General David Howell Petraeus was born in Cornwall-on-Hudson, New York, and graduated from Cornwall Central High School in 1970. He has a BS from the U.S. Military Academy. Petraeus was the top graduate of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, class of 1983. He subsequently earned a MPA degree (1985) and a PhD degree (1987) in international relations from the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University. He later served as assistant professor of international relations at the U.S. Military Academy and also completed a fellowship at Georgetown University.

Petraeus has had many important staff assignments and multiple leadership positions. At the time of this talk he was serving as commander of the United States Central Command (USCENTCOM), a position he assumed in October 2008. In that position he was responsible for U.S. operations in 20 countries spreading from Egypt to Pakistan. His previous assignment was as commanding general, Multi-National Force–Iraq (MNF–I). In that position Petraeus oversaw all coalition forces in Iraq. Within months of this talk, Petraeus was made commander, International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), and commander, U.S. Forces Afghanistan (USFOR–A).

Petraeus married Holly Knowlton, a graduate from Dickinson College and daughter of Army General William A. Knowlton, who was superintendent of the U.S. Military Academy (West Point) at the time. They have two grown children, Anne and Stephen.
General Petraeus: Well, good evening to you all. Thanks for that very warm welcome. Thanks for those very kind words, General Jordan, which mean even more coming from the individual who was the head of the Department of Social Sciences when I was a cadet at West Point. You know what they say about one of those kind introductions, though. I just wish my parents could have been here to hear it. My crusty old Dutch American sea captain father would have enjoyed it, but would have been a tad skeptical. My dear old mother would have loved every last word and believed every one of them, too. So thank you very much. I’d like to think I am, at BYU, here at the right place at the right time. And it’s great to join you. We were on a TV timeout, by the way, before this. I didn’t realize that as we came out and sat and sat for a moment or two. It’s a little like being at the football game, you know, and you’re waiting for them to give you the signal that you can resume play. And I know I have to finish before *Perry Mason* comes on, as well, so we’ll try to keep this on time.

But let me actually just turn again and thank General Jordan for his extraordinary contributions during a long career in uniform, which culminated, of course, with retirement as a Brigadier General after serving for a number of years in this coveted position of head of the Department of Social Sciences, which I was privileged to teach in, but could never aspire to be the head of. And then, of course, he breathed enormous energy and life into one of Washington’s most important think tanks, the Center for Strategic and International Studies. So thanks for all you’ve done and I hope that you’re enjoying seeing all those young cadets; a couple of us sort of make our way reasonably to the top, so we appreciate that.

Mr. President, it’s great to be here at BYU. It’s a real thrill. I’ve never been here before. I understand that BYU just leapfrogged Harvard to number one in *U.S. News and World Report*’s ranking of most popular national universities. I congratulate you on that. (There may be a little bit of license that we’re taking there. Someone asked me to suggest what the ratings could be if BYU students had a spring break. I’ll mention again, I’m only as good as the material they give me—you know, there may be an inaccuracy here or there. But they did ask me to wonder. I understand, actually. I was at Yale this morning, and we were up in New Hampshire last night, and I picked up a rumor that Harvard is considering canceling its spring break next year so it can compete with BYU on a level playing field.) But congratulations again on the leadership that you
have provided here and all the great accomplishments at this extraordinary institution, a true national asset, and, again, what a pleasure it is to be here.

It’s an honor to have the governor here, the commander in chief of the National Guard of this tremendous state and an individual who is known very well for the leadership he provides for the state that I understand—and this is accurate—that has been judged the best managed state of all of our 50 great states. And I know that he cares deeply for those who serve in uniform in the active [branches of the military] as well as his National Guard and we appreciate that.

General Robert Oaks is here, as well, a four-star general in the Air Force—and then, of course, he held very important positions with the Mormon faith around the world, using those skills that he developed in the Air Force. So thanks to him, not only for being here, but for all that he did in uniform and then since taking the final pass in review.

I know there is a considerable contingent of Army and Air Force cadets here from the Cougar Battalion. Can we have a hooah? Apparently there are even more in a breakout room. You know, you gotta get here early, you guys. If you want to get tickets for something . . . But in any event, they should be very proud of themselves. This is what I understand is the largest ROTC program in the nation other than those that are at military schools—if you will, traditional military programs. But I know that you have achieved some extraordinary results. In fact, I just awarded coins to those who have won the annual Sandhurst Competition which is carried out at West Point every year and that is quite a great tribute.

In fact, with these future military officers here and in all these different breakout rooms (this is a risk here now, because I’m going to try something), I thought I’d share with you something that my research team dug up on the top 10 reasons why BYU graduates make great soldiers. Now, I offer this, and as I do this I want to say that one of my admonitions to myself is, “Don’t take yourself too seriously, but do take your work seriously.” So I offer this in that vein, to test your sense of humor. And some of these are not exactly great, but again, I’m only as good as the material they give me.

So, the top reason, number 10: They have already been on many a mission.

Number 9: Army chow is no problem for folks accustomed to eating green Jell-O and shredded carrots. (What is that? We didn’t get green Jell-O. In fact, we had quite a lovely dessert—we did have shredded carrots, though, and I appreciate that. I want to get the full experience.)

