

Thank you all for this opportunity and your service.

Mr Chairman, I want to specifically thank you for acknowledging the importance of hearing from junior officers and NCO's. I believe I speak for everyone on the panel and the soldiers with whom we served when I say we appreciate the audience.

In early 2005, I was working as an investment banker in London. Less than a year later, I was deployed with the 1st Brigade of the 82nd Airborne Division in Eastern Afghanistan. My good friend and a hero of mine, LTC Michael Fenzel, deputy brigade commander of the unit I later joined, asked me if I would be willing to leave the world of finance and serve. A sense of duty to my oath as an officer, a sense of commitment to the troops I would lead, and a sense of loyalty to my friend who asked me to join him propelled me to leave my comfortable existence to spend 9 months in the border region of Afghanistan.

Before deploying, I read extensively about the history of the region and sought counsel from those who I thought had any insight on the area. Within days of arriving in our area of operations, I realized nothing could have prepared me for some of the most trying, exhilarating, and heartbreaking days of my life.

(1)

Iraq dominated the news cycle at the time. However, what I immediately learned was that the fight in Afghanistan is just as crucial and precarious if not more than the fight in Iraq. The terrain, the economic and educational conditions, its neighbors, two of which are nuclear armed, the tribalism and “pashtunwali” law that reigns supreme over any inclination of nationalism, the lack of basic services such as electricity and clear water resources, and a plethora of other realities make this conflict more complex than I could have ever imagined. But my time in Afghanistan also made this war very real to me, and made getting this right very personal.

The fighting was tough, and the kinetic operations are all-encompassing, but the main reason I was asked to serve as the Director of Information Operations was to address the American strategic support plan for Program-Tuakli-el-Sul, or the Afghan Reconciliation Program. The Afghans, following the lessons of South Africa and Chile before them, aimed to create a reconciliation program that allowed Afghans who were involved with Al Qaeda, HIG, the Haqqani Network, and the Taliban to turn in their weapons, pledge allegiance to the new Afghan government, and return home to their families without fear of retribution or imprisonment. When my team arrived, 8 people had

PTS'd, or reconciled. LTC Fenzel and the other senior leaders of my unit "got it." They understood the basic premise that the more insurgents we can convince to peacefully reconcile, meant the fewer we needed to make submit via force. We reevaluated our strategies and techniques to support the Afghans in this initiative. We created a program called "Afghan Public Relations Officers, or APRO's," who were Afghans we worked with us to better tailor our messages and reaction to events. We stopped using broadcasts written by US soldiers and simply read by translators, and altered not only the messages but the messengers, and recruited respected leaders like former President Mujadidi, to better reach our targets. We stopped using leaflet drops in order to spread the word because with a population that has a literacy rate in the single digits, written materials were utterly ineffective. We broadcasted PTS success stories so that people who were on the fence knew that a safe alternative awaited them, and that the option of waiting for our forces to find them was a losing proposition.

By the time we redeployed, 533 people had PTS'd and rejoined Afghan society. The initiative still runs to this day. I say that not to pat our team on the back, or to say the effects were perfect,

because there were some significant flaws in the initiative, but to say many important lessons were learned during that experience.

1) Unlike Iraq, Afghanistan is a rural fight, and cannot be fought out of Kandahar or Kabul. The reason we were effective is because we spent time out in the field. Days at a time, we were talking to locals, building trust, gaining insight. But we need more, and it needs to be with a local focus. In Iraq, the saying was "As goes Baghdad, so goes the rest of the country." This is not the case in Afghanistan, and in many ways that is the antithesis of the truth.

2) We are under funded and undermanned in Afghanistan. We have fought this war on the cheap and I say that not only on the military side, but on the civilian support side as well. But on the military angle specifically, we asked two brigades to have coverage over a 1600 mile area that is known as Eastern Afghanistan, much of it in the most dangerous terrain in the world. We just announced we are adding 17,000 troops but even when those troops come online, it is still a paltry number needed fulfill the troop-to-task demands required for a persistent engagement with the people in rural areas.

4

3) Many of the attacks we sustained were not conducted by ideologues. They were conducted by people who simply had no economic options and felt that pull of monetary reward for supporting insurgents. I personally dealt with insurgents who told me they were not Taliban for cause, but Taliban for hire. This number is now smaller, and the dynamic is now changing, but we need to help provide means to jobs, education, security, and a viable future for the Afghans and their families in order to avoid the Taliban's campaign of intimidation and their significant information operations platform.

Right now, an American soldier is ending another long day of patrolling the mountain ranges in the Kunar region. Under his sweat-soaked Kevlar, and burdened by the 40 pound ruck-sack he has been carrying for the past 12 hours, he looks over his shoulder and sees a group of Afghan children playing in the distance. And at that very moment, he's again reminded what's at stake. And that same soldier is thinking about his own family and loved ones back at home, constantly being reminded why he's there. Let me be clear, I like many of my fellow soldiers and citizens want this war to end. I have lost friends and colleagues, both American and Afghan. I understand the burden that sits on your shoulders as decision-makers because it is similar to the

burden that sat on mine as an officer who led troops in combat. But the Taliban is executing a doctrine based on exhaustion, where their entire strategy depends on our political and national will faltering. Many of them are fond of saying, "The Americans have the wristwatches, but we have the time." You have the wherewithal to make that an illusion by committing the resources, support and political will to ensure that this war is brought to an effective close.

Thank you all for your time and commitment to getting this right. I welcome your questions.

6