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

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

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

(Applause)

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

(Applause)

MR. BLITZER: I speak not only as an American citizen obviously, but as a former Pentagon correspondent who's had a little interest in what you've been up to over
these many years. We always think of in recent years, of
course, at least in the past year with Admiral McRaven as
the orchestrator, the architect of the raid that killed
Osama bin Laden, and you know, we've all read a lot about
it.

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

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

(Laughter)

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

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

MR. BLITZER: And he deserves an enormous amount
of credit for that decision.

ADM. McRAVEN: Absolutely he does.

(Applause)

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

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

And a tremendous amount of that credit goes to director Leon Panetta at the time because he built the right team, he had the right people, he made some very gutsy calls and he was not concerned about who got the credit. And so when you take a look at how he built that team, which was a military intelligence team, tremendous amount of credit goes to the agency.
And the other piece of this really is the President's national security team. I've made it very clear to people again the military piece of this, we did, I think, 11 other raids that evening in Afghanistan. Now I don't want to diminish the nature of this raid. It was a little bit more sporting.

(Laughter)

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

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

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

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

ADM. McRAVEN: Yes.

(Laughter)

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

ADM. McRAVEN: They were.

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

ADM. McRAVEN: Well, I'm not going to talk about the tactical details, but obviously we're not going to do a mission like that without rehearsing. We rehearse every
operation particularly significant ones like that. As I said, I have made a point in not talking about the tactical piece of this other than say that it is what we do. We did on helicopters, we go to objectives, we secure the objectives, we get back on helicopters and we come home.

MR. BLITZER: So --

ADM. McRAVEN: Just short of one helicopter.

But --

(Laughter)

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

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

MR. BLITZER: What were you thinking?
ADM. McRAVEN: I was too busy frankly -- I mean we had a backup plan and we executed the backup plan and at that point in time, you're worried about getting the mission done and getting the boys back home. So we had a plan, suffice to say.

MR. BLITZER: And it worked?

ADM. McRAVEN: And it worked.

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

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

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

(Laughter)

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

(Laughter)

MR. BLITZER: How confident were you that a tall guy was hiding out in that compound?
ADM. McRAVEN: Well, again, I'm not going to address the tactical piece of that. Suffice to say we were not sure he was there, and again, that gets back to some tough decisions that were made. My job was to get him if he was there. If he wasn't there, we would know that pretty quickly and our intent was to get up and get out.

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

(Laughter)

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

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

(Laughter)

MR. BLITZER: Oh. But there were contingencies
this guy would be brought out in a helicopter and brought somewhere?

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

(Laughter)

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

ADM. McRAVEN: No.

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

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

MR. BLITZER: And --

(Laughter)

MR. BLITZER: That's also --

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

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

ADM. McRAVEN: No, no.

MR. BLITZER: Is this the first interview like
this you've ever done?

ADM. McRAVEN: It is the first interview.

(Applause)

MR. BLITZER: How does it feel so far?

ADM. McRAVEN: Ask me again in an hour.

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

ADM. McRAVEN: Thank you.

(Applause)

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

ADM. McRAVEN: Okay.

MR. BLITZER: What is Special Operations?

ADM. McRAVEN: Yeah, well, a great question. You know, we get a lot of notoriety for the raids, for the rescue operations and frankly we're very proud of that.

When the nation calls on us to do those sort of
operations, they expect us to be successful every single
time and I expect the guys to be successful and they
expect to be successful.

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

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

MR. BLITZER: How many men and women do you
ADM. McRAVEN: Yeah, 66,000 today, but let me qualify that term. Of the 66,000, you've got about 44,000 of those are people that can't deploy forward. Of those 44,000, about 33,000 are kind of badged Special Operations or tactical units. So special forces, officers, Navy SEALs, rangers, night stalkers that fly helicopters, those are the tactical units. So of those 33,000 to 35,000 folks, we deploy about 10,000 to 12,000 a day are constantly deployed.