Number 8: No problem if they don’t know what rank somebody else is; they just refer to them as Brother or Sister So-and-So.

Number 7: They never go AWOL; they prefer to call it being “less active.” (I am very relieved, actually. I was reading these in the plane on the way here and I thought, “Uuuuh . . .”)

Number 6: They will seize any objective swiftly if you tell them refreshments will be served afterward. (We gave a Snickers bar to some folks that were sitting in the hall on the way over.)
Number 5: They know how to make things happen. In fact, if you ever need a base built quickly in a barren wasteland, you have only to stride out to where you want them to start, plant your walking staff in the ground, and say with a loud voice, “This is the place.”

There is more. Number 4: They have innovative ideas for handling insurgents, like assigning them home teachers.

Number 3: They always have a year’s supply of provisions on hand.

Number 2 (and one of my favorites): They are the world’s most reliable designated drivers. I was suggesting that they might also add something about no problems with General Order #1. This is the order that we have in the Central Command region in Islamic countries, which prohibits certain liquid substances, shall we say.

And number 1: They understand how far Iraq has come over the last seven years. In fact, they think that Iraq’s old spot in the axis of evil can now be filled by the University of Utah.

Well, again, thanks for working with me there. The speechwriters are breathing a big sigh of relief back there, I can assure you.

I also want to congratulate the BYU community on your sports teams this year. We watched the bowl victory, I understand your football team is back to winning 11 games a year, and you’ve had some impressive Top 25 rankings. We were rooting big-time for the basketball team. They had a tremendous season and, candidly, we wish it was still ongoing, but I know they had an extraordinary performance and we congratulate them on getting as far as they did, as well.

Okay, we’ve done the “don’t-take-yourself-too-seriously” part and now I want to get serious about what it is that we do out in the Central Command region where I am privileged to command some 210,000-plus soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines and Coast Guardsmen, and some tens of thousands of Defense Department civilians, and to work with some extraordinary members of the United States diplomatic community, partner nations, and others from our interagency.

Tonight is what it is billed as; it is a conversation. And we enjoy these because we’ll go where you want to go. I’ll give a couple of just real introductory asides. I should remind you that it is the inalienable right of all four-star Army generals to use PowerPoint slides in exercising our freedom of expression and to use a laser pointer in communicating. (There’s a little asterisk on the First Amendment, if you read it closely. It’s down there.)

I’m going to start out with just a couple of slides that set the scene, if you will, then I’ll turn to General Jordan and let him ask the first question or two, and then we’ll open it up to the audience.

First, let me just remind you what Central Command is and where it fits in the grand scheme of things—because there are six of us Geographic Combatant Commanders, as we are called, and we divide the world up, if you will, as you see right here. Central Command is right here in the center. Of course you always put yourself in the center of the slide and it’s these countries right here [pointing to the Middle East]
and central Asia]. Now my staff would point out to you that we may be the smallest of the Geographic Combatant Commands, but we’re proud to have the most problems. So there you have it; that’s where we fit into the scheme. The rest of the military (the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines and Coast Guard) all provide forces to the six Geographic Combatant Commanders. And so do the other four Unified Commanders. Special Operations provides special operators, the Transportation Command transports us around the world, and so on. Those are the Commands that employ and have the privilege of overseeing our forces as they carry out operations on the ground around the world.

Next, let me just be sure that you recall that with the onset of the African Command, which came into being on 1 October 2008, we divested ourselves of the Horn of Africa, leaving Central Command with 20 countries—from Egypt in the west to Pakistan in the east, Kazakhstan in the north, down to Yemen and also the waters off Somalia. (We wanted to be sure that we didn’t give up Johnny Depp and the pirates out there.) This is a region that you all know well. It’s a region of extraordinary contrast. It’s a region of many religions and ethnic groups. There are many fault lines that run through it: sectarian fault lines; ethnic fault lines; various languages; all kinds of forms of government, from ones that are very well developed to ones that are very challenged. It’s a region of the haves and the have-nots. There are incredible contrasts between several countries that are among the poorest in the world and then others that are the richest, literally, including one that has a per capita income of $100,000 per year.

It is an area that is rich in natural energy resources, including something like 55 percent to 60 percent of the world’s oil and nearly half of the world’s natural gas, but is poor in many respects in fresh water. There are some exceptions, Iraq among them, but the rest generally do not have that. So it’s an area with enormous blessings, but also enormous challenges.

You can see listed over here the kinds of operations we are carrying out [counter-terrorism operations; counterinsurgency campaigns; counter, protect and deter; partnership building and security assistance; freedom of navigation; counter arms smuggling; and support to diplomatic initiatives]. We are doing all of that—or our forces are. Obviously there are terrorists out there, al Qaeda and other transnational extremist elements, in addition to the insurgencies that we are grappling with in places like Afghanistan, where we are conducting the counterinsurgency campaign. We are focused on Iran in terms of insuring that the forces out there can defend themselves, can protect themselves, and ideally deter any untoward action.

