can
4 think of no one better to discuss these challenges and no
5 one better to lead that discussion than tonight's featured
6 guest and moderator. With that, it's my great pleasure to
7 welcome to the podium my dear friend and the host of *CNN's*
8 *Situation Room*, Wolf Blitzer, who will now discuss things
9 with our guests.

10 (Applause)

11 MR. BLITZER: I thank you so much for coming
12 out, a lovely crowd we have here in Aspen. This is a
13 rough assignment for the admiral and for me. It's a
14 pleasure. I've been coming to the Aspen Institute by the
15 way since 1983 and I come usually every summer. So I love
16 it out here and it's a pleasure to be here with a real,
17 real hero and you are a hero. Thank you so much for
18 everything you're doing. And --

19 (Applause)

20 MR. BLITZER: I speak not only as an American
21 citizen obviously, but as a former Pentagon correspondent
22 who's had a little interest in what you've been up to over

1 these many years. We always think of in recent years, of
2 course, at least in the past year with Admiral McRaven as
3 the orchestrator, the architect of the raid that killed
4 Osama bin Laden, and you know, we've all read a lot about
5 it.

6 I know Peter Bergen is here. He's written a
7 whole book about it, an excellent book about it, but this
8 is the guy who is sitting right here who had the guts to
9 tell the commander in chief we should do it, let's do it.
10 And when you ordered that raid and when you said you think
11 you did, you didn't even know for sure that bin Laden was
12 in Abbottabad at that compound about a mile or so away
13 from the West Point of Pakistan, did you?

14 ADM. McRAVEN: Well, let me make one thing
15 clear. I didn't order the raid.

16 (Laughter)

17 MR. BLITZER: But he told the President of the
18 United States that he thought he could do it.

19 ADM. McRAVEN: Now I mean -- and this is not a
20 small point. The fact of the matter is it was the
21 President of the United States that ordered the raid.

22 MR. BLITZER: And he deserves an enormous amount

1 of credit for that decision.

2 ADM. McRAVEN: Absolutely he does.

3 (Applause)

4 MR. BLITZER: And when he came to the head of
5 Special Operations -- that would be you -- and said, what
6 do you think, what did you say?

7 ADM. McRAVEN: Well, first, I will tell you that
8 it was a long process to get there and our piece of it,
9 the military piece of kind of what I look like is kind of
10 three components was probably the easiest aspect of the
11 entire raid. The two other pieces of this was the CIA's
12 role and I think when the history is finally written and
13 outlined and exposed on how the CIA determined that bin
14 Laden was there, it will be one of the great intelligence
15 operations in the history of intelligence organizations.

16 And a tremendous amount of that credit goes to
17 director Leon Panetta at the time because he built the
18 right team, he had the right people, he made some very
19 gutsy calls and he was not concerned about who got the
20 credit. And so when you take a look at how he built that
21 team, which was a military intelligence team, tremendous
22 amount of credit goes to the agency.

1 And the other piece of this really is the
2 President's national security team. I've made it very
3 clear to people again the military piece of this, we did,
4 I think, 11 other raids that evening in Afghanistan. Now
5 I don't want to diminish the nature of this raid. It was
6 a little bit more sporting.

7 (Laughter)

8 ADM. McRAVEN: And we understood that there were
9 some strategic implications to it, but at the end of the
10 day, it was what we had been doing really for 10 years.
11 The President and his national security team -- you know,
12 I'm not a political guy, but I will tell you as an
13 interested observer in this, they were magnificent in how
14 they handled the start to finish.

15 We went through a number of meetings. The
16 President asked all the right questions. His national
17 security team with Secretary Gates, Secretary Clinton,
18 Chairman Mullen, the Vice Chairman Tom Donilon, Dennis
19 McDonough and John Brennan and others really did a fine
20 job of digging down to find out the facts, to make their
21 recommendations based on the facts and, of course, the
22 President gave me ample time to prepare once the concept

1 was approved.

2 But at the end of the day, make no mistake about
3 it, it was the President of the United States that
4 shouldered the burden for this operation, that made the
5 hard decisions that was instrumental in the planning
6 process because I pitched every plan to him. So any
7 indication that Bill McRaven, you know, ordered this raid,
8 led this raid was, you know, the key piece of this raid is
9 just patently false.

10 MR. BLITZER: But you're a Navy SEAL --

11 ADM. McRAVEN: Yes.

12 (Laughter)

13 MR. BLITZER: -- and these men who went in
14 there, Navy SEALs, they were taking orders from you
15 directly?

16 ADM. McRAVEN: They were.

17 MR. BLITZER: You were speaking to all of them.
18 You knew each one of them personally. Do you -- here's
19 just a technical question, did you rehearse it in advance?

20 ADM. McRAVEN: Well, I'm not going to talk about
21 the tactical details, but obviously we're not going to do
22 a mission like that without rehearsing. We rehearse every

1 operation particularly significant ones like that. As I
2 said, I have made a point in not talking about the
3 tactical piece of this other than say that it is what we
4 do. We did on helicopters, we go to objectives, we secure
5 the objectives, we get back on helicopters and we come
6 home.

7 MR. BLITZER: So --

8 ADM. McRAVEN: Just short of one helicopter.

9 But --

10 (Laughter)

11 MR. BLITZER: Well, that stealth helicopter,
12 when it went down -- and all of us have read about it,
13 we've heard about it, I've spoken to people who were in
14 that room, the White House Situation Room, which is
15 opposed to another situation room, but when that
16 helicopter went down, there was a gasp, because a lot of
17 the folks there -- correct me if I'm wrong -- thought of
18 Desert One in 1980, of Jimmy Carter's plan to rescue
19 Americans in Iraq.

20 ADM. McRAVEN: Well, I wouldn't pretend to tell
21 you what they were thinking.

22 MR. BLITZER: What were you thinking?

1 ADM. McRAVEN: I was too busy frankly -- I mean
2 we had a backup plan and we executed the backup plan and
3 at that point in time, you're worried about getting the
4 mission done and getting the boys back home. So we had a
5 plan, suffice to say.

6 MR. BLITZER: And it worked?

7 ADM. McRAVEN: And it worked.

8 MR. BLITZER: That helicopter, by the way, is
9 all that, the stealth technology and all that, is that
10 gone? Is that been shared with bad guys?

11 ADM. McRAVEN: I'm not going to address that.

12 MR. BLITZER: You don't want to talk about it?

13 (Laughter)

14 MR. BLITZER: Curious. All right. Let's talk a
15 little bit about -- and I want to nail this down as best
16 as I can. You didn't have a 100 percent knowledge, the
17 President didn't have a 100 percent knowledge that bin
18 Laden was holed up in that compound. Did you have 80
19 percent, 50 percent, give me your -- a ballpark --

20 (Laughter)

21 MR. BLITZER: How confident were you that a tall
22 guy was hiding out in that compound?

1 ADM. McRAVEN: Well, again, I'm not going to
2 address the tactical piece of that. Suffice to say we
3 were not sure he was there, and again, that gets back to
4 some tough decisions that were made. My job was to get
5 him if he was there. If he wasn't there, we would know
6 that pretty quickly and our intent was to get up and get
7 out.

8 MR. BLITZER: I suspect you're not going to want
9 to answer this question, but I'll ask it anyhow.

10 (Laughter)

11 MR. BLITZER: And as the admiral and I know --
12 we just spent some quality time together -- this is the
13 United States of America. We can ask the questions. He
14 doesn't have to answer them, but we can ask the questions.
15 And I think it's an important question that at least I've
16 always, you know, been very, very curious about. Was the
17 mission to capture bin Laden or was the mission to kill
18 bin Laden?

19 ADM. McRAVEN: You know, that's a great question
20 and I'm not going to answer it.

21 (Laughter)

22 MR. BLITZER: Oh. But there were contingencies

1 this guy would be brought out in a helicopter and brought
2 somewhere?

3 ADM. McRAVEN: Do they teach you this to do the
4 end around when the first question doesn't work?

5 (Laughter)

6 MR. BLITZER: Yeah, just trying to make sure,
7 you know, you don't want to discuss that?

8 ADM. McRAVEN: No.

9 MR. BLITZER: All right. And I told the
10 admiral, you know, he's got a sense of the job, as you
11 know. We've got to protect sources and methods,
12 classified information, and we fully appreciate --

13 ADM. McRAVEN: And my career or whatever's --

14 MR. BLITZER: And --

15 (Laughter)

16 MR. BLITZER: That's also --

17 ADM. McRAVEN: -- whatever will be left of it
18 after this.

19 MR. BLITZER: That's also very important. You
20 don't do a lot of these interviews, do you?

21 ADM. McRAVEN: No, no.

22 MR. BLITZER: Is this the first interview like

1 this you've ever done?