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

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

ADM. McRAVEN: The Middle East. But he doesn't
have any budget to do acquisition programs. When we were legislating Major Force Program '11, very, very important because it allows me to put capability into the hands of the operators very rapidly. So if we identify a problem and an operator, you know, says I need a new weapon, I need a new boat, I need a better helicopter, then I'm in a position because we have an acquisition authority to be able to turn that requirement quickly and get it back out in the field.

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

ADM. McRAVEN: Right.

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

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

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

(Laughter)

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

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

ADM. McRAVEN: Right.

MR. BLITZER: How many of them are women?

ADM. McRAVEN: I don't know the exact figure, but we have a lot of females that serve in the Special Operations. They do a fantastic job across the board. There is obviously some legislation when they cannot operate in tactical ground units, but having said that, great support to all of those units, and we couldn't do the job without them.
MR. BLITZER: Now I know a lot of these people over the decades I've covered the story, a formal Pentagon correspondence myself during the first Gulf war, if the stress is enormous, the training is very, very rigid, very, very difficult. They serve two, three, four, five tours in a war zone. A lot of them come back obviously injured; some of them don't come back at all. They come back and they have posttraumatic stress and the suicide rate unfortunately is really getting higher and higher, certainly higher than it was 20 years ago.

ADM. McRAVEN: Right.

MR. BLITZER: Why?

ADM. McRAVEN: Well, let me give you a little bit more broader answer to that. Before I took command, my predecessor, Admiral Eric Olson, initiated a study to take a look at the pressure on the force and they spent 10 months looking at all of our units. I think they talked to somewhere in the neighborhood of 7,000 soldiers, about 1,000 spouses, went to over 400 different meetings to determine whether or not what the status of the force was. And that report landed on my desk about the time I took command. And frankly, as Eric Olson has said a
number of times in testimony, the force was frayed and I think that was exactly the right term. You know, we're not crumbling. You know, we're not destroyed, but we are clearly fraying a year ago. I think that fraying is getting a little worse.

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

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

The suicides that we are tracking right now tend
to be related to a couple of things, relationship.

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

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

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

ADM. McRAVEN: An Army Green Beret.

MR. BLITZER: That would be your dad?

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

(Laughter)

ADM. McRAVEN: Now this was in the -- probably very early '70s. The movie, The Green Berets had come out starring John Wayne and this young Army captain came to
meet my sister for a date. My sister, as usual was late. So I had an opportunity to talk to him for a little while and he knew I was interested in the Navy. And he said, hey, if you're going to go into the Navy, you ought to be a Navy SEAL.

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

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

ADM. McRAVEN: Well, historically and I'm not exactly sure what today's figures are, but I'll tell you that historically, you know it's about a 50 percent we'll make it through. Not that's kind of splitting the officers and the enlisted. The officers tend to do a little better in terms of their success rate because we start with them a little bit earlier at the naval academies at other areas.
The enlisted rate tends to be a little bit lower on that scale, but we're working very hard to get more folks through without diminishing the quality because at the end of the day, it is the quality of the individual we get that will make us successful in the battlefield, not the quantity.

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

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

So he's got some life experience. And now that's not always true. The young SEALs come in, some of
them are 18, 19 years old. The young rangers come in, some of them are 18, 19 years old, but across the board, our population is a little bit more experienced. But at the end of the day, the physical piece is important, but thinking on your feet is the most important piece.

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

ADM. McRAVEN: Yeah, I majored in journalism.

MR. BLITZER: Excellent.

(Laughter)

ADM. McRAVEN: What was I thinking?

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

ADM. McRAVEN: Yeah.

MR. BLITZER: Forget about bin Laden for a
second. Tell me the two or three greatest Special Operations missions that you studied and you learnt from.

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

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

The couple of ones that jump out at me interestingly enough was the Army Special Forces raid on the POW compound in Son Tay, North Vietnam. And while the prisoners were not there and we were not successful in rescuing the prisoners, when you look at how those great Green Berets and airmen and helicopter pilots planned,
rehearsed and executed that operation, other than the fact that the intelligence was flawed and we were not able to get to POWs, it was, you know, almost flawless in terms of the execution.