We do a great deal of building of partnerships. There is a regional security architecture that we are constantly developing and it involves all kinds of cooperation with countries in that region and we have numerous organizations out there among those 210,000-plus soldiers that indeed exist to do just that.
We’re obviously all about freedom of navigation; we have three of the world’s most important checkpoints: Strait of Hormuz, Bab-el-Mandeb and the Suez Canal. There is an awful lot of movement of illegal arms, illegal narcotics and a variety of other substances that we’re trying to get at.

So that sets the table for what we do. And now I’m going to test my team in the booth, wherever they are, because, again, they don’t know where the conversation is going either, but they’ve got a deck of about 100 slides back there and I’d like to go to the “Big Idea” slide, the one that’s right before the final slide in this particular set of briefings, because I do want to offer one last comment here before we go into the questions. This came out of the strategic assessment and it has the insight that it takes more to deal with counterterrorism than just counterterrorist forces. That seems a little bit strange, that countering terrorism requires more than Delta Force and SEAL Team 6 and 22 SAS, but it is a fact. In truth, if we think more in terms of dealing with an insurgency (and therefore having a whole of governments approach), this is not just counterterrorist forces, it’s not even just conventional military forces or host nation forces. This is about much more than that. It’s about civilian endeavors. It’s about getting at the reasons that particular populations or subsets of populations might be given to join extremist elements, why the conditions might prompt that: the lack of adequate services, education, opportunity and all the rest of that. So you have to attack all of that. And typically there’s something connected with the tension and rehabilitation of those who are caught up in those systems and you have to work it regionally and it requires as many partners as you can get. [Slide caption: Countering Terrorism requires more than Counter-Terrorist Forces. Countering Terrorism=Whole of Government Counter-Insurgency.]

So that is, if you will, the way that we have tried to describe the intellectual approach that we are taking to the problems out in this area. This is what we did in Iraq, for what it’s worth. We did not approach that just as counterterrorism by any means. In fact, you cannot kill or capture your way out of an industrial-strength insurgency such as we faced there. So with that “Big Idea” out there (that came out of the strategic assessment that we did when I took command of Central Command) I’d like to now offer General Jordan the opportunity to ask the first question and the second question and then we’ll turn it over to the audience.

**General Jordan:** The first question is, I think, logically, what application in Afghanistan can we make of the lessons we learned in Iraq? To what extent are those situations so different that there really is not very much carryover?

**General Petraeus:** Well, you’ve put your finger on a hugely important issue, and this is the whole idea of How do you use lessons of history? And the answer is, of course, “Very carefully,” because the lessons of history can obfuscate as well as illuminate. And the fact is that Afghanistan is very, very different from Iraq. In fact, I was asked to
go to Afghanistan one time (when I was a three-star coming home from a second tour in Iraq) by Secretary Rumsfeld. I went out there dutifully, did the assessment, came back, and actually made a PowerPoint slide (of course, that being our means of communication), and the title of it was “Afghanistan ≠ Iraq.” Then I laid out various categories of how it was very different.

Having said that, however, there are many lessons that we learned in Iraq that are, indeed, applicable if applied with real care and a granular appreciation for local circumstances. All counterinsurgencies are local and you have to do this village by village, valley by valley, and that requires a very in-depth understanding, something that we did, in fact, learn in Iraq. The big surge in Iraq was not the surge of forces. The big surge was a surge of ideas. It was securing the population first and foremost, not handing tasks off to the Iraqi forces that couldn’t handle the level of violence. It was doing so by living with the people. It was promoting reconciliation. It was living our values. It was being first with the truth. [There was] a whole series of admonitions.

Many of those apply in Afghanistan, so the core counterinsurgency guidance that we developed for Iraq has applicability, but only if applied with a great care to understand the circumstances in which those lessons indeed are going to be applied.

**General Jordan:** The second question is of quite a different character. You are widely known as the apostle of counterinsurgency (the Petraeus Doctrine, it’s sometimes labeled), but I understand that the Army has an ongoing debate between those who believe that the future use of the Army will be in counterinsurgency missions and those—a substantial number in the Army, probably mostly in the artillery and the armor—who believe that we should keep our mind and our priorities clearly focused on conventional war, which, of course, requires a very different set of weaponry, different training, and so forth. That debate will probably determine the future character of the Army. Would you comment?

**General Petraeus:** I would be happy to, Sir. I remember when I was studying international relations in graduate school and I read this wonderful essay, of course characteristically written by a British professor, and it ended very elegantly by saying that the truth is not to be found in either school of thought, but rather in the debate among them. That’s the case in this particular situation.

The fact is that we think that most of our conflicts in the future will involve a combination of offense, defense, and stability and support operations. And, in fact, even in Iraq at various times (and we have a number of veterans of Iraq here) there have been periods when one unit might be in very, very tough combat, traditional conventional combat. So there’s no question that we still have to do that and we obviously have to have tanks and artillery and all the rest, although we tend to shoot precision munitions. We don’t shoot lots of dumb artillery in the way that we did when, say, we were fighting on our way to Baghdad.
and shot—I don’t know—six or seven thousand rounds of artillery in a week and a half or so. Now we use precision munitions. And we also have access to enablers now that we just didn’t even dream of just a few years ago, again when we were doing the fight to Baghdad. During that time I was a division commander of the great Screaming Eagles of the 101st. It was one of three divisions in this corps (the entire Army corps of probably 80 to 100 thousand troopers) that had one Predator and we were all fighting over it like kids fighting over the Nintendo—or whatever you fight over now.