2 ADM. McRAVEN: It is the first interview.

3 (Applause)

4 MR. BLITZER: How does it feel so far?

5 ADM. McRAVEN: Ask me again in an hour.

6 MR. BLITZER: I think it's a statement and it's
7 a tribute to the Aspen Institute that the first interview
8 with the head of Special Operations, with Admiral McRaven,
9 is done here in Aspen at the Aspen Institute and it's a
10 tribute to all of the Aspen Institute folks who are here
11 and I thank you on their behalf.

12 ADM. McRAVEN: Thank you.

13 (Applause)

14 MR. BLITZER: But let's -- I'm going to come
15 back to bin Laden in a moment, but let's do a little
16 Special Operations for dummies right now.

17 ADM. McRAVEN: Okay.

18 MR. BLITZER: What is Special Operations?

19 ADM. McRAVEN: Yeah, well, a great question.
20 You know, we get a lot of notoriety for the raids, for the
21 rescue operations and frankly we're very proud of that.
22 When the nation calls on us to do those sort of

1 operations, they expect us to be successful every single
2 time and I expect the guys to be successful and they
3 expect to be successful.

4 But the fact of the matter is that's a small
5 portion of what we do. When you take a look at where we
6 are around the globe today, we are in 79 countries, I
7 think, today. Only one of those is Afghanistan. The
8 other 78 countries, we are out there building partner
9 capacity. We are trying to teach other nations how to
10 deal with their own problems so they don't grow violent
11 extremists. We're building wells in places. We're doing
12 civil affairs operations. We're doing information
13 operations to buy down things like corruption.

14 So there is a whole spectrum of things that
15 Special Operations do that rarely get the press' attention
16 because it's not sexy. It's not -- it doesn't sound
17 terribly good or terribly bad at that point in time, but
18 when you put the totality of it together, you have nations
19 out there that have not gone extremist because Special
20 Operations forces have been working there for decades. So
21 that's really a piece of the story. We've got --

22 MR. BLITZER: How many men and women do you

1 command?

2 ADM. McRAVEN: Yeah, 66,000 today, but let me
3 qualify that term. Of the 66,000, you've got about 44,000
4 of those are people that can't deploy forward. Of those
5 44,000, about 33,000 are kind of badged Special Operations
6 or tactical units. So special forces, officers, Navy
7 SEALs, rangers, night stalkers that fly helicopters, those
8 are the tactical units. So of those 33,000 to 35,000
9 folks, we deploy about 10,000 to 12,000 a day are
10 constantly deployed.

11 So right now in Afghanistan, you know, our
12 numbers are close to 7,000 and then another 3,000 spread
13 out across the globe. We've got a good budget that
14 supports that and I'm a very interesting what you call
15 combatant command. I'm one of the only combatant commands
16 that has service life responsibilities and, you know, if
17 you look at Central Command, for example, Jim Mattis is
18 the Central Command. He is in charge of a vast array of
19 countries in terms of military responsibility.

20 MR. BLITZER: He's in charge of the Middle East
21 and South Asia.

22 ADM. McRAVEN: The Middle East. But he doesn't

1 have any budget to do acquisition programs. When we were
2 legislating Major Force Program '11, very, very important
3 because it allows me to put capability into the hands of
4 the operators very rapidly. So if we identify a problem
5 and an operator, you know, says I need a new weapon, I
6 need a new boat, I need a better helicopter, then I'm in a
7 position because we have an acquisition authority to be
8 able to turn that requirement quickly and get it back out
9 in the field.

10 MR. BLITZER: Special Operations is the only --
11 one of only two Pentagon's budgets that's not being cut?

12 ADM. McRAVEN: Right.

13 MR. BLITZER: In fact, it's going up?

14 ADM. McRAVEN: Well, I think that remains to be
15 seen. Suffice to say we did pretty well in the
16 President's budget that was put forward, and we're very
17 thankful for that. And we'll -- you know, we'll see where
18 it goes from there.

19 MR. BLITZER: What's the top mission that you
20 have right now?

21 (Laughter)

22 ADM. McRAVEN: Well, my job is to provide

1 support to the geographic combatant commanders. So as we
2 talked about, the guys that actually fight the fight from
3 the military standpoint are the geographic combatant
4 commanders, CENTCOM, SOUTHCOM, EUCOM and my job is to
5 provide them, you know, the best forces I can. They are
6 the ones that execute the military mission within their
7 area of responsibility. So job one for me is to man,
8 train, equip and deploy forces in support of the
9 geographic combatant commanders. I do not do any
10 commanding control from down in Tampa.

11 MR. BLITZER: This is an enormously difficult
12 operation. If you're in Special Operations, a lot of
13 these men and women who serve, 66,000, you say, right?

14 ADM. McRAVEN: Right.

15 MR. BLITZER: How many of them are women?

16 ADM. McRAVEN: I don't know the exact figure,
17 but we have a lot of females that serve in the Special
18 Operations. They do a fantastic job across the board.
19 There is obviously some legislation when they cannot
20 operate in tactical ground units, but having said that,
21 great support to all of those units, and we couldn't do
22 the job without them.

1 MR. BLITZER: Now I know a lot of these people
2 over the decades I've covered the story, a formal Pentagon
3 correspondence myself during the first Gulf war, if the
4 stress is enormous, the training is very, very rigid,
5 very, very difficult. They serve two, three, four, five
6 tours in a war zone. A lot of them come back obviously
7 injured; some of them don't come back at all. They come
8 back and they have posttraumatic stress and the suicide
9 rate unfortunately is really getting higher and higher,
10 certainly higher than it was 20 years ago.

11 ADM. McRAVEN: Right.

12 MR. BLITZER: Why?

13 ADM. McRAVEN: Well, let me give you a little
14 bit more broader answer to that. Before I took command,
15 my predecessor, Admiral Eric Olson, initiated a study to
16 take a look at the pressure on the force and they spent 10
17 months looking at all of our units. I think they talked
18 to somewhere in the neighborhood of 7,000 soldiers, about
19 1,000 spouses, went to over 400 different meetings to
20 determine whether or not what the status of the force was.

21 And that report landed on my desk about the time
22 I took command. And frankly, as Eric Olson has said a

1 number of times in testimony, the force was frayed and I
2 think that was exactly the right term. You know, we're
3 not crumbling. You know, we're not destroyed, but we are
4 clearly fraying a year ago. I think that fraying is
5 getting a little worse.

6 We are putting an inordinate amount of effort
7 into making sure we are now preserving the force and
8 families. I have taken a look at the scope of the
9 problem. I've assigned a general officer. I've got my
10 command sergeant major and myself are going out, we're
11 talking to the troops. We're trying to find out what the
12 real issues are. You can look at statistics, but
13 statistics don't tell you everything.

14 For example, you talked about our suicide rate.
15 It is as high as it has been in recorded history in terms
16 of how long we've been keeping track of this, which is
17 really a couple of years now. Having said that, most
18 people would think, well, that's a result of the fact that
19 guys have been at hard combat, they've seen their buddy
20 killed in front of them, but we don't find that
21 necessarily to be the case.

22 The suicides that we are tracking right now tend

1 to be related to a couple of things, relationship.
2 There's always a bad relationship in there. There is
3 alcohol or drugs that are involved and there are some
4 other things that contribute to it. But it's not as easy
5 as saying, this kid was in combat and that's why he has,
6 you know, that kind of stress that caused him to commit
7 suicide.

8 So I will tell you there is a tremendous effort
9 on the part of the secretary of Defense, actually the
10 commander in chief on down to take a hard look at our
11 problems with suicide and do something about them. And we
12 are making full-court press to do that.

13 MR. BLITZER: And what made you, Admiral
14 McRaven, want to go in and become a Navy SEAL?

15 ADM. McRAVEN: An Army Green Beret.

16 MR. BLITZER: That would be your dad?

17 ADM. McRAVEN: No, actually, it was a guy my
18 sister was dating.

19 (Laughter)

20 ADM. McRAVEN: Now this was in the -- probably
21 very early '70s. The movie, *The Green Berets* had come out
22 starring John Wayne and this young Army captain came to

1 meet my sister for a date. My sister, as usual was late.
2 So I had an opportunity to talk to him for a little while
3 and he knew I was interested in the Navy. And he said,
4 hey, if you're going to go into the Navy, you ought to be
5 a Navy SEAL.

6 Well, back in, you know, 1971-'72 frame at the
7 time, you never heard of Navy SEALs. So I had to do a
8 little digging -- hard to believe now -- but then you
9 didn't. And so to my Army brethren, of which it's a very
10 large Army organization that I'm honored to be in charge
11 of, I attribute the fact I'm a Navy SEAL to my Army Green
12 Beret brothers.

13 MR. BLITZER: How many that try out to become a
14 Navy SEAL and how many are eventually accepted?

15 ADM. McRAVEN: Well, historically and I'm not
16 exactly sure what today's figures are, but I'll tell you
17 that historically, you know it's about a 50 percent we'll
18 make it through. Not that's kind of splitting the
19 officers and the enlisted. The officers tend to do a
20 little better in terms of their success rate because we
21 start with them a little bit earlier at the naval
22 academies at other areas.