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

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

As you recall, they had a Mercedes with an Idi Amin look-alike. That gave them just enough time to be able to get to target and execute the mission.
Unfortunately Yonathan Netanyahu was killed in the operation but having said that, exceedingly successful operation. So when I look at kind of from a U.S. or an international standpoint, those are two that jump out. But frankly, there are equally magnificent special operations going on today in Afghanistan and in the past years in Iraq that would probably rival any of those. They just didn't get the kind of, you know, recognition that they probably deserve.

MR. BLITZER: One of the controversial areas that I want you to discuss it as much as you can in Afghanistan right now is the -- are these night raids that are going on and the Afghans -- and I interviewed President Hamid Karzai at the NATO summit in Chicago not that long ago and, you know, as someone who's watched all of this unfold, it's still hard for me to believe, accept the fact that the U.S. still has almost 90,000 troops in Afghanistan right now. U.S. taxpayers still are spending about $2 billion a week, $100 billion a year maintaining that military presence in Afghanistan right now and yet Hamid Karzai occasionally -- and I, you know, criticized him for
it in front of him -- he seems to think he is doing us a big favor by letting us do that.

ADM. McRAVEN: Right.

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

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

So what I can tell you on the night raids and in the course of our operations in Afghanistan, we are completely partnering with the Afghans now. And that has really mitigated a lot of, I think, the senior Afghan concern about these night raids. The night raids are
important for a lot of reasons. Tactically, the enemy as
we say, beds down at night. So they will stop at a
compound at night and it makes it easier for us to locate
them.

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

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

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

ADM. McRAVEN: Yeah.
MR. BLITZER: They may be totally loyal to the Taliban.

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

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

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

ADM. McRAVEN: Well, again, I mean that's -- you know, while I'm not sure all U.S. troops will be out by
2014, that's certainly a decision by the President and President Karzai.

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

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

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

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

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

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

MR. BLITZER: Because I heard the same arguments, the same point being made when the US was withdrawing all of its troops from Iraq. Well, even after the U.S. withdrew all its troops from Iraq, there would
still be a continued U.S. military presence in Iraq, but
guess what? There's no continued U.S. military presence
in Iraq right now because the Iraqis did not want to give
the U.S. military immunity for Iraqi -- prosecution.
There -- and I suspect -- I could be wrong that the
Afghanis probably won't want to do that either.
ADM. McRAVEN: Again, that's a policy decision,
Wolf, and not in my lane, so to speak.
MR. BLITZER: But you spent a lot of time in
Iraq.
ADM. McRAVEN: I did.
MR. BLITZER: What's happening right now and
just the past 48 hours, we've seen several dozen terrorist
incidents.
ADM. McRAVEN: Right.
MR. BLITZER: The country looks like it's a --
we don't pay that much attention anymore because the U.S.
forces are out of Iraq. But it looks like a horrible
situation that's developing in Iraq right now, very
worried about it. What about you?
ADM. McRAVEN: Well, I mean we're certainly
concerned about al-Qaeda in Iraq coming back. I think we
recognize this would be a problem, but you know, the Iraqi security forces as we were exiting Iraq, they're very capable security forces. This is a tough problem set for them. It's very complex, but I'm confident that they understand what the problem is and hopefully, they'll be able to deal with it as time goes on. But I mean clearly al-Qaeda in Iraq is a problem that they've got to deal with.

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

ADM. McRAVEN: Nothing.

(Laughter)

MR. BLITZER: I'll rephrase the question.

(Laughter)

MR. BLITZER: Here's what we know. Some of
these drone strikes are organized by the CIA, but some are
organized by the U.S. military including Special
Operations. Is that right?

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

MR. BLITZER: In Afghanistan?

ADM. McRAVEN: In Afghanistan.