Now, let me show you how we do fight, because among the most intense combat that we had in Iraq was that which took place in March and April of 2008 [shows slide entitled The Battle of Sadr City: March–April 2008] when we had the Battle of Sadr City and the Battle of Basra. This is a case where one brigade commander was the ground force commander, the great Colonel Hort (John Hort) of the Fourth Infantry Division. He had all of the ground forces that we could possibly give him: tanks, Bradley fighting vehicles, Strykers, dismounted infantry, U.S. Navy SEAL snipers, you name it. But over the top of him he had arrayed all of [the unmanned aerial vehicles pictured in the slide]. What you can count here are two specialized Predators, two more conventional Predators (these are all unmanned aerial vehicles armed with special signals intelligence packages), three attack helicopter teams (this is all 24 hours a day Air Force close air support), and then six more unmanned aerial vehicles—not armed but with full motion video—and we could pull all of this together and fuse this in one command post, using screens and chat rooms underneath each one. So this is a very different way of fighting. And we had precision fires. We killed 77 rocket teams in the course of that time, but we did not do extensive damage to Sadr City at all. We did shoot artillery into the city, precision artillery, and it defeated the militia. So this is a very different way of fighting when we can array all these enablers as we were able to do there. But there’s no question there will still be conventional combat. There’s also no question that it will likely be accompanied by stability and support operations even as you are conducting that conventional combat.

**Question:** Will the United States extend a nuclear umbrella over the Gulf states in the event Iran tests a nuclear weapon?

**General Petraeus:** Why don’t you start me off with something a little bit harder?

That is such a loaded hypothetical that it resembles a minefield, and 30 or 35 years ago I learned that it’s probably best to go around those rather than stumbling through them. So let me just talk about where we are with Iran, if I could. We have spent about a year—properly, I think—embarked on what has been called the “diplomatic track” and this is including, literally and figuratively, extending an open hand to Iranian leaders in spite of the differences that exist—and make no mistake about it, there are very serious differences. Iran is a country that is arming, training, funding, and directing extremist
militias and proxy elements in southern Iraq, in southern Lebanon (Lebanese Hezbollah), and in Gaza with Hamas, some of which is led by a leader who denies the existence of the Holocaust (it gives some pause when you realize that), and it carries out very provocative actions. There’s also a modicum of assistance to the Taliban in western Afghanistan. So this is what we confront—and Iran is embarked on a nuclear program that many analysts assess to include all of the components required for the eventual decision to actually construct a nuclear weapon.

The diplomatic track did not achieve resolution of these differences. Iran essentially blew off the International Atomic Energy Agency, the U.N. body charged with overseeing nuclear matters. That body has registered its concerns. The U.N. Security Council has registered those, as well. Now what is happening is that we are on the so-called “pressure track” (to use Secretary Hillary Clinton’s phrase), working on a package of sanctions that can demonstrate the seriousness of the international community—and particularly, of course, of the U.N. Security Council—to convey this extraordinary concern while, of course, carrying out whatever other activities might be necessary to ensure that our partners, our forces and so forth, are protected and capable should anything come beyond that. That’s about as far as I would want to go on that particular question.

**Question:** This month Admiral Michael Mullen, the chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, stated that U.S. foreign policy is too dominated by the military, that we’re too dependent upon generals and the admirals who lead our major overseas commands. In doing so, he echoed what Secretary Robert Gates has often called the “creeping militarization” of U.S. foreign policy. Do you agree with their assessment and, if so, what can be done to reverse that trend?

**General Petraeus:** I do agree with it, actually. In fact, I’ve also stated that for the record on a number of occasions, including on Capitol Hill—and I did it again just last week, as a matter of fact. The challenge is, of course, that we’ve been engaged in these endeavors that require very substantial tasks and the State Department, which is filled with a bunch of heroes, frankly, needs more of them. The Agency for International Development (USAID) does not have sufficient numbers either. There are a number of other organizations in the interagency. Again, they don’t do deployments.

Let me just give you an example of this kind of thing. What the solution we reached in Iraq featured was partnerships. We were there in Iraq. I remember I had only recently taken over as the Commander of Multi-National Force–Iraq. It was one of my second or third meetings with Prime Minister Maliki, one of the very few leaders I’d not gotten to know in earlier tours, and as I was leaving he asked me, just offhand, if I would be kind enough to detain his Deputy Minister of Health. I thought that might be a mistranslation, so I asked that again as we were walking out of the room and he said, no, that’s really what he wanted me to do. “And,
oh, by the way, detain the general who was in charge of the Facility Protection Security Forces of the Ministry of Health, as well”—some thousands of security forces. We did it, by the way; he asked us to do it and we did it. They were in the grip of the militia, which is a commentary on the state of things at that particular time when we launched the surge.