1 The enlisted rate tends to be a little bit lower
2 on that scale, but we're working very hard to get more
3 folks through without diminishing the quality because at
4 the end of the day, it is the quality of the individual we
5 get that will make us successful in the battlefield, not
6 the quantity.

7 MR. BLITZER: When you look at a young man or a
8 woman out there, 17-, 18-, 19-, 20-year-old who wants to
9 be a Navy SEAL, what do you look for?

10 ADM. McRAVEN: Well, we look for a couple of
11 things. One, they're got to be able to think on their
12 feet. The physical aspect of it is important, but we all
13 know people that are very physically fit but can't think
14 on their feet. At the end of the day, I want somebody
15 that can think, react and operate under pressure and make
16 the right decision, somebody that's got some life
17 experience and maturity, which when across the soft
18 spectrum is that the average operator is about 34 years
19 old, married with two kids, spent about 6 years in the
20 conventional force.

21 So he's got some life experience. And now
22 that's not always true. The young SEALs come in, some of

1 them are 18, 19 years old. The young rangers come in,
2 some of them are 18, 19 years old, but across the board,
3 our population is a little bit more experienced. But at
4 the end of the day, the physical piece is important, but
5 thinking on your feet is the most important piece.

6 MR. BLITZER: A lot of people don't realize that
7 you had an excellent major when you were in college. You
8 want to tell everyone here what you've majored in in
9 college?

10 ADM. McRAVEN: Yeah, I majored in journalism.

11 MR. BLITZER: Excellent.

12 (Laughter)

13 ADM. McRAVEN: What was I thinking?

14 MR. BLITZER: Excellent, excellent major. You
15 majored in journalism and you used that skill, the writing
16 skill that you developed, I assume, because you did some
17 academic work on Special Operations forces around the
18 world and you took a look at some of the great special
19 operations mission, the commando operations, the missions,
20 some of the not-so-great ones.

21 ADM. McRAVEN: Yeah.

22 MR. BLITZER: Forget about bin Laden for a

1 second. Tell me the two or three greatest Special
2 Operations missions that you studied and you learnt from.

3 ADM. McRAVEN: Yeah, well, I was fortunate
4 enough to go to the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey
5 and I had an opportunity to do some good thinking and
6 research on Special Operations. And I was originally
7 trying to figure out what the principles of Special
8 Operations were.

9 There have been historically been principles of
10 war, mass maneuver, size, those sorts of things, but I
11 knew that a successful Special Operation was different
12 because invariably you've got a smaller force going
13 against a well-defended force. But more times than not,
14 that Special Operation force succeeded. So the question
15 was why did it succeed? I did eight different case
16 studies.

17 The couple of ones that jump out at me
18 interestingly enough was the Army Special Forces raid on
19 the POW compound in Son Tay, North Vietnam. And while the
20 prisoners were not there and we were not successful in
21 rescuing the prisoners, when you look at how those great
22 Green Berets and airmen and helicopter pilots planned,

1 rehearsed and executed that operation, other than the fact
2 that the intelligence was flawed and we were not able to
3 get to POWs, it was, you know, almost flawless in terms of
4 the execution.

5 And the one thing that taught me because I had
6 an opportunity to interview a lot of these soldiers was
7 that they rehearsed and rehearsed and rehearsed and then
8 rehearsed again. And they looked at plan A, plan B, plan
9 C and plan D because they knew at the end of the day that
10 no good plans survives first contact with the enemy. And
11 so when things did go wrong to some degree on the target
12 in Son Tay, they quickly flexed.

13 The other one was the raid on Entebbe, the
14 Israeli raid on Entebbe, different model in that they
15 didn't have as much time but they had a very, very capable
16 force, but in their case, they were very ingenious in how
17 they approached the problem set. They knew they had to
18 get close to the target, they knew they had to use some
19 operational deception, which they did.

20 As you recall, they had a Mercedes with an Idi
21 Amin look-alike. That gave them just enough time to be
22 able to get to target and execute the mission.

1 Unfortunately Yonathan Netanyahu was killed in the
2 operation but having said that, exceedingly successful
3 operation. So when I look at kind of from a U.S. or an
4 international standpoint, those are two that jump out.

5 But frankly, there are equally magnificent
6 special operations going on today in Afghanistan and in
7 the past years in Iraq that would probably rival any of
8 those. They just didn't get the kind of, you know,
9 recognition that they probably deserve.

10 MR. BLITZER: One of the controversial areas
11 that I want you to discuss it as much as you can in
12 Afghanistan right now is the -- are these night raids that
13 are going on and the Afghans -- and I interviewed
14 President Hamid Karzai at the NATO summit in Chicago not
15 that long ago and, you know, as someone who's watched all
16 of this unfold, it's still hard for me to believe, accept
17 the fact that the U.S. still has almost 90,000 troops in
18 Afghanistan right now.

19 U.S. taxpayers still are spending about \$2
20 billion a week, \$100 billion a year maintaining that
21 military presence in Afghanistan right now and yet Hamid
22 Karzai occasionally -- and I, you know, criticized him for

1 it in front of him -- he seems to think he is doing us a
2 big favor by letting us do that.

3 ADM. McRAVEN: Right.

4 MR. BLITZER: I mean how do you deal with that
5 when you're dealing with someone you have a mission to do
6 and the host country occasionally not only says bad things
7 but isn't necessarily all that receptive to what you're
8 trying to do?

9 ADM. McRAVEN: Yeah. Well, it is a sovereign
10 country and we absolutely respect the Afghan sovereignty.
11 Now again as I've mentioned earlier, I don't conduct
12 operations in Afghanistan any more in my role as the U.S.
13 Special Operations commander. That's the purview of
14 General John Allen whose role as the ISAF commander and
15 then General Jim Maddox, in his role as the CENTCOM
16 commander as they report to the secretary and the
17 President.

18 So what I can tell you on the night raids and in
19 the course of our operations in Afghanistan, we are
20 completely partnering with the Afghans now. And that has
21 really mitigated a lot of, I think, the senior Afghan
22 concern about these night raids. The night raids are

1 important for a lot of reasons. Tactically, the enemy as
2 we say, beds down at night. So they will stop at a
3 compound at night and it makes it easier for us to locate
4 them.

5 Also at night time, the local population is not
6 moving around as much. So frankly, the opportunity to
7 have an unfortunate civilian casualty is lessened by the
8 fact that it's at night. But we absolutely understand the
9 Afghans concerns about night raid. Nobody wants somebody
10 coming into their house in the middle of the night.

11 Having said that, we are working with the
12 Afghans, within the Afghan legal system to be able to
13 execute raids both daytime and where required, night time
14 in order to get after a target that is beneficial to the
15 Afghans and to the United States.

16 MR. BLITZER: In recent months and maybe it's
17 been longer, there have been incidents where Afghans,
18 Afghanis dressed in military uniforms have killed American
19 troops, raising the question do you trust these guys that
20 you go on a sensitive night raid with because they're on,
21 they're loaded.

22 ADM. McRAVEN: Yeah.

1 MR. BLITZER: They may be totally loyal to the
2 Taliban.

3 ADM. McRAVEN: We trust them a 100 percent. And
4 the fact of the matter is when you spend time with the
5 guys that we spend time with, I mean you realize that they
6 are just as patriotic, just as committed, just as tough,
7 just as courageous as the American soldier that's
8 partnered with them. So for the folks that we work with,
9 I don't think trust has even been an issue.

10 That's not to say that there aren't people out
11 there who aren't trustworthy and we have to recognize that
12 and we need always be, I think, need a little bit on
13 guard. But the Afghans are wonderful people. Candidly, I
14 think we've done a good job of partnering with them and I
15 think we'll continue to do that as we go forward.

16 MR. BLITZER: When all troops, U.S. troops are
17 out by the end of 2014 starting next year, you're going to
18 be withdrawing those numbers big time, do you think that
19 that country is really going to be a stable, friendly
20 country to the United States?

21 ADM. McRAVEN: Well, again, I mean that's -- you
22 know, while I'm not sure all U.S. troops will be out by

1 2014, that's certainly a decision by the President and
2 President Karzai.

3 MR. BLITZER: But I thought they've made that
4 decision already.

5 ADM. McRAVEN: Well, what they've made is that
6 there's going to be a long-term strategic agreement
7 between the United States and the government of
8 Afghanistan.

9 MR. BLITZER: So they'll negotiate how many
10 troops, trainers and others might stay afterwards, Special
11 Operations forces, for example?

12 ADM. McRAVEN: I think that is the case, yes.

13 MR. BLITZER: All right. But most of the --
14 most of the 90,000 that will be gone, there'll be -- after
15 2014, what are you thinking about, 5,000, 10,000?

16 ADM. McRAVEN: Yeah. It's, again, not my place
17 to discuss that. That remains with John Allen and the
18 Afghans and the President to kind of make those decisions.