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

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

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

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

(Laughter)

MR. BLITZER: I've heard -- he's very good.

I've heard top U.S. officials, Secretary Panetta and
others testify there are fewer al-Qaeda elements left in
Afghanistan today than there are in Yemen, for example, or
Somalia for that matter. Is that true?

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

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

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

President Hadi has done a good job of kind of stepping up to the plate, taking this threat of al-Qaeda
in Yemen seriously and because of that, the United States
is again reaching out to him where it is appropriate to do
so.

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

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

But again, I'm not an expert on the dynamics of
the Middle East. My job is kind of purely in a military
role to support, again in this case, General Mattis or
Admiral Stavridis as required.
MR. BLITZER: But you do work closely with foreign -- foreign militaries?

ADM. McRAVEN: Absolutely.

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

ADM. McRAVEN: Okay.

MR. BLITZER: What do you do with Israel?

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

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

ADM. McRAVEN: You know, before we ever go into
a country, the U.S. ambassador and the country team have
to provide us country clearance in order to get into the
country. So any thought that, you know, somehow Special
Operations guys, you know, slip into a country and do
things that are outside the purview of the embassy is just
patently wrong. Everything we do supports the embassy
mission there and that starts, you know, months before we
are ever in a country.

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

MR. BLITZER: What vetting is that?

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

MR. BLITZER: This is after Senator Patrick
Leahy?

ADM. McRAVEN: Correct. So you know, once all
that is done and a unit is identified, then we will
partner with that unit. And a lot of times, it's basic infantry tactics dependent upon the unit to get them up to a certain level and then when they're at the appropriate level, military level, then we can kind of continue to, you know, we do the crawl, walk, run approach if you will.

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

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

ADM. McRAVEN: Absolutely, you bet.

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

ADM. McRAVEN: Absolutely.

MR. BLITZER: There's a good dialogue going on.
ADM. McRAVEN: Absolutely. I mean there's a --
there's this belief that, you know, as we go in as
Americans to a less developed country that somehow we're
doing all the teaching. That's absolutely not the case.
The fact of the matter is we go into country, we're
learning a lot about their culture and the one thing we
talk about within Special Operations is understanding the
human domain.

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

We're learning what their culture is so next
time we come back in, you know, they understand who we
are, we understand who they are. You know, you kind of
build that trust and you can't surge trust. So you've got
to start it early and that's one of the things Special
Operations forces do very well, build small footprint. We
40
don't take a lot of guys to do that and pretty cost-effecti-
MR. BLITZER: How good is the U.S. right now in
linguistic skills? Do you have enough Arabic speakers,
for example, to get the job done from your perspective?
ADM. McRAVEN: Yeah, we're always short on our
linguistic skills. You know, to learn Arabic -- it's a
very difficult language -- we've got some great training
that takes place at most of the major institutions we have
within Special Operations primarily at Fort Bragg, but we
take immersion training downrange, if you will, in a
variety of countries. We'll do anything we can to get our
guys up to speed in Arabic, Pashto, Tagalog, whatever the
required language is.
Maintaining those skills is difficult, but I
think we do a pretty good job as a force. But I won't kid
you. It's a difficult problem set, one we do pretty well,
but there's never enough Arab or Pashto linguists to go
around to really deal with all the problems we have to
deal with.
MR. BLITZER: Were the -- and you don't have to
answer this if you don't want to and I suspect you won't -
MR. BLITZER: The Navy SEALs who went in to get bin Laden, did they speak other languages other than English?

ADM. McRAVEN: Yes.

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

(Laughter)

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

ADM. McRAVEN: They do, yeah, absolutely.

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

ADM. McRAVEN: No, just some of them.

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

(Laughter)

MR. BLITZER: That's very, very important. I told our guests here and those who were listening and watching that we'd come back to bin -- the bin Laden raid. And there's been so much written about it and I know some of it is great, but some of it not so great. Share with
us one nugget, one nugget that without violating sources
or methods or classified information that you believe is
important that the American people know about this raid
that they may not have read about or don't know about,
something that, you know, you want to share.