I then went in the embassy and I said, “Where is the team that is in charge of helping the Iraqi Ministry of Health?” And it turned out that there was an army of one, as we call a single individual. She was a tremendous health attaché, but she was one person. So we sat down with her and what we did is we teamed. I said, “We’ve got military hospitals out here; we have all these assets. And we have a little bit of excess capacity because we’re always prepared for the worst. How about if we provided you a handful of doctors and a few supervisory nurses and some medical logisticians and some health administrators? We have all of this in the military. And oh, by the way, they already have body armor and Kevlar and they know how to use radios and shoot weapons if they have to (although we probably don’t want to do that with the doctors). So we provided them some infantry squads, as well. And, of course, she was very grateful.

That’s what we have done to work around this, but what Secretary Gates is capturing is that, ideally, we wouldn’t have to do that as much as we have had to. And we have ended up performing some functions that traditionally were performed by the State Department (training, oversight of training, police and that kind of thing) because the capacity is just not there in, for example, the State Department’s Bureau of International Narcotics and Law.

So that’s the challenge, and it’s an accurate depiction. So what’s the solution? The solution is we need more Foreign Service Officers (and Secretary Clinton got the first increase, I think, in quite some time), we need more folks in AID, and we need more elements within the interagency that can deploy. The fact is that we have National Guard agricultural development teams in Afghanistan and one reason is that there are not enough in the Department of Agriculture, although, again, there are a bunch of heroes that we have from there. Those that deploy are fantastic and the Secretary, Tom Vilsack, is working this hard. In the meantime, we have workarounds. That’s okay with those of us in the field because we’re more than happy to partner. As some of you may recall, Ambassador Ryan Crocker and I in Baghdad vowed from day one that this was going to be a team effort and that cooperation was not optional, and we put that message out to our respective elements.

**Question:** As a Norwegian, I’m anxious to know what your thoughts are about the current division of Afghanistan among the members of the coalition, in which Norwegian and German troops serve in the relatively safe north, suffering few casualties, and in which Americans, Canadians, Dutch, and those from various other countries serve in the south where it’s much more dangerous. And what justifications do the various governments use to serve in the north?
General Petraeus: First of all, it’s not all that safe in Mazar-i-Sharif and, in fact, we are going to deploy some additional U.S. forces there. In addition, the Germans are also deploying additional forces. I think your country is, as well, by the way. And there have been casualties there, tragically. So I wouldn’t want to overstate that, but certainly the violence is higher in the south. This is a Pashtun insurgency, by and large, and therefore those that are in the southern Pashtun area are certainly facing much greater violence than they see in the Regional Command North area. Some of this is the way it was divvied up, and once you’ve got infrastructure in and forces in and all the rest, that’s where you tend to stay because it costs a heck of a lot of money to move.

But there are also caveats. I’m not familiar with what the exact restrictions are, but many of the countries do have caveats. Welcome to our world. When I was the Chief of Operations for the stabilization force in Bosnia in 2001, I had a matrix on my desk that had the tasks down one side and the countries across the top, and it had an “x” in the box whether you could deploy them in those particular tasks. And then it even broke it down by whether they could do those tasks in their own area, in their divisional area, and then countrywide.

The truth is, there’s never been a commander in history, I suspect, who has ever had enough forces, enough money, enough partners, and enough authorities. What you do is you make recommendations, you provide your best military advice, and at the end of the day you take those resources, those forces that are provided to you, and you use them in as skillful a manner as you possibly can to accomplish the mission that you’re given. And there’s a point at which you have to stop, in a sense—we say, “Don’t be a fine Chardonnay.” (That’s a wine, by the way, for those who don’t know it.) Don’t be a whiner, if you will. You conclude, at a certain point, that we are extraordinarily grateful to Norway and to Germany for the forces they have provided and for the casualties they have taken. And then you get on with it and try to do the best you can to accomplish the mission.

Question: We know you’re trying really hard to avoid civilian casualties right now. I’m wondering if you can really win a war that way and if it’s going to cost more American lives.

General Petraeus: You can and you have to. You cannot have tactical successes that are strategic defeats. We had this situation in the spring and summer of last year, in particular. I remember I’d get a report that would say, “This was a really good op. We killed 40 or 50 Taliban.” And then the next sentence would be “We also killed a couple dozen Afghans.” Obviously we didn’t mean it; it certainly wasn’t the intent. They were caught in crossfire or in a house that a bomb was dropped on or something like this. But it almost cut the entire strategic knees out from under us. You cannot do that.

Having said that, we will never, ever tie our soldiers’ hands behind their backs. Those on the ground, the Marines, the airmen on
the ground, sailors on the ground—we will always back them with what is required. But we want them to think through certain situations. The example of this that we often provide is the case where they are receiving fire from a compound and they don’t really know who’s in the compound. They do know there’s somebody shooting at them. It’s not effective fire, necessarily, but you’d really like to take the fight to these guys. That’s what we do. We’re proud to say we’re taking the fight to the enemy. Well, there are times when you don’t want to take the fight to the enemy because if you drop a bomb on that house and it turns out there are two families inside it and you’ve killed a dozen civilians to get at a handful of Taliban, or whomever it was that was shooting at you, you have just completely undermined your effort. So you’ve got to be very conscious.