19 MR. BLITZER: Because I heard the same
20 arguments, the same point being made when the US was
21 withdrawing all of its troops from Iraq. Well, even after
22 the U.S. withdrew all its troops from Iraq, there would

1 still be a continued U.S. military presence in Iraq, but
2 guess what? There's no continued U.S. military presence
3 in Iraq right now because the Iraqis did not want to give
4 the U.S. military immunity for Iraqi -- prosecution.
5 There -- and I suspect -- I could be wrong that the
6 Afghanis probably won't want to do that either.

7 ADM. McRAVEN: Again, that's a policy decision,
8 Wolf, and not in my lane, so to speak.

9 MR. BLITZER: But you spent a lot of time in
10 Iraq.

11 ADM. McRAVEN: I did.

12 MR. BLITZER: What's happening right now and
13 just the past 48 hours, we've seen several dozen terrorist
14 incidents.

15 ADM. McRAVEN: Right.

16 MR. BLITZER: The country looks like it's a --
17 we don't pay that much attention anymore because the U.S.
18 forces are out of Iraq. But it looks like a horrible
19 situation that's developing in Iraq right now, very
20 worried about it. What about you?

21 ADM. McRAVEN: Well, I mean we're certainly
22 concerned about al-Qaeda in Iraq coming back. I think we

1 recognize this would be a problem, but you know, the Iraqi
2 security forces as we were exiting Iraq, they're very
3 capable security forces. This is a tough problem set for
4 them. It's very complex, but I'm confident that they
5 understand what the problem is and hopefully, they'll be
6 able to deal with it as time goes on. But I mean clearly
7 al-Qaeda in Iraq is a problem that they've got to deal
8 with.

9 MR. BLITZER: The other huge problem -- Iraq's a
10 huge problem, Afghanistan's a huge problem. What about
11 Pakistan right now? And I want you to get into as much as
12 you can what we call drone strikes. It's a sensitive
13 issue. The Pakistanis are obviously complaining about it
14 all the time, but under President Obama, the U.S. has
15 intensified the drone attacks against various targets in
16 Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, at other places as well.
17 What can you tell us about that?

18 ADM. McRAVEN: Nothing.

19 (Laughter)

20 MR. BLITZER: I'll rephrase the question.

21 (Laughter)

22 MR. BLITZER: Here's what we know. Some of

1 these drone strikes are organized by the CIA, but some are
2 organized by the U.S. military including Special
3 Operations. Is that right?

4 ADM. McRAVEN: What I can tell you is the
5 military uses drones in Afghanistan routinely to conduct
6 strikes.

7 MR. BLITZER: In Afghanistan?

8 ADM. McRAVEN: In Afghanistan.

9 MR. BLITZER: But you don't want to talk about
10 other places?

11 ADM. McRAVEN: Don't want to talk about other
12 places.

13 MR. BLITZER: It's a very sensitive subject.

14 ADM. McRAVEN: Then why would I talk about it,
15 of course.

16 (Laughter)

17 MR. BLITZER: I've heard -- he's very good.
18 I've heard top U.S. officials, Secretary Panetta and
19 others testify there are fewer al-Qaeda elements left in
20 Afghanistan today than there are in Yemen, for example, or
21 Somalia for that matter. Is that true?

22 ADM. McRAVEN: Yeah, I think that's a true

1 statement. And again, it's been a year since I've been in
2 Afghanistan, but the number of al-Qaeda in Afghanistan,
3 you know, a year ago, numbers in, you know, somewhere in
4 the 100 or so, they can still be key interlocutors. So
5 we're always wary of them and where there are al-Qaeda, I
6 know the military makes very aggressive stands to go after
7 them. So they are still a problem in Afghanistan that we
8 have to deal with. Are there more in Yemen? Based on the
9 reports that I see in the open press reports, there
10 certainly appear to be a lot of al-Qaeda in Yemen.

11 MR. BLITZER: And what do -- what should the
12 U.S. be doing about that or in Somalia for that matter?

13 ADM. McRAVEN: Yeah, well, I think what the U.S.
14 is doing is they're partnering with the government of
15 Yemen. The government of Yemen has been very supportive
16 in this partnership and we are again, working with Yemeni
17 forces so that they can take care of their own security
18 problems. And as they made the transition from President
19 Saleh to President Hadi, that transition frankly probably
20 went better than we would have expected.

21 President Hadi has done a good job of kind of
22 stepping up to the plate, taking this threat of al-Qaeda

1 in Yemen seriously and because of that, the United States
2 is again reaching out to him where it is appropriate to do
3 so.

4 MR. BLITZER: I was in Cairo and Tunis with the
5 Secretary of State Hillary Clinton about a year or so ago
6 maybe a little bit more and she walked around Tahrir
7 Square and the Arab Spring seemed -- everyone seemed to be
8 very upbeat, very positive, very confident that democracy
9 was moving in the right direction in North Africa and the
10 Middle East. But now, people aren't that confident. Can
11 you give us your assessment of what's going on in the Arab
12 Spring?

13 ADM. McRAVEN: Yeah, well, I'm certainly not an
14 expert on the Arab Spring. I mean I -- what I know is
15 democracy is hard and I've watched it as we've tried to
16 build democracies in Iraq and Afghanistan. It's tough.
17 It took us a long time as a nation to build a strong
18 democracy and will probably take them some time.

19 But again, I'm not an expert on the dynamics of
20 the Middle East. My job is kind of purely in a military
21 role to support, again in this case, General Mattis or
22 Admiral Stavridis as required.

1 MR. BLITZER: But you do work closely with
2 foreign -- foreign militaries?

3 ADM. McRAVEN: Absolutely.

4 MR. BLITZER: How does that work out? I mean
5 give us a little description. I'll throw in an example,
6 Israel.

7 ADM. McRAVEN: Okay.

8 MR. BLITZER: What do you do with Israel?

9 ADM. McRAVEN: Well, I won't focus on Israel.
10 What I'll tell you is with all the countries, as I said,
11 we're in about 78 additional countries above and beyond
12 Afghanistan today. We work -- the first thing we do is we
13 go on and we sit down with the country team, the chief
14 emissary, the ambassador, make sure that our goals are
15 consistent with the ambassador's goals. There is some
16 belief out there that somehow we have a separate agenda
17 from the ambassador and I will tell you that's absolutely
18 not the case. We sit down with the ambassador --

19 MR. BLITZER: So if you go into a country,
20 whether Israel or Egypt or any other country, first thing
21 you do is meet with the U.S. ambassador?

22 ADM. McRAVEN: You know, before we ever go into

1 a country, the U.S. ambassador and the country team have
2 to provide us country clearance in order to get into the
3 country. So any thought that, you know, somehow Special
4 Operations guys, you know, slip into a country and do
5 things that are outside the purview of the embassy is just
6 patently wrong. Everything we do supports the embassy
7 mission there and that starts, you know, months before we
8 are ever in a country.

9 So we'll work with the embassy. We will partner
10 with a unit that is vetting, that's gone through the Leahy
11 vetting to make sure that there are no human rights
12 violations.

13 MR. BLITZER: What vetting is that?

14 ADM. McRAVEN: The Leahy. Leahy Amendment is an
15 amendment that basically tells us we have got to make sure
16 that the partners we are working with have really no human
17 rights violation so that we're partnering with the right
18 people.

19 MR. BLITZER: This is after Senator Patrick
20 Leahy?

21 ADM. McRAVEN: Correct. So you know, once all
22 that is done and a unit is identified, then we will

1 partner with that unit. And a lot of times, it's basic
2 infantry tactics dependent upon the unit to get them up to
3 a certain level and then when they're at the appropriate
4 level, military level, then we can kind of continue to,
5 you know, we do the crawl, walk, run approach if you will.

6 And then some of the -- some of the countries
7 obviously have high-end counterterrorism units and it's
8 easier for us to kind of partner with them and kind of
9 share tactics, techniques and procedures, but in every
10 case, regardless of the country, there is a partnering
11 with the embassy. There is an understanding of what the
12 embassy's requirements are, what the geographic combatant
13 commander's requirements are. We make sure that's all
14 understood before we ever set foot in a foreign country.

15 MR. BLITZER: And then there's usually with a
16 friendly country, there's pretty good cooperation, whether
17 a NATO ally or other countries.

18 ADM. McRAVEN: Absolutely, you bet.

19 MR. BLITZER: And you train each other, you help
20 each other, you learn from each other.

21 ADM. McRAVEN: Absolutely.

22 MR. BLITZER: There's a good dialogue going on.

1 ADM. McRAVEN: Absolutely. I mean there's a --
2 there's this belief that, you know, as we go in as
3 Americans to a less developed country that somehow we're
4 doing all the teaching. That's absolutely not the case.
5 The fact of the matter is we go into country, we're
6 learning a lot about their culture and the one thing we
7 talk about within Special Operations is understanding the
8 human domain.