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

You tend to think that the FBI's lane is very
clear and that the CIA's lane is very clear and that the
Defense Intelligence is very clear, but in reality, they
are all talking to each other all day long making sure
that the information they've got and the intelligence
they've got is right. They are checking and double
checking.
So as we went in to the bin Laden raid, this thought that this is going to be difficult pulling the military and the CIA together along with the support we had from the National Security Agency and NGA and others, this was easy for us. It was easy for us because for the last 10 years, we'd been doing this. We'd been building this interagency team and I got to tell you, today it hums. The -- you know, on the margins are there problems? Sure.
But if you talk to, you know, Bob Mueller or Keith Alexander here or Dave Petraeus, I mean we've known each other all for a long time. We're not only colleagues, we are friends. And so when you have that trust, everything else is easy. And we built that trust up over many, many years.
MR. BLITZER: And how good is the intelligence? Because without good intelligence in the bin Laden raid, if you didn't have good intelligence, you wouldn't have known anything?
ADM. McRAVEN: Sure, yeah.
MR. BLITZER: But when you go into a mission in
Afghanistan or any place else in the world, do you have
certainty in the intelligence you're getting?

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

(Applause)

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

(Laughter)

ADM. McRAVEN: Yeah, I'm not even sure how to
answer that Wolf. I will tell you that my hope as -- and
if there's anybody from TIME here, they will know the
background of this is it certainly wasn't my intent to be
the TIME magazine runner-up or the TIME Man of the Year.
And frankly, I've fended off a number of attempts to have
interviews because it isn't about me. I mean, it's about
that young E5 with two kids -- married and two kids who's
on his 11th and 12th deployment. You know, that's who the real heroes are out here, and to put --

(Applause)

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

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

ADM. McRAVEN: Yeah. Well, it was quite an honor. You know, it's -- the White House had reached out to me a couple of weeks before and invited me on behalf of
the First Lady and the President to sit in the box and I thought it was a very gracious offer and I was honored to do so and really to help represent the men and women in uniform in addition to the joint chiefs that were present at the State of the Union.

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

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

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

ADM. McRAVEN: The President of the United States is fantastic. And again, I'm not a political guy. I've worked in both administrations. I very, very much enjoyed working for President Bush and I very much enjoy working for President Obama. And it's -- again, this isn't about politics. This is about a commander in chief who I have the opportunity to engage with on a routine
basis and watching him and the decisions he makes along
with his national security team.

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

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

(Applause)

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

ADM. McRAVEN: Well, I know from uniform
military standpoint, I mean we serve the President and the
commander in chief irrespective of whether they served in
uniform or not. So again, I'm not going to get into the
political discussion, but I will tell you we're proud to serve whoever sits in the White House.

(Applause)

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

ADM. McRAVEN: Why do you start every --

(Laughter)

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

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

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

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

(Laughter)

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

MR. BLITZER: You're based in Tampa?
ADM. McRAVEN: I'm based in Tampa.

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

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

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

So my -- again, this gets back to the trust and relationship I have with guys like General Ray Odierno, General Norton Schwartz, General Amos, you know, these are
great working relationships and John Green at the C&O,
great working relationships, great personal relationships.
So as we get in the kind of tough issues, budget issues,
when you sit down across a table with each other and come
to good decisions.

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

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

MR. BLITZER: And they are excellent indeed.

We're going to take some questions. I have another
question before we move on to your questions. The
Pentagon's overall budget and you're only responsible for
part of that and your budget is in relative good shape, but, you know, but Leon Panetta, the Defense Secretary, he's very upset, he's very worried about what he calls the hallowing out of the U.S. military.

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

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

The U.S. military -- the U.S. Defense Department, its annual budget is higher than the next 15 countries combined. And that includes friendly countries, NATO allies like Britain and Canada and France and Italy.
It includes not-so-friendly countries like China and Russia and it includes adversaries like Iran, North Korea and other countries. So why does the United States, why do American taxpayers need to spend so much more than the next 15 countries combined?