We used to have a saying in Iraq. I used to challenge our forces to say, “Will this operation take more bad guys off the battlefield than it creates by the way it is conducted?” And that’s the test that is here. It is very difficult to ensure that that intent is clearly understood by our troopers. It is something we definitely did in Iraq. Again, we worked that very hard. General Stanley McChrystal and his team have refined the tactical directive. It was one of the big ideas that they had there. We’re working very hard to ensure that those at ground level implement it in a proper fashion so that we never deny something. If they are decisively engaged, we’re going to do whatever it takes to ensure that they can extricate themselves or do what’s necessary. But on the other hand, you have to think your way through each situation, and that’s what’s important.

Let me talk a tiny bit about what we have done in Afghanistan, if I could. [Shows a slide labeled Afghanistan: Getting the Inputs Right.] We’ve spent the last year basically working to get the inputs in Afghanistan right. These are areas where we knew what we needed from Iraq [organizational structure, people, concepts and approach, resources].

We knew we needed certain structures. If you’re doing reconciliation and reintegration, you have to have a cell that oversees it. You want to unify your Special Ops. You have to have fusion of all your intelligence. The breakthrough in intelligence, by the way, is not in any one discipline—signals, human, measurement, imagery—the breakthrough is in the fusion of the products of all the different disciplines. And so that’s critical. We didn’t have a three-star level operational command, something that was invaluable in Iraq and which we formed after about 18 months there. So we knew we needed these structures, but we didn’t have the numbers to do it at that time. We built them over the course of the last year.

We then worked to get the best people possible into those positions. They’re not all U.S., by the way. There are a number of different international individuals here. Then we tried to get the big ideas right. I mention this because the Tactical Directive is the one that you’re talking about. It aims at ensuring our soldiers understand the context in which we’re operating and do everything possible to minimize civilian loss of life.
without unduly jeopardizing our own soldiers’, sailors’, airmen’s, and Marines’ lives in the context of doing that.

But it is also a comprehensive Civil-Military Campaign Plan. This isn’t just about military aspects. This is whole of governments again, as I mentioned upfront. By the way, we even have a Tactical Driving Directive. You might say, “What is that all about?” That’s about the fact that we were driving in such an egregious manner to an engagement that we were making far more enemies on our way to and from the actual engagement than we ever made friends at the engagement site. It was just unconscionable. Remember Toad in Wind in the Willows? We had taken it a couple of orders of magnitude beyond that.

And then we worked to get the resources necessary to carry out these concepts under these leaders in charge of these organizations. There were some 38,000 additional forces deployed last year, a combination of residual orders by President George W. Bush and initial orders by President Barack Obama, then the 30,000 additional that he announced at the West Point speech—some 11,500 of which now are already in the country, and the rest will be in there by the end of August, with the exception of one division headquarters that isn’t needed by that point in time. There are additional NATO and non-NATO coalition forces, authorization of additional 100,000 Afghan forces, additional civilians and additional funding.

Now, none of this is easy. I’ve laid out that this is an 18-month campaign plan. We’ve just seen the inputs. We’ve just seen the very first output. That’s the Central Helmand Operation. It’s well known that we will be focusing attention in Kandahar and in other areas in the east and even in the north and out in the northwest. But that’s going to play out. But as I told Congress the other day, this is definitely going to get harder before it gets easier. This is going to be a tough year. When you do take the fight to the enemy—and we do have to do that, we do have to take away the sanctuaries and safe havens that the Taliban and the other elements of the extremist syndicate have been able to establish—they will fight back, as they already are doing. Just as in Iraq, where we took the fight to the enemy there with the surge, to secure the people you have to move into their neighborhoods, and we did just that, but we had to fight to do that, and we will have to fight to do that in Afghanistan, as well.

As we do all of that, we have to remember why we are in Afghanistan. We’re there because of 9/11. That’s where it was planned, in Kandahar. Initial training of the attackers was in eastern Afghanistan, before they went to Germany and then on to U.S. flight schools, and we cannot allow that country to again become a sanctuary for transnational extremists like al Qaeda.

**Question:** Considering that Iran has recently demonstrated that it can enrich uranium to 20 percent and that it had launched living organisms into space, this suggests that they may be able to produce longer-range missiles than we previously thought. Do you think this suggests a need to reevaluate our strategy to take Long-Range
Ballistic Missile Defense out of Eastern Europe?

**General Petraeus:** The strategy that was announced for Europe is, in fact, focused more on this threat than was the previous plan (and it gets it deployed there much sooner), as is the strategy for certain actions that are being pursued in the Gulf region. So it actually addresses this threat more quickly and more effectively than did the longer-term Ballistic Missile Defense threat that was being looked at there.

**Question:** My question is regarding the counternarcotics efforts in Afghanistan. Specifically, is the U.S. sending mixed signals to the Afghan population by allowing the opium and poppy production in the Helmand Province, and specifically in and around Marja, to continue? And, moreover, is the U.S. military sending mixed signals to Americans back home?