9 The human domain, I mean, you can think of it
10 as, you know, you have the maritime, the ground, the air
11 and then there's a human domain you have to operate in and
12 that's the kind of the totality of the physical, the
13 cultural environment that has to do with the people that
14 you're dealing with. So as we go into a country in Africa
15 or in the Middle East or in the Pacific region, we're
16 learning about them.

17 We're learning what their culture is so next
18 time we come back in, you know, they understand who we
19 are, we understand who they are. You know, you kind of
20 build that trust and you can't surge trust. So you've got
21 to start it early and that's one of the things Special
22 Operations forces do very well, build small footprint. We

1 don't take a lot of guys to do that and pretty cost-
2 effective.

3 MR. BLITZER: How good is the U.S. right now in
4 linguistic skills? Do you have enough Arabic speakers,
5 for example, to get the job done from your perspective?

6 ADM. McRAVEN: Yeah, we're always short on our
7 linguistic skills. You know, to learn Arabic -- it's a
8 very difficult language -- we've got some great training
9 that takes place at most of the major institutions we have
10 within Special Operations primarily at Fort Bragg, but we
11 take immersion training downrange, if you will, in a
12 variety of countries. We'll do anything we can to get our
13 guys up to speed in Arabic, Pashto, Tagalog, whatever the
14 required language is.

15 Maintaining those skills is difficult, but I
16 think we do a pretty good job as a force. But I won't kid
17 you. It's a difficult problem set, one we do pretty well,
18 but there's never enough Arab or Pashto linguists to go
19 around to really deal with all the problems we have to
20 deal with.

21 MR. BLITZER: Were the -- and you don't have to
22 answer this if you don't want to and I suspect you won't -

1 -

2 (Laughter)

3 MR. BLITZER: The Navy SEALs who went in to get
4 bin Laden, did they speak other languages other than
5 English?

6 ADM. McRAVEN: Yes.

7 MR. BLITZER: Thank you. That's it.

8 (Laughter)

9 MR. BLITZER: All right. That's important.
10 Because not only were they courageous and in great
11 physical shape and brilliant, but they also spoke at least
12 one other language?

13 ADM. McRAVEN: They do, yeah, absolutely.

14 MR. BLITZER: All of them or some of them?

15 ADM. McRAVEN: No, just some of them.

16 MR. BLITZER: Okay, just want to be precise.

17 (Laughter)

18 MR. BLITZER: That's very, very important. I
19 told our guests here and those who were listening and
20 watching that we'd come back to bin -- the bin Laden raid.
21 And there's been so much written about it and I know some
22 of it is great, but some of it not so great. Share with

1 us one nugget, one nugget that without violating sources
2 or methods or classified information that you believe is
3 important that the American people know about this raid
4 that they may not have read about or don't know about,
5 something that, you know, you want to share.

6 ADM. McRAVEN: Yeah. You know, I think what the
7 American people, they probably do but they may not
8 appreciate is how great our interagency process is. And I
9 look around the audience at some of our great interagency
10 representatives here. But when you look at the CIA, the
11 FBI, the Defense Intelligence Agency, NGA, Homeland
12 Security, National Counterterrorism Center, all of these
13 folks day in and day out that are going after the threat
14 that's out there, that are looking at the threat that are
15 protecting the American people and how well they work
16 together day in and day out, and you don't see that.

17 You tend to think that the FBI's lane is very
18 clear and that the CIA's lane is very clear and that the
19 Defense Intelligence is very clear, but in reality, they
20 are all talking to each other all day long making sure
21 that the information they've got and the intelligence
22 they've got is right. They are checking and double

1 checking.

2 So as we went in to the bin Laden raid, this
3 thought that this is going to be difficult pulling the
4 military and the CIA together along with the support we
5 had from the National Security Agency and NSA and others,
6 this was easy for us. It was easy for us because for the
7 last 10 years, we'd been doing this. We'd been building
8 this interagency team and I got to tell you, today it
9 hums. The -- you know, on the margins are there problems?
10 Sure.

11 But if you talk to, you know, Bob Mueller or
12 Keith Alexander here or Dave Petraeus, I mean we've known
13 each other all for a long time. We're not only
14 colleagues, we are friends. And so when you have that
15 trust, everything else is easy. And we built that trust
16 up over many, many years.

17 MR. BLITZER: And how good is the intelligence?
18 Because without good intelligence in the bin Laden raid,
19 if you didn't have good intelligence, you wouldn't have
20 known anything?

21 ADM. McRAVEN: Sure, yeah.

22 MR. BLITZER: But when you go into a mission in

1 Afghanistan or any place else in the world, do you have
2 confidence in the intelligence you're getting?

3 ADM. McRAVEN: We have the best intelligence
4 agencies in the world bar none and there is -- there's
5 nobody even close to us.

6 (Applause)

7 MR. BLITZER: We're going to take questions from
8 some of you too, so you might want to get ready, I have a
9 few more. But start thinking of a question. This is a
10 rare opportunity we all have. I've got a few questions
11 that may are may not be relevant. You were runner-up for
12 2011's *TIME* Magazine's *Person of the Year*. How
13 disappointed were you?

14 (Laughter)

15 ADM. McRAVEN: Yeah, I'm not even sure how to
16 answer that Wolf. I will tell you that my hope as -- and
17 if there's anybody from *TIME* here, they will know the
18 background of this is it certainly wasn't my intent to be
19 the *TIME* magazine runner-up or the *TIME Man of the Year*.
20 And frankly, I've fended off a number of attempts to have
21 interviews because it isn't about me. I mean, it's about
22 that young E5 with two kids -- married and two kids who's

1 on his 11th and 12th deployment. You know, that's who the
2 real heroes are out here, and to put --

3 (Applause)

4 ADM. McRAVEN: To put my face on it frankly is
5 not what I wanted. What I was hoping was that it would be
6 the Special Operations, you know, soldier or warrior of
7 the year because you got Sergeant Leroy Petry Medal of
8 Honor winner. We've got Navy Cross and Distinguished
9 Service Cross winners. We've got Silver Star winners out
10 there. I mean, it was a phenomenal year for Special
11 Operations and frankly, the focus on me and the bin Laden
12 raid, you know, just didn't necessarily sit well with me.

13 MR. BLITZER: What did it feel like -- and I was
14 anchoring our coverage of the President's State of the
15 Union address when you were invited to sit next to the
16 First Lady up in the gallery before a joint session of the
17 United States Congress and you were obviously introduced
18 and the whole world was watching. What did that feel like
19 a Navy SEAL, just a guy like you?

20 ADM. McRAVEN: Yeah. Well, it was quite an
21 honor. You know, it's -- the White House had reached out
22 to me a couple of weeks before and invited me on behalf of

1 the First Lady and the President to sit in the box and I
2 thought it was a very gracious offer and I was honored to
3 do so and really to help represent the men and women in
4 uniform in addition to the joint chiefs that were present
5 at the State of the Union.

6 MR. BLITZER: That was a -- did you have to go
7 through clearances and authorization from your commanders
8 to -- or when the commander in chief says I want you up in
9 that gallery, you're in the gallery?

10 ADM. McRAVEN: I -- well, yes. Yes. So I mean
11 it was understood, you know, in discussions with the
12 secretary and chairman, they understood the offer and as I
13 said, they -- I was honored to accept the offer.

14 MR. BLITZER: Is the -- what kind of commander
15 in chief is he?

16 ADM. McRAVEN: The President of the United
17 States is fantastic. And again, I'm not a political guy.
18 I've worked in both administrations. I very, very much
19 enjoyed working for President Bush and I very much enjoy
20 working for President Obama. And it's -- again, this
21 isn't about politics. This is about a commander in chief
22 who I have the opportunity to engage with on a routine

1 basis and watching him and the decisions he makes along
2 with his national security team.

3 They are a very impressive group of guys and
4 gals. And so you know, as a -- as an operational -- as a
5 commander, I feel comfortable that when we present our
6 best military advice to the President and his team, they
7 take it very seriously. They consult routinely with the
8 senior leadership of the military and they do the best
9 they can to make the right decisions. So you know, that's
10 my personal opinion, but I'm very -- again, very impressed
11 with the President and his national security team.

12 MR. BLITZER: I've heard that from others as
13 well in your position.

14 (Applause)

15 MR. BLITZER: The fact that he never served in
16 the military and Mitt Romney never served in the military,
17 is that at all a factor that the American people should
18 consider at all?

19 ADM. McRAVEN: Well, I know from uniform
20 military standpoint, I mean we serve the President and the
21 commander in chief irrespective of whether they served in
22 uniform or not. So again, I'm not going to get into the

1 political discussion, but I will tell you we're proud to
2 serve whoever sits in the White House.

3 (Applause)

4 MR. BLITZER: Without violating any sensitive,
5 classified information --

6 ADM. McRAVEN: Why do you start every --

7 (Laughter)

8 MR. BLITZER: Because I know you. Just walk us
9 through what you -- you know, in general terms, because
10 you're not going to be specific, where you go from the
11 Aspen Institute?

