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Dear General Rodriguez,

I would like to thank you, General Votel, General Anderson, Colonel Petrenko, and all your staff for the privilege of visiting the 82nd Airborne; being briefed on its plans and analysis of the threat; and seeing its operations on the ground. I hardly need to say how impressed I was with the quality and dedication of every man and woman I had the chance to interact with, and with the advances being made in combining counterinsurgency operations with nation building.

It is one thing to read reports, and quite another to see the practice. The advances the 82nd, the USAF, the civilian aid teams, and the others in the team operating in Eastern Afghanistan are making in developing an integrated approach to improving security, governance, and development were an outstanding case study in just how far we have come in adapting to a different kind of war, and a different definition of joint operations.

I was particularly impressed with the advances made in effects planning that seek to tie together all of the necessary actions in your AOR. I was also impressed with the advances being made in assessment, as well as the quality of the intelligence analysis and its depth in looking beyond the immediate priorities of the battlefield to the overall situation in Afghanistan and the pressures imposed by threat activities in Pakistan and Iran. At the same time, it was clear that there was

a deep concern for the future of the Afghan people, and that every effort was being made to limit civilian casualties and collateral damage.

For someone who was witness to similar activities in Vietnam, and in other countries in the years that followed, it is truly impressive to see how much has been developed since our initial invasion of Afghanistan. It was even more impressive to visit one of your brigades in the field, to talk to some of the combat pilots that support them, and to see how plans and assessments have been transformed into actions.

At the same time, everyone made it clear that there is much still to do in creating the proper mix of US military and civilian efforts, in forging an effective partnership with our NATO/ISAF allies, and in creating matching operations in Pakistan. No one understated the challenges or timelines necessary to develop an effective partnership to transfer responsibility to the Afghans for governance at every level, to create truly effective Afghan security forces, and to transition to self-sustained development. Your officers demonstrated that success will require a long effort, possibly extending to 2020. At the same time, they showed that the war is clearly winnable, and how important it is to achieve victory.

It was this frankness and the realistic assessment of the challenges and risks that made me believe we can achieve a meaningful definition of victory in Afghanistan *if* we invest the necessary patience and resources over a period that could easily last a decade.

Indeed, if I have any message that comes out of my visit, it is not the few suggestions I made about assessment during the briefings I received. It is rather the need to build a sound base for a lasting US commitment that shows the American people, the Congress, our allies, and the media what is really happening in Afghanistan and the time, patience, and resources needed to win.

At the level of US planning and operations in Afghanistan, my key suggestion is that you formally incorporate clear goals and metrics that look further into the future - perhaps on a rolling five year basis.

Such plans can never overcome the uncertainties of war, but they can test the viability of current concepts, lay out the criteria to provide continuity and an effective transition as units rotate, and ensure that we look beyond the exigencies of the next month and year. They can also define the specific levels of resources, combat forces and aid, and civil partners necessary to translate tactical successes into the broad long-term progress in every area of your counterinsurgency and nation building goals.

The more critical task, however, is to ensure that Americans understand what is happening, what you are achieving, and what still needs to be done. This can only be done at the unclassified level, and my highest priority suggestion to you and the US country team is that the US command and country team in Afghanistan use the metrics, assessments, and threat analysis you have developed to issue an Afghan version of the report on "Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq."

Americans need to see the progress you are making and the risks involved; they need to see the trend lines, and the challenges you still face. This reporting also must be provided at the unclassified level. One thing has not changed in the nearly 50 years I have been working with the military: gross over-classification is still the rule and not the exception. Support for a long and difficult war can only be built up by communicating as much as possible at the unclassified level.

At the same time, I would urge all of those who work on Afghanistan in the country team and in Washington not to repeat the failures of "Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq" - failures that still do so much to undermine its impact and credibility. It is not enough to respond to Congressional requirements. Effective communication must go further.

We need a report that honestly addresses the need for future commitments of troops, aid resources, and more civilian partners over a period of at least five years. We need to show how armed nation building can succeed over time, and that we have an integrated and effective approach to support our Afghan ally in building security, governance, and development.

We need to show why this effort deserves the support of Congress and the next Administration, rather than leave the future unaddressed or imply rapid victory and the possibility of rapid withdrawal. We need to show what still must be done, and highlight the risks and uncertainties in ways that make it clear that every setback is not defeat. We need to be honest about the resources that will be needed over time and show why these are necessary. Trust and credibility cannot be built on optimism, unkeepable promises, or by omitting the scale of future needs.

We also cannot afford to ignore the fact that success depends so much on an effective handover to the next Administration and building bipartisan Congressional support. You, the 101st, and the other elements of our forces and aid teams may accomplish a great deal in 2008, but this is clearly a war that must be fought beyond the life of the next Administration.