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

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

MR. BLITZER: Good answer. All right. Let's take some questions. I know we have some microphones out here. Yeah, there is one over there. Whoever asks a
question, just tell us your name, where you're from and go ahead. And by the way, let's do this Q&A, in other words, not A&A.

(Laughter)

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

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

No intelligence is a 100 percent perfect. You know, we talked about the bin Laden raid. As good as that
was, we didn't know for certain. So there's always going
to be a degree of uncertainty no matter how good your
intelligence is. My point is, you know, with the support
that we get from the National Security Agency, from the
Central Intelligence Agency, from Defense Intelligence,
National Geospatial, the FBI, all of the interagency folks
that are out there, that intelligence community is the
best in the world.

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

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

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

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

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

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

SPEAKER: Right. I have a woman-oriented question as well. Thank you for your service, sir and Wolf, you've done a wonderful job tonight. I admire your role in this -- in moderating. My question is about women in the military and I know as you alluded, women serve on cultural support teams with the Special Operations Command.
But as you also know, the 1994 ground combat exclusion policy was recently relaxed earlier this year, opening up 14,000 more positions to women in infantry or combat support roles and 4,000, I think, in the Navy and there is a pilot program with the Marines right now to allow them into the infantry, but a lot of resistance in the Army for allowing women into our infantry and ranger school. What are your thoughts on increasing women's role in combat and the eventuality of women as Navy SEALs?

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

You know, I'm always careful to say we don't women in combat because I'll tell you when a culture support team female, you know, hops on a helicopter with her, you know, range or company that's going out to an objective and flies from that forward-operating base to an offset location, patrol six kilometers to the target, allows the rangers to secure the target, comes and talks to the females on the targets, patrols back to an offset
location, gets back on a helicopter and flies back to a forward-operating base, it's hard to distinguish between what she did and what her male counterpart did.

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

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

ADM. McRAVEN: That is true.

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

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

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

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

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

MR. BLITZER: Okay. Go ahead.

MR. KREVOY: Thank you. My name is Brad Krevoy. I'm a film producer from Los Angeles and I had -- thank you very much for your service and I had the privilege and honor to work with Lieutenant Colonel Mike Strobl and General Kelly. We produced Taking Chance for HBO that won the Golden Globe for Kevin Bacon.
We're working on a three-part mini series now in view of all the bin Laden controversy over the feature film that's been made, we stepped back from doing a interview about you. So I just have two quick questions. I hope you'll humor me. The first is regarding where you were on September 11 and the second is you alluded to the fact that new facts will come out about the raid that would perhaps supplement the book that's already been written that was soon to come out. How soon will that be before that information does come out?

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

That's not to say we haven't talked in general about the intelligence revolving around the raid. But the details as we say, the sources and the methods which we protect very, very carefully, those won't be known for
decades, but when that does happen and it becomes unclassified, again those folks that are still around will be very impressed with it. Where I was on September 11th, I had had a parachute accident and I was laid up in a bed recovering from a parachute accident when it occurred.

MR. BLITZER: How do you feel now?

ADM. McRAVEN: Great.

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

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

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

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

(Applause)

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

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

MR. BLITZER: I couldn't agree more.

(Applause)

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

ADM. McRAVEN: I can't address specifics.

Again, a lot of these --

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

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

MR. BLITZER: Oh, tell me what piece of information.
ADM. McRAVEN: Yeah, I mean are people affected by the information that comes out? You bet they are. Are lives at risk? Absolutely.

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

ADM. McRAVEN: Okay.