12 ADM. McRAVEN: In terms of what kind of --

13 MR. BLITZER: What would be a normal, you know,
14 week for you, the next week?

15 ADM. McRAVEN: Yeah. I'd have to ask my aide-
16 de-camp to find out what they're going to do next week in
17 answering.

18 (Laughter)

19 MR. CLEMONS: I mean I spend a lot of time at
20 Washington, D.C. because as I said, I've got dual
21 responsibilities.

22 MR. BLITZER: You're based in Tampa?

1 ADM. McRAVEN: I'm based in Tampa.

2 MR. BLITZER: That's where the Special
3 Operations command is headquartered.

4 ADM. McRAVEN: Right. Now I'm based in Tampa,
5 fantastic town, great support from the people there in
6 Tampa for both U.S. Special Operations Command and Central
7 Command. But I spend a couple of days a week up at
8 Washington D.C. because again as I said, I have service-
9 like responsibilities. So as we're working through budget
10 issues, as we're beginning to build the next Program
11 Objectives Memorandum, the POM, it's important that I'm up
12 here to interface with my service components.

13 One of the things that's very important to
14 understand about Special Operations is that we are not
15 Special Operations without the support of larger services,
16 the Army, Navy, Air Force, the Marine Corps. They provide
17 us a very, very large part of our capability. We would
18 not be the Special Operations forces we are without the
19 support of the services.

20 So my -- again, this gets back to the trust and
21 relationship I have with guys like General Ray Odierno,
22 General Norton Schwartz, General Amos, you know, these are

1 great working relationships and John Green at the C&O,
2 great working relationships, great personal relationships.
3 So as we get in the kind of tough issues, budget issues,
4 when you sit down across a table with each other and come
5 to good decisions.

6 So I spend a fair amount of time in Washington
7 D.C. I like to get out, obviously and visit the troops
8 and they are spread out across the entire continental
9 United States and as I mentioned, across the globe. But
10 my responsibility for the continent, the troops based in
11 the continent of the United States is to make sure that
12 they are, you know, trained and equipped to the best level
13 they can be.

14 So as I get out on the road, I am looking hard
15 at whether or not I am meeting their expectations in terms
16 of providing the equipment they need and frankly, that
17 they're meeting mine and the nation's expectations and
18 being the best Special Operations warriors they can be.

19 MR. BLITZER: And they are excellent indeed.
20 We're going to take some questions. I have another
21 question before we move on to your questions. The
22 Pentagon's overall budget and you're only responsible for

1 part of that and your budget is in relative good shape,
2 but, you know, but Leon Panetta, the Defense Secretary,
3 he's very upset, he's very worried about what he calls the
4 hallowing out of the U.S. military.

5 I was just with him in Brussels at NATO
6 headquarters and he was very -- you know, I interviewed
7 him and he was, you know, pretty worried that -- he's
8 already cut \$500 billion over the next 10 years and if the
9 sequestration goes through, if there's the fiscal cliff or
10 whatever and another \$500 billion over the next 10 years
11 has to be cut, he doesn't know if that's, you know, what
12 the impact of that is going to be.

13 Here is the question that I have. Because
14 others are saying, you know what, with all the troops
15 coming out of rock, most of the troops, you know, pretty
16 soon will be out of Afghanistan, the military can afford
17 to cut its expenditures. And right now, and I think it's
18 a fact, we've fact-checked this.

19 The U.S. military -- the U.S. Defense
20 Department, its annual budget is higher than the next 15
21 countries combined. And that includes friendly countries,
22 NATO allies like Britain and Canada and France and Italy.

1 It includes not-so-friendly countries like China and
2 Russia and it includes adversaries like Iran, North Korea
3 and other countries. So why does the United States, why
4 do American taxpayers need to spend so much more than the
5 next 15 countries combined?

6 ADM. McRAVEN: Well, thank you. We'd have to
7 ask the American taxpayers whether or not they feel that
8 the value they get from their military is worthwhile.
9 Again, this is a issue for the American people. I will
10 tell you I, needless to say, absolutely agree with the
11 secretary. You know, we're not even planning for
12 sequestration.

13 The secretary has made his concerns known to the
14 President and to the Hill and, you know, we're going to
15 let the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the secretary
16 and the President kind of fight that budget battle. But
17 it's always up to the American people on how much military
18 they think they need to do the jobs that are out there and
19 to fend off the threats that are coming our way.

20 MR. BLITZER: Good answer. All right. Let's
21 take some questions. I know we have some microphones out
22 here. Yeah, there is one over there. Whoever asks a

1 question, just tell us your name, where you're from and go
2 ahead. And by the way, let's do this Q&A, in other words,
3 not A&A.

4 (Laughter)

5 MR. FISHMAN: Hi. My name is Steve Fishman
6 (phonetic). I'm from Los Angeles. First, I want to thank
7 you for speaking to us and for your service to our
8 country. My question concerns your answer on quality of
9 our intelligence. We're currently facing a situation with
10 Iran and their ability to develop nuclear weapons and what
11 the red line is. So obviously, without providing
12 specifics, can you give us an idea of what capability
13 we'll have to determine that red line?

14 ADM. McRAVEN: Yeah, well, obviously I'm not
15 going to go into specifics on what we do and do not know
16 about Iran. All I can tell you is that the right intel
17 resources are put -- are being put towards that problem.
18 You know, we partner with a lot of folks out there to
19 ensure we've got the best intelligence picture that we can
20 have.

21 No intelligence is a 100 percent perfect. You
22 know, we talked about the bin Laden raid. As good as that

1 was, we didn't know for certain. So there's always going
2 to be a degree of uncertainty no matter how good your
3 intelligence is. My point is, you know, with the support
4 that we get from the National Security Agency, from the
5 Central Intelligence Agency, from Defense Intelligence,
6 National Geospatial, the FBI, all of the interagency folks
7 that are out there, that intelligence community is the
8 best in the world.

9 Does that mean that they're going to be right
10 every single time? Absolutely not. But I got to tell
11 you, they are incredible professionals, you know, working
12 exceedingly hard every day to get the President and the
13 decision makers the intel they need to make the right
14 decisions.

15 MR. BLITZER: We have a question from Walter
16 Isaacson.

17 MR. ISAACSON: Thank you for coming here,
18 Admiral. Earlier this summer at the Aspen Institute,
19 Admiral Mullen and then seconded by Stan McChrystal,
20 General McChrystal, both said that they thought we should
21 return to some system of national service. What are your
22 thoughts about mandatory national service or versus the

1 all-volunteer force?

2 ADM. McRAVEN: Well, again, you know, probably,
3 out of my lane a little bit other than to say that the
4 all-volunteer force has served us exceedingly well. When
5 you take a look at the quality of the young men and women
6 we have in the service, it's unparalleled and I was in
7 well before the all-volunteer force. I came in in 1977,
8 then if you go back to '73 in my time in RTC.

9 So I know what the -- not all-voluntary force
10 was capable of doing. And while they were great folks
11 supporting us at the end of the day, this all-volunteer
12 force -- Bill McRaven's been here, has served us very,
13 very well.

14 MR. BLITZER: Want to get a woman to ask you
15 questions.

16 SPEAKER: Right. I have a woman-oriented
17 question as well. Thank you for your service, sir and
18 Wolf, you've done a wonderful job tonight. I admire your
19 role in this -- in moderating. My question is about women
20 in the military and I know as you alluded, women serve on
21 cultural support teams with the Special Operations
22 Command.

1 But as you also know, the 1994 ground combat
2 exclusion policy was recently relaxed earlier this year,
3 opening up 14,000 more positions to women in infantry or
4 combat support roles and 4,000, I think, in the Navy and
5 there is a pilot program with the Marines right now to
6 allow them into the infantry, but a lot of resistance in
7 the Army for allowing women into our infantry and ranger
8 school. What are your thoughts on increasing women's role
9 in combat and the eventuality of women as Navy SEALs?

10 ADM. McRAVEN: Yeah, you know, frankly, what
11 we've seen at least in my time in the military and
12 certainly over the last 10 years is the phenomenal job
13 that women do everywhere we put them in terms of a
14 military job.

15 You know, I'm always careful to say we don't
16 women in combat because I'll tell you when a culture
17 support team female, you know, hops on a helicopter with
18 her, you know, range or company that's going out to an
19 objective and flies from that forward-operating base to an
20 offset location, patrol six kilometers to the target,
21 allows the rangers to secure the target, comes and talks
22 to the females on the targets, patrols back to an offset

1 location, gets back on a helicopter and flies back to a
2 forward-operating base, it's hard to distinguish between
3 what she did and what her male counterpart did.

4 And I think everybody in today's environment
5 certainly recognizes that. Again, the law and the policy
6 is not my lane. And so I'll defer to those who look at
7 that. All I can tell you is, you know, the women that are
8 serving with us now are doing an absolutely magnificent
9 job and we couldn't do the job without them, period.