It will be years before our combat forces can shift to an advisory and strategic overwatch role and civilian aid teams and US military advisors become the core of the mission. If we cannot manage this transfer, and return to a more bipartisan environment during the course of 2008, we may well become our own most serious enemy. Again, all our tactical successes and sacrifices could be meaningless without time, patience, and resources at a much broader level.

I fully realize that this is not your responsibility as a division commander, although it was all too clear that the cadre of civilians supporting you is far too small to meet the broad need for civilian partners. If the military does not address governance and development at the provincial and local levels, it will

not be addressed effectively - if it is addressed at all.

Accordingly, this message is not really one I need to address to you, those in the 82nd Airborne, or to the Marines, Air Force, Navy, and civilian personnel in the field. It is a message that I realize needs to be passed on in Washington, to Congress, and to the media. I intend to do my best to do so, and I applaud your plans to bring in other civilian experts to share my experience. No single voice can possibly be adequate.

Let me add several further points, again as part of the message I am taking back with me rather than points you can possibly need to hear from me.

First, I am concerned that I do not see clear long-term plans for the overall course of US action in Afghanistan any more than I have seen in Iraq. I am concerned about a long series of budget submissions and supplementals that imply we can fund victory in the coming year. I have heard too many political speeches about progress that exaggerate what our host country ally can really do in the short term, understating or ignoring the need for a long term commitment.

We need long-term plans that can be communicated on both a classified and open level. These clearly need to be developed largely by the country team, and they need to exist at both the classified and unclassified level. They need to show we can provide the civilian experts and "enablers" we now need over time. They need to fund the mix of combat forces and military advisors we require, and to provide a clear path for linking aid to Afghan efforts in development. I am told the "Joint Campaign Plan" in Iraq may meet this goal for Iraq. If a similar effort does not exist for Afghanistan, it should.

Second, when I see the problems our forces now face on the ground, it is clear that we must do a much better job of addressing the problems imposed by our host government, our NATO/ISAF allies, and Pakistan.

Third, in the case of our host country partner, I believe we already recognize that making the necessary improvements in Afghan governance and forces will take years longer than the February 2009 time frame of the Afghan compact. Today, the civil side of our effort requires far more progress at the local and provincial level, and it will then require sustained and larger aid programs and a larger US PRT program. The military advisory effort will need to be sustained at least throughout the next Administration. We also need to frankly admit that we do not yet have a credible mix of plans and resources that can develop the needed mix of police, local security, and criminal justice capabilities in the field.

Fourth, in the case of our NATO/ISAF allies, I believe it is critical to move down a dual path where we work closely at both the NATO and allied country level to develop Afghan-wide approaches to take advantage of the advances I saw in counterinsurgency methods, in assessment, in effects planning, and in intelligence.

We need to learn from our allies, but they need to learn from us as well. I saw a clear validation on the ground of many of the points Secretary Gates and General McNeill made about the limits our allies face in terms of resources, the problems affecting their national efforts in the south, and the cost of national caveats and "stand aside" forces.

This emphasizes the need for strong and independent US reporting and planning efforts, and a unified US command effort that is not tied to NATO/ISAF. We must not fall into the trap of assuming that we do not need to plan, report, and identify key problems and issues on a national level. Diplomacy is one thing; the hard realities of war are another. This is why I am deeply concerned that too much of the US command, planning, and reporting effort may be turned over to NATO/ISAF, and be politicized at the international level in the process. The goal should not be to avoid open debates with our allies; it should be for all the countries in NATO/ISAF to win them. We owe that much to every US and

allied soldier and civilian that serves in a high-risk area.

Fifth, in the case of Pakistan, I share the deep concern of everyone I met regarding what is happening in that country. It was clear at every level that we recognize that this is not an Afghan War, but an Afghan-Pakistani struggle that is spreading far beyond the Pashtun areas in both countries, and where the links between the Taliban, other Islamist extremist movements, and Al Qa'ida are evolving into a far more dangerous and effective form of "distributed network" than we have faced in the past.

It is scarcely good news to see Taliban efforts expanding in an attempt to destabilize northern, central, and western Afghanistan. It is not reassuring to hear that Omar's more classic Taliban is expanding in the south, though it has been slower to move away from a rigid hierarchical structure that increases its vulnerability.

What I find truly disturbing, however, is the growth of the Taliban influence in Pakistan, the effort to expand outside of the tribal areas, the improved ability of all the extremist movements to cooperate, and the way Al Qa'ida is expanding its influence, leverage, and extra-national ideological influence over these movements. It has long been clear to me that if there is any center of gravity to an Islamist extremist threat that operates in more than 60 countries, it is in Pakistan and not in Iraq. Your intelligence analysts made a decisive case for this grim reality.

Last, let me turn back from strategy to reality. It was a real honor to meet the US officers and enlisted personnel in Eastern Afghanistan. I hope that our media do more to recognize the courage and sacrifice of these men and women. They are extraordinary!

Again my thanks,

"Tony"

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