**General Petraeus:** We don't think so. We thought pretty hard about this, and the fact is that the eradication campaign, which we are not doing at this point in time, was creating vastly more enemies than any benefits that it accrued. The idea should be not to go after the little guys. What you have to do with the little guys, the farmers in the fields, is provide them an alternate crop. And so, indeed, what we are going to do after this particular harvest is to fund seed, fertilizer and so forth to grow alternative crops in that area and in other areas that we have been able to secure. Meanwhile, we are going after the big guys. This is an industry; this is an illegal narcotics industry that provides a vast amount of certain elements of the world's illegal narcotics. It's an area where all the countries in the region—including Iran, but also the central Asian states, Russia, China, all of them, and all of us—share an interest in combating the illegal narcotics trade and also, of course, extremism, by and large. So that's the approach that we're going to take—not to penalize the farmer right now. It is to help them plan for the fall planting season (in about a month and a half they start getting ready for that), meanwhile going after the big guys, rather than taking away the little guy's fruits of his labor. And so that's the approach. And we think it makes a good deal more sense, frankly, than the eradication programs that were being carried out before which also, unfortunately, had become corrupt in certain ways. And that's a big challenge in Afghanistan. One of our efforts has to be to help the Afghans achieve legitimacy in the eyes of the people for their governance, and that has not been the case in many areas because of predatory practices and corruption. President Hamid Karzai is keenly aware of that, and he is working to combat it, but it is a very, very tough conundrum for him.

**Question:** The Islamist ruling party of Turkey is changing the constitution to eliminate the independence of the judiciary and the military, which as the traditional guardians of secularism in Turkey have been shaken by reprisals from the government. What will be the ramifications for Turkey
being a geostrategic partner with the United States with these recent events?

General Petraeus: I have to beg off a little bit on that one because Turkey is not part of our area of responsibility. I follow that to a degree because we have access to certain bases there that provide Transportation Command footprint. And we do have some intelligence-sharing activities that CENTCOM is involved in, but I’m not riveted on the ongoing challenges that are taking place there. I do know enough that I would qualify slightly what you inferred about what the ruling party is trying to do. But by and large I’ll leave that to the commander of the European Command and I’ll try to arrange to get him out here [to BYU] posthaste so he can answer that question.

Question: The U.S. military is hoping to co-opt moderate Taliban leaders into the Afghan government. What do the women and girls in Afghanistan think about this, and did the military or the Obama administration think to ask them about this?

General Petraeus: Yes. In fact, there is absolutely every attempt to try and fracture insurgencies because, again, you can’t kill and capture your way out of a very substantial problem like this. So what you have to do is essentially what we did in Iraq. You have to promote reconciliation. In this case, at local and mid-level, it’s termed “reintegration of reconcilables” in Afghanistan. And we’ve worked hard to try to understand which elements could be reconcilable. But one of the qualities of being reconcilable is that you can’t burn the girls’ schools and you can’t impose these overly oppressive practices. It is a conservative society, to be sure, but you can’t carry out the practices that the Taliban did when they were in charge in Afghanistan in the past.

The truth is that there is no love lost for the Taliban, by and large. There are some who have an interest in Taliban activities. The Taliban is tied into the illegal narcotics business; it’s tied into criminal activity in some respects. That’s how it gets some of its funding, to be sure. And the Afghan people remember their experience under the Taliban. They remember the extraordinary violence, the hanging of thousands of people in the stadium in Kabul. They remember the closing of all the girls’ schools, the very oppressive social practices that were implemented at that time, and just the sheer extremism of the way that they practiced their ideology and the indiscriminate nature of some of the violence, as well.

That helps the Afghan government if it can be legitimate, in turn, in the eyes of the people. And that, of course, has been a challenge. They have to provide local dispute resolution. It’s okay to do that with traditional norms. This process that we carried out with President Obama was really quite extraordinary: two and a half months of real rigorous challenging of assumptions and batting around of ideas and trying to really come to grips with “Who is this enemy? Can they be divided or subdivided?” One of the outcomes was that we also refined our objectives. They are more modest. We realize that we are not
going to turn Afghanistan into Switzerland in two years or less. With that in mind, local traditional organizing systems and structures are okay. What you have to do is figure out how to connect those ultimately with what comes out of Kabul and make sure that all of them are viewed as generally legitimate and worthy of the support of the people. That is no easy task, but it can, indeed, accommodate the reintegration of a number of these lower and mid-level Taliban who really aren’t the hard-core Taliban. These are, as they say, “the five-dollar-a-day Taliban.” They are the Taliban who are in it to survive, in some cases. This is a country that has been wracked by war for 30 years. It was among the poorest in the world to begin with. There is a dearth of human capital because of all that conflict. They have 70 percent–plus illiteracy. These are people who are professional chameleons to some degree. They have survived under all kinds of different strongmen and warlords. They are more than happy to reintegrate back into society if it can be a guarantee of security for them and perhaps some promise of some kind of modest economic opportunity for them, as well.