10 MR. BLITZER: I'm going to go back, but a quick
11 question and follow-up, if you will, because I covered
12 this for so many years. Now that gays are allowed to
13 serve openly in the U.S. military, I assume a Special
14 Operations among the 66,000 troops that you command there
15 are gays and lesbians who serve there?

16 ADM. McRAVEN: That is true.

17 MR. BLITZER: How is that working out? Because
18 we heard all sorts of horror stories, fears that this
19 would be a disaster.

20 ADM. McRAVEN: Yeah, but at the end of the day,
21 all we care about is whether you carry your rucksack and
22 you do your job, you know.

1 (Applause)

2 ADM. McRAVEN: And so whether you're a female,
3 whether you're gay or lesbian, whether you're a minority
4 is immaterial to the guy in the military. We just want
5 somebody that steps up and does their job.

6 MR. BLITZER: And close quarters, has that been
7 an issue at all? Because we heard all sorts of fears that
8 this was going to be bad.

9 ADM. McRAVEN: I can tell you and I don't want
10 to speak for the other services and I don't want to speak
11 for the folks that are downrange. I can tell you I have
12 not had to deal with any of those issues as the commander
13 of SOCOM. That's not to say that there are not out there
14 and somebody else hasn't had to deal with them, but for
15 right now, nothing has been raised to my level.

16 MR. BLITZER: Okay. Go ahead.

17 MR. KREVOY: Thank you. My name is Brad Krevoy.
18 I'm a film producer from Los Angeles and I had -- thank
19 you very much for your service and I had the privilege and
20 honor to work with Lieutenant Colonel Mike Strobl and
21 General Kelly. We produced *Taking Chance* for HBO that won
22 the Golden Globe for Kevin Bacon.

1 We're working on a three-part mini series now in
2 view of all the bin Laden controversy over the feature
3 film that's been made, we stepped back from doing a
4 interview about you. So I just have two quick questions.
5 I hope you'll humor me. The first is regarding where you
6 were on September 11 and the second is you alluded to the
7 fact that new facts will come out about the raid that
8 would perhaps supplement the book that's already been
9 written that was soon to come out. How soon will that be
10 before that information does come out?

11 ADM. McRAVEN: Yeah, again, my point was the
12 details of the intelligence and how we gain the
13 intelligence to identify the compound, in probably 25
14 years, the real details of that will come out or maybe
15 later. My only point there was it was a phenomenal
16 intelligence operation. I don't expect that you're going
17 to see it anytime coming out in somebody's book or open
18 press.

19 That's not to say we haven't talked in general
20 about the intelligence revolving around the raid. But the
21 details as we say, the sources and the methods which we
22 protect very, very carefully, those won't be known for

1 decades, but when that does happen and it becomes
2 unclassified, again those folks that are still around will
3 be very impressed with it. Where I was on September 11th,
4 I had had a parachute accident and I was laid up in a bed
5 recovering from a parachute accident when it occurred.

6 MR. BLITZER: How do you feel now?

7 ADM. McRAVEN: Great.

8 MR. BLITZER: Okay. Glad. I'm going to -- on
9 that sources and methods, there's a huge uproar now and
10 from your perspective and actually to get your sense about
11 the leaks about the bin Laden raid, whether it did
12 undermine sources and methods, it went too far. They are
13 investigations as you know, on the Hill right now. Can
14 you share a thought with us on how you feel about all
15 this?

16 ADM. McRAVEN: Well, we're never happy when
17 leaks occur obviously. I mean we go to great lengths to
18 protect our national security, that's very great lengths
19 to protect our sources and methods. So all of that we
20 guard very carefully. Unfortunately, not everybody guards
21 that very carefully.

22 And I think what you've seen is the secretary

1 and the President and Capital Hill are taking these leaks
2 very, very seriously as they should and we need to do the
3 best we can to clamp down on it. Because sooner or later,
4 it is going to cost people their lives or it's going to
5 cost us our national security. So it is important and
6 frankly it's important, I would tell you, for reporters
7 that are here.

8 You know, you're going to hear things, you're
9 going to see things that you think the public needs to
10 know. And I will tell you, I'm not sure the public needs
11 to know all that. And a lot of times, you all are racing
12 to a deadline to try and trump the next network
13 potentially at the expense of somebody's life. And I have
14 had discussions with editors and --

15 (Applause)

16 ADM. McRAVEN: I have had discussions with
17 editors about the sensitive nature of some of the things
18 they are about to print and they've been very candid with
19 me and said, you know, if so-and-so is going to beat us to
20 the story, I'm going to print it. And all you can do is
21 make the best case you can. That's not to say that the
22 American people don't need to have a completely

1 transparent government. I got it.

2 And I am -- I'm the guy that is working to
3 protect that transparency for all the right reasons. But
4 I do think as reporters, you have an obligation as well
5 and I would encourage every reporter in this room to
6 accept their responsibility to protect this country.

7 MR. BLITZER: I couldn't agree more.

8 (Applause)

9 MR. BLITZER: But has there been in your mind
10 without getting into a detail, a specific piece of damage
11 to whatever you do as a result of recent leaks?

12 ADM. McRAVEN: I can't address specifics.

13 Again, a lot of these --

14 MR. BLITZER: Don't tell me the specifics, but
15 just, you know, has a mission been hurt, has an American
16 life been endangered because of something that appeared in
17 a newspaper or magazine or on television?

18 ADM. McRAVEN: Again, the problem is if I go
19 down that road, I'm going to end up telling you what piece
20 of information.

21 MR. BLITZER: Oh, tell me what piece of
22 information.

1 ADM. McRAVEN: Yeah, I mean are people affected
2 by the information that comes out? You bet they are. Are
3 lives at risk? Absolutely.

4 MR. BLITZER: All right. You answered the
5 question.

6 ADM. McRAVEN: Okay.

7 MR. BLITZER: All right. We have another
8 question, Ambassador Stuart Bernstein.

9 AMB. BERNSTEIN: Thank you. This was very
10 special. I had the great honor to be an American
11 ambassador and part of that training was spending a day
12 with the Special Forces and watch them do what they do and
13 hanging out with them afterwards and talking to each of
14 them. All they talked about was being able to execute a
15 real-life situation to see how they would perform. And
16 how do you instill that kind of commitment and dedication
17 in these young men and women?

18 ADM. McRAVEN: Now, thank you, Ambassador.
19 Well, I think a lot of them come in with that in their
20 DNA. They come in and they join our organizations because
21 they want to be special, they want to be challenged, they
22 want to be put into difficult situations. And so you have

1 great men and women that are coming in to the service.
2 But when they join an organization, you know, a lot of
3 times, you join initially because it's an adventure.

4 When you're young, you're looking for an
5 adventure. And then after a while, that adventure kind of
6 becomes a profession and then after a while, that
7 profession becomes a calling and you find in the senior
8 military guys that it has become a calling to them. I
9 mean it is a very, very powerful self awareness that it's
10 not about you anymore. It's about a cause that's greater
11 than you and that's what brings them together.

12 MR. VIZMU: I'm Arte Vizmu (phonetic), ZDF
13 German Television. Thank you very much for the insights
14 that you gave us tonight and I promise I'm hoping for an
15 answer that doesn't endanger any lives, sir. I was
16 thinking that maybe there is a -- or there could be a good
17 argument be made, a very good argument, ethical argument
18 be made for the legitimacy of drone strikes and targeted
19 killings, but you rarely hear about it because officials
20 are not talking about this publicly.

21 Do you think that the public deserves more
22 explanation about the ethical side of targeted killings

1 and drones -- drone strikes? And while I'm at it, let me
2 ask the question that David Sanger of the *New York Times*
3 posts in his book basically saying what makes a drone
4 strike different from, for example, plugging an explosive
5 device to a car of an Iranian scientist?

6 ADM. McRAVEN: Well, I think you answered your
7 own question a little bit. I mean the fact of the matter
8 is there is a lot of discussion out there about drone
9 strikes. I see it on the cover of magazines. There's
10 books written about it. So to say that we as an American
11 public, as an international public are not talking about
12 drone strikes, I think, is not true.

13 You know, we look at drone strikes and again, I
14 can tell you within the Afghan framework and that's what
15 I'm prepared to talk about, you know, we go through great
16 lengths to make sure that our intelligence is as precise
17 as it can be. And we have rules of engagement that are
18 backed up by the law of armed conflict that are looked at
19 through a legal review before we ever even propose a drone
20 strike, recognizing again that in a theatre of war, a
21 drone strike, a drone is just the vehicle that takes the
22 weapon to the target.

1 So as long as you're adhering to the law of
2 armed conflict and you're adhering to the legal protocols,
3 then a drone for us in Afghanistan is no different than an
4 F-15 or an F-16. In terms of the legal aspects of it, you
5 know, I'll leave that to the lawyers. What I do know is
6 as we have very strict rules of engagement that are
7 informed by, that are framed by the law of armed conflict
8 and a whole host of other conventions.