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

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

ADM. McRAVEN: Now, thank you, Ambassador. Well, I think a lot of them come in with that in their DNA. They come in and they join our organizations because they want to be special, they want to be challenged, they want to be put into difficult situations. And so you have
great men and women that are coming in to the service. But when they join an organization, you know, a lot of times, you join initially because it's an adventure. When you're young, you're looking for an adventure. And then after a while, that adventure kind of becomes a profession and then after a while, that profession becomes a calling and you find in the senior military guys that it has become a calling to them. I mean it is a very, very powerful self awareness that it's not about you anymore. It's about a cause that's greater than you and that's what brings them together.

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

Do you think that the public deserves more explanation about the ethical side of targeted killings
and drones -- drone strikes? And while I'm at it, let me ask the question that David Sanger of the New York Times posts in his book basically saying what makes a drone strike different from, for example, plugging an explosive device to a car of an Iranian scientist?

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

You know, we look at drone strikes and again, I can tell you within the Afghan framework and that's what I'm prepared to talk about, you know, we go through great lengths to make sure that our intelligence is as precise as it can be. And we have rules of engagement that are backed up by the law of armed conflict that are looked at through a legal review before we ever even propose a drone strike, recognizing again that in a theatre of war, a drone strike, a drone is just the vehicle that takes the weapon to the target.
So as long as you're adhering to the law of armed conflict and you're adhering to the legal protocols, then a drone for us in Afghanistan is no different than an F-15 or an F-16. In terms of the legal aspects of it, you know, I'll leave that to the lawyers. What I do know is as we have very strict rules of engagement that are informed by, that are framed by the law of armed conflict and a whole host of other conventions.

MR. BLITZER: Those drones are pretty good though?

ADM. McRAVEN: The drones are pretty good.

MR. BLITZER: Okay.

(Laughter)

MR. BLITZER: Getting better too?

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

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

ADM. McRAVEN: Oh, you know, we're about to have a change of the chief of staff of the Air Force. She's a good friend of mine. I wouldn't even want to go down that road and so.
MR. BLITZER: Let's get another question. Yeah, in the back, go ahead.

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

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

MR. BLITZER: The only thing I know is we know
where the U.S. Olympic team's uniforms were made. Other
than that, we don't know where anything else was made.

(Laughter)

MR. BLITZER: Yes, go ahead.

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

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

(Laughter)

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

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

(Laughter)

ADM. McRAVEN: So you ask your question, you
rephrase it, you try to comment. No, I'm not going to
answer that question.
MR. KLAIDMAN: All right.

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

(Applause)

MR. BLITZER: Go ahead.

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

ADM. McRAVEN: Right, right.

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

ADM. McRAVEN: Yeah, I mean I think any time we have an operation that gets that kind of international scrutiny, invariably people want to understand the good news aspect of the story and this was a good news aspect of the story. You know, the units that contributed to the success, I think, were part and parcel to that. We do identify units routinely on operations.
I mean we talk about Navy SEALs and Army Green Berets and Army Rangers. So I think it's a little misleading to think that we don't talk about specifics. Now we don't generally get into the names of the individuals. We're very, very careful about that to protect their families and that really becomes a red line for us.

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

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

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

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

ADM. McRAVEN: And we appreciate that.

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

(Laughter)

MR. BLITZER: -- it's going to ruin -- it's
going to really down the road endanger brave young men and women.

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

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

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

They would rather increase the legitimacy of a
host nation's government in the eyes of the host nation's citizens. Question, are there sometimes an exception to that rule? And if there have been, would you have any examples of that?

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

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

But what we don't do is it's not about credit for the United States. It is about a partnership with the Colombians that frankly is making both of us better. So
when we have an opportunity to discuss our relationship with another country, it's not necessary about giving credit to one force or another, it's to talk about how we're strengthening that partnership and the value of that partnership to both countries.

MR. BLITZER: That wraps up our presentation.

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

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

ADM. McRAVEN: Right.

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

(Laughter)
ADM. McRAVEN: Wolf, if I could be as good as you --

MR. BLITZER: No, just give me a yes or a no.

(Laughter)

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

ADM. McRAVEN: Have I given up my dream?

Absolutely, yeah.

(Laughter)

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

(Applause)