Question: You recently urged that the Palestinian territories be included in CENTCOM.

General Petraeus: Actually, I didn’t and I welcome the opportunity to set the record straight. That was an inaccurate blog. I did not ask for the Palestinian territories in Israel. The staff talked about it; the staff at CENTCOM has always talked about it. Israel is not part of the 20 countries [currently under CENTCOM]. We did consider it, but I did not ask for it and my formal Unified Command Plan submission did not include that, and I appreciate the opportunity to set the record straight because it caused quite a buzz in the blog community, and then it was packaged with something else that was equally incorrect: that I sent some kind of a blurb to the White House about this, which was also not correct.

Question: So why wouldn’t the Palestinian territories be included with CENTCOM, in your opinion?

General Petraeus: First of all, the Palestinian territories are not a governmental structure. There is not a resolution to their legal status. The reason, I think, that that particular area of Israel and the West Bank were carved out and kept in European Command is that I think that the “Founding Fathers” [of our current Command structure]—30 or 40 years ago when they carved up and created Central Command during the final years of the Carter administration—I assume wanted to have CENTCOM largely focused on the Arab world. Originally we didn’t have the central Asian states either. Therefore, that would be the focus, and they would let European Command focus on Israel, and then the national authorities could be the adjudicators. And I think that’s really what was going on there.

Question: My question is in regard to reports that have come out about secret
peace negotiations between Afghanistan and the Taliban. How are these impacted by recent arrests of top Taliban members by Pakistan?

**General Petraeus:** First of all, a bit more has been made of those, candidly, than it has been in reality. There have been discussions at various times between representatives of the Afghan government and various representatives of various Taliban, but I don’t think there’s been anything overly serious about that. And I think it’s a little bit of an overstatement to suggest, for example, what you’re really getting at: Was Mullah Baradar detained in Pakistan because of some connection that he might have been involved in secret peace negotiations? Those who know the circumstances of the detention will tell you that we’re pretty certain that there was not that motivation behind it. In fact, we’re quite confident that that was not part of the reasoning behind that individual being detained.

There have been other discussions. Again, these discussions will take place, but as Secretary Gates—I think correctly—observed yesterday, we should be careful not to be premature in judgments about how successful these might be, given that we would assess that the Taliban assumes that it still has the momentum right now. This is an element that has been resurgent now for a number of years, after being defeated back in late 2001 and early 2002. It took them a number of years to regroup, to reconnect, to get back in, to reestablish infrastructure, to reintimidate people, and so forth. But we think that they have a sense that they can outlast us. As they say, we may have the watches but they have the time. You have to be realistic about this. You have to understand where you’re operating. This is a Pashtun insurgency. There’s another saying from Afghanistan: The Pashtun waited 99 years for revenge and he cursed himself for his impatience. So this is what we’re up against and there’s nothing easy about it. I would never, ever sugarcoat it or give anything but a realistic assessment about that.

But I think it would be premature to expect results from these kinds of talks at this point until there is a good bit more pressure on the Taliban, and it will grow further on the Pakistani side, which has carried out very impressive operations for the past 10 months, frankly—quite impressive counterinsurgency campaigns in Northwest Frontier Province, in Bajaur, and also down in South Waziristan in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. I think, again, we have to be measured in our expectations about this and we should be careful, I think, not to impute that the reason certain actions were taken in Pakistan was to disrupt some kind of negotiations that had any real legs to them at that particular time.

[End of questions]

If I could, I’d like to end showing something that we often show at the end of these discussions because this is what our business is really all about. [Shows slide entitled 4th of July 2008 Reenlistment Ceremony] This is a reenlistment ceremony. We believe it was the largest in our military’s history. It’s
1,215 soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines on the Fourth of July, 2008 and they’re all standing there in the headquarters of the Multi-National Force–Iraq. You can see that it’s one of Saddam’s old grand palaces. They have their right hands in the air, and they are reenlisting in a combat zone, all gathered in there and knowing that by reciting the oath of enlistment—and I was privileged to be the reenlisting officer—they likely will be called on to deploy again, back to a combat zone. I want to point out again that this is July 4, 2008. This is before the economic downturn. They weren’t worried about having jobs waiting for them because there were lots of opportunities for those who had their experiences. They weren’t doing it for the stock options.

I actually stood there and I thought, “What is it? Why are these individuals doing this?” And my conclusion is that they were raising their right hands and reenlisting because of a sense of purpose, a sense that they are performing a mission that is larger than self, something that is of extraordinary meaning to our country and to the country in which we are operating there in Iraq. And they were doing it because they felt privileged to perform these missions with great folks on their left and right. They come from all over our country, every city, every rural area, every religion, and every sex. Every element of our society is there. These are the individuals that these great ROTC cadets will have the privilege of leading, some of them in combat, in the years that lie ahead. I can tell you that there is no greater privilege than being able to serve with them in such endeavors, and I am here today as their representative, taking great pride in explaining what they have accomplished and what they are doing—and also, on their behalf, to say thank you to this community which has been so supportive of its men and women in uniform and of their families who also make extraordinary sacrifices. Thank you very much.