9 MR. BLITZER: Those drones are pretty good
10 though?

11 ADM. McRAVEN: The drones are pretty good.

12 MR. BLITZER: Okay.

13 (Laughter)

14 MR. BLITZER: Getting better too?

15 ADM. McRAVEN: And they are getting better,
16 absolutely.

17 MR. BLITZER: Are they going to replace fighter
18 aircrafts at some point?

19 ADM. McRAVEN: Oh, you know, we're about to have
20 a change of the chief of staff of the Air Force. She's a
21 good friend of mine. I wouldn't even want to go down that
22 road and so.

1 MR. BLITZER: Let's get another question. Yeah,
2 in the back, go ahead.

3 MS. LEEBACK: Hi, Joanie Leeback (phonetic).
4 Thank you for your incredible service. My question is
5 about drones. Is it accurate to assume they're
6 manufactured abroad such as in China and if so, do you
7 have any worry that these secrets of drones or other
8 highly sensitive equipment, that those secrets could come
9 out and eventually be turned against us so that drones
10 would be used against Washington or something? What is
11 your concern? Because I think GE is in China and they
12 have to share a lot of their secrets with China. Thank
13 you.

14 ADM. McRAVEN: Yeah, I don't know where the
15 parts of the drones are made. I do know that we have some
16 very strict protocols when it comes to technology transfer
17 and so we are always working issues of technology transfer
18 and again, there is a long legal process that the
19 Department of Defense has to go through before any
20 contractor is allowed to transfer technology for any
21 reason. I can't speak specifically to the drone issue.

22 MR. BLITZER: The only thing I know is we know

1 where the U.S. Olympic team's uniforms were made. Other
2 than that, we don't know where anything else was made.

3 (Laughter)

4 MR. BLITZER: Yes, go ahead.

5 MR. KLAIDMAN: Hi. Dan Klaidman from *Newsweek*
6 and *The Daily Beast*. Thanks for being here, Admiral.
7 Back in May, Mitt Romney was on a campaign trail and he
8 was asked about the raid on the bin Laden compound and
9 what he said was effectively any president would have made
10 that call. I wonder what you think of that statement.

11 ADM. McRAVEN: Yeah, I'm not going to get into
12 that discussion.

13 (Laughter)

14 MR. KLAIDMAN: Well, let you ask it a different
15 way. Do you think that any president would have made that
16 call?

17 ADM. McRAVEN: Do they -- they didn't teach me
18 this in journalism school.

19 (Laughter)

20 ADM. McRAVEN: So you ask your question, you
21 rephrase it, you try to comment. No, I'm not going to
22 answer that question.

1 MR. KLAIDMAN: All right.

2 ADM. McRAVEN: It's a good try though.

3 (Applause)

4 MR. BLITZER: Go ahead.

5 MR. GARRETT: Thank you. Mike Garrett with
6 Boeing in Seattle. In the past, when it's been made
7 public about Special Forces successes, it's usually just
8 said Special Forces. We don't identify which branch it
9 comes from.

10 ADM. McRAVEN: Right, right.

11 MR. GARRETT: What went behind with respect to
12 identifying the SEALs in this case with the bin Laden
13 success and how were you involved with that and what was
14 going through the pros and cons of why we would want to
15 identify them specifically from a risk standpoint?

16 ADM. McRAVEN: Yeah, I mean I think any time we
17 have an operation that gets that kind of international
18 scrutiny, invariably people want to understand the good
19 news aspect of the story and this was a good news aspect
20 of the story. You know, the units that contributed to the
21 success, I think, were part and parcel to that. We do
22 identify units routinely on operations.

1 I mean we talk about Navy SEALs and Army Green
2 Berets and Army Rangers. So I think it's a little
3 misleading to think that we don't talk about specifics.
4 Now we don't generally get into the names of the
5 individuals. We're very, very careful about that to
6 protect their families and that really becomes a red line
7 for us.

8 I mean if you say it was, you know, SEAL Team
9 One or the 75th Rangers that conduct the operation, you
10 know, we're generally okay with that. When you start
11 getting down into the specifics of who did it, that
12 becomes a red line for us because it is really about
13 protecting the individual and the -- and their families.

14 MR. BLITZER: And what's important is that not
15 one name of any of the Navy SEALs who went into Abbottabad
16 has been disclosed.

17 ADM. McRAVEN: And frankly, I do give the press
18 a lot of credit for that because my guess is there are
19 folks out there that know some of those names. So to the
20 folks, the members of the press that are here, I greatly
21 appreciate that, because it does -- you know, when you
22 talk about the fact that will it really protect

1 individuals and their families, you bet it will.

2 MR. BLITZER: This is a sensitive subject and I
3 know we're almost out of time, but I just to press you on
4 this because I'm -- you know, for many years very
5 sensitive to it as well. We're all journalists. We're
6 all Americans but we're human beings. We don't want to
7 see people needlessly get killed. So we're -- when
8 somebody in a position of high authority, the military or
9 the civilian rack, comes to us and says, if you report
10 this lives will be endangered, we listen. And very often,
11 we don't report it.

12 ADM. McRAVEN: And we appreciate that.

13 MR. BLITZER: And it's just a matter of you
14 know, we'll rather take the chance and getting scooped by
15 somebody else than report information, but it's something
16 that the top military and political leadership can't just
17 use -- when they come to us and they say that and they do
18 from time to time, it's really got to be the real thing,
19 because if you just -- and I hate the expression, cry wolf
20 --

21 (Laughter)

22 MR. BLITZER: -- it's going to ruin -- it's

1 going to really down the road endanger brave young men and
2 women.

3 ADM. McRAVEN: No, we absolutely have to have
4 the same integrity that we expect of you if we're going to
5 ask you to protect that -- again, those -- those sources
6 and those methods. So no argument there.

7 MR. BLITZER: Yeah, and at *CNN* -- I can only
8 speak for *CNN*, we're very sensitive of that because we
9 have viewers in 240 countries around the world who are
10 always watching including some of those countries not very
11 friendly countries. All right. We have time for one more
12 question. Is there a woman who would like to ask a
13 question? Yes, please. Woman, stand up.

14 MS. BALLING: My name is Christine Balling
15 (phonetic). I'm from Bogotá, Columbia. Admiral, you
16 mentioned earlier that there is much that the Special
17 Forces do that is not publicized, humanitarian assistance,
18 civil affairs and so on. And I understand on a very
19 superficial level the "by, with and through" theory which
20 is essentially that the Special Forces do not want to put
21 an American face on their work.

22 They would rather increase the legitimacy of a

1 host nation's government in the eyes of the host nation's
2 citizens. Question, are there sometimes an exception to
3 that rule? And if there have been, would you have any
4 examples of that?

5 ADM. McRAVEN: Well, I'm sure there's exceptions
6 to every rule, but as a matter of kind of policy and
7 approach, we absolutely want the host nation to get the
8 credit. Columbia is a fantastic example. As you know,
9 we've been working with the Columbians for decades and
10 certainly since Plan Columbia came into effect, we've had
11 a very great working relationship with the Colombian
12 Special Forces.

13 They are magnificent Special Operations forces
14 and they have done a terrific job against the FARC in
15 Colombia and that is a credit again to the Colombian
16 leadership, both political and military leadership and to
17 the great soldiers that they bring into the Special
18 Forces. We don't hide the fact that we've been working
19 with Colombian SOF for sometime. We embrace that.

20 But what we don't do is it's not about credit
21 for the United States. It is about a partnership with the
22 Colombians that frankly is making both of us better. So

1 when we have an opportunity to discuss our relationship
2 with another country, it's not necessary about giving
3 credit to one force or another, it's to talk about how
4 we're strengthening that partnership and the value of that
5 partnership to both countries.

6 MR. BLITZER: That wraps up our presentation.
7 I'll have the prerogative of one final question and --
8 you'll leave all of these people and I think it's fair to
9 say in the past hour and 15 minutes or whatever we've been
10 up here, we came in with a certain body of knowledge, but
11 we're all leaving a little bit smarter than we were when
12 we came in, which is the goal of this forum. I'm so proud
13 that *CNN* is cosponsoring it with the Aspen Institute and
14 the *New York Times*.

15 So here is the final question, Admiral, and I'll
16 thank you for all the work that you do. At some point,
17 you're going to retire from the U.S. Navy and you're going
18 to have to go back and to do some civilian work.

19 ADM. McRAVEN: Right.

20 MR. BLITZER: Here is the question. Have you
21 given up on your dream of becoming a journalist?

22 (Laughter)

1 ADM. McRAVEN: Wolf, if I could be as good as
2 you --

3 MR. BLITZER: No, just give me a yes or a no.
4 (Laughter)

5 MR. BLITZER: Have you given up your dream of
6 becoming a journalist, because as you know, there are some
7 retired military personnel. We see them talking on
8 television all the time.

9 ADM. McRAVEN: Have I given up my dream?
10 Absolutely, yeah.

11 (Laughter)

12 MR. BLITZER: Let's give a big round of
13 applause.

14 (Applause)

15 * * * * *